

American link to Thai coup

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BANGKOK — Key agitators for the brutal Thai coup of Oct. 6 were members of a unit established, funded and trained by the United States.

Thai leftists insist the CIA engineered the coup, but there is no proof that it did.

The unit is called the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC). It includes a core of activist colonels who argue that only military force can bring order to Thailand.

ISOC was established in 1965 at the suggestion of then-Ambassador Graham Martin, who found Thailand's anti-Communist operations badly disorganized.

Col. Thawat Phisuthiphan, then the ISOC's deputy chief, said in 1974 that the unit and the Thai border patrol were still working with the CIA.

Thai military sources say Thawat was involved in 11 efforts last

year to organize a coup. But the army's commander-in-chief, Gen. Bunchai Bamrungphong, insisted on unity within the military before he would move to seize power.

Bunchai apparently was convinced the time was ripe in late August when Thawat persuaded his close friend, Adm. Sangad Chalor-yu, former supreme commander of the armed forces, to ally himself with Bunchai. Sangad, in turn, was made head of the junta's key body, the National Administration Reform Council. He's now minister

A former ISOC colonel charged in February that the United States was using the ISOC to create fears of an invasion of Thailand by its Communist neighbors. Military-controlled radio stations and newspapers carried lurid reports of atrocities in Cambodia and a rising Communist threat within Thailand.

ISOC members have created two extreme right-wing organizations that have agitated for a military takeover. The military junta's new prime minister, a civilian named Thanin Kraiwithien, is known as a member of one of the ISOC-backed groups, Navaphol.

The other group is called the Red Bulls. Its members led lynch mobs during the coup and are

The Red Bulls include groups of rightist vocational students who have been attacking leftist students and intellectuals since October 1973. The vocational students aren't part of Thailand's elite and often resent the privileges and status of the university students.

Many vocational students joined university students to bring down the military government three years ago. But since then many have been receptive to rightist charges that the privileged university radicals are destroying precious Thai royal and religious traditions.

The Red Bulls reportedly are funded by businessmen. They're highly organized, with separate divisions of public relations, rapid operations, enforcement and welfare. The organization claims 100,000 members.

The Red Bulls are believed to receive support and advance intelligence from ISOC and the Thai police.

The power of ISOC and its offshoots — as well as that of the entire Thai military-police complex — stems from the 26 years in which the U.S. Defense Department and CIA built up the Thai defense forces.