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# U.S. Bolsters Force in Thailand Because of Foe's Vietnam Drive

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The United States has increased its armed forces contingent here from 32,000 men a few months ago to 40,000. Most of the increase results from strengthening of the Air Force contingents at six Thai bases to counter the Communist offensive by bombing in South and North Vietnam.

The number of airmen—the preponderant majority of those here—is now almost as great as the total American troop strength in Vietnam itself. But American correspondents are not permitted to visit the six air bases now in use or a seventh now being readied at Nam Phong in the event of further increases in American air power.

The bases—at Nakhon Phanom, Ubon, Korat, Utapao, Udon and Ta Khli, which was reopened in May—technically belong to the Thais, who conduct few air operations at any of them, but who have refused almost all newsmen's requests to visit the American Air Force installations at any of the bases.

The most recent request, for a group of American correspondents who cover Indochina, was supported by the United States Embassy here but turned down personally by the chairman of the National Executive Council, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, early last month, according to embassy officials, who maintain stoutly, as does Ambassador Leonard Unger, that they are powerless to insist that the press has a right to cover the purely American activities on the bases.

Yet the Thai military leaders,



The New York Times/June 8, 1972

**Air base being prepared at Nam Phong is seventh U.S. base in Thailand.**

who see a Communist victory in Vietnam as a threat to Thailand, have been "delighted," in the words of one American diplomat, with the reversal of the previous trend of troop withdrawals from Thailand.

"They agreed with amazing speed to these deployments but they want to keep it all quiet," one official said.

Peak American military strength in Thailand at the height of the involvement of the United States in the ground war in 1969 was 48,000. The total includes a few hundred army advisers to the Thai Army and once included some army engineer battalions that were building roads, but almost all the 40,000 now in Thailand are Air Force men flying or supporting bombing, reconnaissance and transport missions directly related to the fighting in Indochina.

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