

# U.S. Arms Aid to Thai Militia

## Local Defense Plans Bared

BANGKOK — (UPI) — Authoritative sources said today the United States is providing weapons and other assistance to Thailand to set up a counter-insurgency militia similar to the Popular Force and Regional Force units it created in South Vietnam.

The sources said the Local Defense Force, an expanded version of the Village Defense Organization, would be centered in a four-province area of Thailand's impoverished northeast, where Communist guerrillas control about 10 percent of the villages.

Plans for the project have not been revealed by U.S. officials or the Thai government, partly to avoid criticism that Communist insurgency is being aggravated by U.S. involvement in Thailand.

### Self-Defense

The sources who outlined the project said it would be much smaller than South Vietnam's militia force, which numbers in the hundreds of thousands. They said plans called for recruitment of 7000 to 15,000 villagers over the next five years. The long-range goal would be a self-defense unit in every village.

As the first step, the sources said, the United States has provided more than 5000 World War II and Korean War weapons for villagers who will be recruited into the VDO.

Sources here said the first weapons will be distributed in Nakhon Phanom Province, a major insurgency area and location of the new U.S. military headquarters for Southeast Asia.

### Reaction Forces

Some villagers would be organized into units in their own villages, corresponding with the Popular Force units of South Vietnam. Others would form "reaction forces" that would correspond with Regional Force units and be sent out from centers to respond to Communist attacks or movements.

The new units would ex-

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and the activities of scattered village self-defense units and of hunter-killer teams, some of them trained by U.S. Green Berets, that are supposed to seek out Communist guerrillas.

There are believed to be about 1500 well-armed guerrillas in Nakhon Phanom, Udorn, Kalasin and Sakon Prvinces of the northeast, with perhaps twice as many support personnel and active sympathizers. U.S. military installations are located in three of the four provinces.

According to authoritative sources, the weapons being distributed include rifles, machine guns and mortars collected by the United States from the Thai army when it was rearmed with M16 rifles and other new equipment over the past few years.

Distribution of the weapons, which have been stored at a U.S. arsenal near its Udorn air base, will add about \$500,000 to this year's military aid program. Although not disclosed, U.S. military aid to Thailand this year is expected to be about \$60 million.

# Reds Poised To Assault Phnom Penh

PHNOM-PENH — (AP) — Cambodian insurgents have overrun a string of weakly defended government positions across the Mekong River from Phnom Penh and control a long stretch of the east bank paralleling the capital city, refugees from the area said today.

Phnom Penh also was menaced from the west. More than 20 rockets hit the airport 2½ miles west of the capital and an adjoining shantytown crowded with refugees early today, killing 19 persons and wounding 62. No aircraft were damaged.

### Big Attack

The assaults are the closest that anti-government forces have struck since Viet Cong sappers raised northern Phnom Penh last October. However, the military command was not moving more troops or heavy weapons to the west bank despite intelligence reports that the insurgents are planning a large-scale attack.

U.S. jet fighters from Thailand bombarded the east bank this morning as

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hundreds watched from the riverside mall in front of the former royal palace.

East bank villagers crossing to Phnom Penh warned journalists trying to reach the other side to stay away. They said the sparse government units defending the east bank fled two days ago as the rebels moved in.

The guerrillas were letting farmers move their produce but were not letting Phnom Penh residents enter the villages, they reported.

Sailors aboard a navy boat moored in midstream to inspect passing boats told newsmen that some government soldiers were left near Prek Luong, four miles inland across from Phnom Penh. They said they did not know of any other government forces which remained.

The military command said yesterday that insurgents "infiltrated" the area and were battling government soldiers in Arei Ksath, two miles from central Phnom Penh.

The command denied reports by other military sources that Arei Ksath had fallen, but said Prek Luong and Mat Krasas Khnoung, two miles from Phnom Penh, had been captured.

The command said eight houses in suburban Pochentong were hit during the brief rocket attack that began at 3 a.m. Four missiles landed in a rice field behind a military camp and three hit in a heavily populated refugee area behind the military academy.

Weeping survivors wandered through piles of straw and palm fronds that once were their homes as the sun rose. Bodies of men, women and children were laid out, some so blown apart they were unrecognizable.

It appeared the attack was aimed at the airport, which is the government's largest military base and only commercial airfield.