

U.S.-Thai Relations Expected to Survive C.I.A. Blow

By JAMES F. CLARITY
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BANGKOK, Thailand, Jan. 20 —The admitted interference of the Central Intelligence Agency in an internal Thai affair does not mean, in the view of knowledgeable Western diplomats, that the C.I.A. has garroted itself with its own cloak in this country, but that it has at least pinked itself with its own dagger.

The incident, which stirred vigorous student protests in a country where students are the most influential political force, left Thai-American relations frayed, but not tattered, the diplomats say.

The affair focused new attention on the large American presence, mostly military, in Thailand. It also marred the entrance on the scene of a new United States Ambassador, William R. Kintner, and forced the interim Government here to disentangle itself from another problem in the midst of the difficulties it has been trying to solve since it replaced the military regime deposed in a student uprising in October.

In the view of some analysts here, the C.I.A. affair was an embarrassment to almost everyone concerned, including the office boy whose registration of an ersatz letter led to the blowing of the cover.

The plot itself seemed simple enough. An agent of the American intelligence agency, not identified but sent home earlier this month, composed a letter purportedly from an insurgent leader asking to discuss a cease-fire with the Government.

The purpose of the letter, ac-

ording to Ambassador Kintner, was to produce dissension and defections among the insurgents who have been fighting the Bangkok Government for years. The registered letter found its way—how is not clear—to the offices of an English-language Bangkok newspaper, The Nation. The paper traced it to the C.I.A. and published it, the ambassador admitted the American involvement and the scandal was under way.

In the succeeding two weeks, Dr. Kintner has apologized for the incident several times, including personal apologies to King Phumiphol Aduldet and Premier Sanya Dharmasakti, and said he had taken measures to prevent American officials from meddling in Thailand's internal affairs. The student organizations, which had first demanded the total ouster of the C.I.A. and the recall of Dr. Kintner to Washington, have not reacted to the Bangkok Government's relatively mild reprimand to the United States and the ambassador last Thursday.

Dr. Kintner, who was personally vulnerable to the student criticism because he worked for

the Central Intelligence Agency for two years during the Korean war, said in a recent interview that the incident caused "chagrin" among Thai officials.

It also, the ambassador said, reflected a "patronizing attitude" that he has found among some of his embassy staff members—not necessarily members of the intelligence agency—toward the Thais. The employee who patronized, whose attitude the ambassador describes as "Look, Charlie, we'll show you how to do it," will be transferred, the ambassador indicated.

The furor over the letter has had a number of other effects.

It has prompted the Government to say that it is re-examining the extent of Central Intelligence Agency operations here. In the process of saying this, the Government has acknowledged that the American intelligence organization provides it with various kinds of help in internal security, counterintelligence, counterinsurgency and narcotics-control programs.

The United States attitude toward this kind of help, as indicated by the ambassador

and other competent diplomats here, is that in future the Thais will get only the intelligence assistance they ask for.

No Thai officials seriously expect the Central Intelligence Agency to stop operating here. They concede that a total ban would be foolish, as the agents would only continue to operate in mufti. There are now in Thailand, American officials say, 50 operating agents supported by 100 clerical and communications assistants.

Ambassador Kintner, an outspoken man who has divided his professional life between the Army and the academic world, says Thai-American relations have survived the incident. He shrugs off questions whether it has caused friction between him and the intelligence agency chiefs in Washington.

Acknowledging that the incident took place without his knowledge after he became ambassador two months ago, Dr. Kintner said of the present structure at the embassy here: "I have full authority from the President and the Secretary of State."