

U.S. AIR FORCE MILITARY CIVIC ACTION IN THAILAND, 1964-1976: MODERNIZATION,
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, AND MILITARY DOCTRINE

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The views expressed in this work are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Air Force, the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between foreign policy and military doctrine, specifically the problems that arise when military doctrine is politicized and the military is used as an instrument of diplomatic or economic power rather than military power. It contains original research on the conduct of military civic action (MCA) by the United States Air Force in Thailand from 1964 until 1976, based largely on archival material from the Air Force Historical Research Agency. MCA has been an element of counterinsurgency doctrine since President Kennedy directed it in 1961, a role often labeled “nation-building.” Like Kennedy’s foreign policy, MCA had its intellectual origins in the social scientific concept of modernization theory. MCA represents the politicization of military doctrine, a method of employing forces based on social scientific theory rather than military experience. As a result of this and the realities on the ground in Thailand, the objectives of MCA did not fit the context of the Thai situation, training did not provide necessary cultural awareness, and execution was haphazard. Ultimately, the USAF failed to achieve the policy goals of MCA in Thailand. Today the U.S. continues to employ military manpower in the diplomatic, economic, and information realms while only training service members in their core specialty. Policymakers and military leaders need to determine whether to sacrifice proficiency in core specialties to enhance cultural and diplomatic skills or to rely more on those agencies traditionally responsible for those instruments of national power.

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This thesis is the outgrowth of a paper written for Dr. Petra Goedde's seminar on international history in the spring of 2011. In the summer after writing that paper, I read nearly every book I could find on modernization theory and U.S. foreign policy and obtained hundreds of pages of archival material from the U.S. Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA). The original impetus behind this subject was my own experience as a military advisor in Afghanistan and airspace liaison at the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. My intent in pursuing a study of U.S. foreign relations was to make sense of the relationships among government policy, military doctrine, and the individual soldier, sailor, or airman on the ground. My scholarly influences consist of Dr. Goedde who I have already mentioned, Dr. Greg Urwin and his course on the rise of military professionalism, Dr. Benjamin Talton and his class on Third World history (a term he successfully dismembered during the course of that semester), and my advisor, Dr. Richard Immerman who deserves credit for teaching me to think, speak, and write like a historian. I am greatly indebted to the U.S. Air Force Academy and the Air Force Institute of Technology for the opportunity to study full-time and fulfill a dream of mentoring those cadets who will become tomorrow's Air Force leaders. I am eternally grateful to Tom Lauria, the archivist at AFHRA, for collecting, declassifying, and mailing the material I requested. His responsiveness, speed, and professionalism reassured me as I entered the world of archival research for the first time. Though this is a thesis and not a dissertation or a book, my long-suffering wife and four kids deserve many hugs for

enduring my struggle to shift from the habits of a regular Air Force job to the life of a graduate student. I thank the Lord for giving them to me as an anchor, bringing me from the realm of theories and methods back to the reality that life is good.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first Gulf War was satisfying to watch. That is not to make light of war or the suffering that inevitably results from violent conflict. However, regardless of one's views about the purpose of going to war against Iraq in 1991, few can criticize the way military force was applied to that policy decision. In roughly 100 days the U.S. military drove Iraq's occupying army out of Kuwait, destroyed Iraq's war making capability, and did so with a minimum of civilian casualties or loss of U.S. military lives thanks to overwhelming technological superiority. It was quick and clean.

The second Iraq War and the preceding war in Afghanistan have been neither quick nor clean. Whereas in the first Gulf War the U.S. military focused almost exclusively on conventional combat, there is a role that has become increasingly dominant in the decade since 9/11. This role is military civic action (MCA), an element of counterinsurgency doctrine (COIN) where U.S. service members apply their combat skills—such as engineering or medical care—to help the indigenous military contribute “to the social and economic development of a society.”¹ MCA consists of the development projects pursued alongside the clear-and-hold efforts, although MCA can be conducted by itself as a preventive measure. MCA was part of the pacification programs in Vietnam like the Strategic Hamlets and Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS). Today, the term “pacification” cannot be found in military doctrine (though elements of it exist in present-day Provincial Reconstruction

¹ John W. DePauw and George A. Luz, ed., *Winning the Peace: the Strategic Implications of Military Civic Action*, (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992), 1.

Teams), but MCA endures unchanged within COIN. Unlike the airpower doctrine that allowed the U.S. to achieve air superiority over Iraq in 1991, MCA is a capability with political origins, one for which the U.S. military is not prepared.

The current (as of 2011) U.S. Defense Department definition of MCA reads: “The use of preponderantly indigenous military forces on projects useful to the local population at all levels in such fields as education, training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communications, health, sanitation, and others contributing to economic and social development, which would also serve to improve the standing of the [indigenous] military forces with the population.”² Little has changed in the fifty years since National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy sent National Security Action Memorandum 119 (NSAM 119) to Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara on 18 December 1961: “By civic action we [President Kennedy and Bundy] mean using military forces on projects useful to the populace at all levels in such fields as training, public works, agriculture, transportation, communication, health, sanitation, and others helpful to economic development ...establishing a link between army and populace.”³ MCA is not simply humanitarian work; it is nation-building.

Despite repeated efforts, the U.S. military has rarely (if ever) successfully executed MCA. This is because MCA, despite being part of military doctrine, is based on ideology and social scientific theory rather than an accurate application of military

² *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), 219, www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf.

³ National Security Action Memorandum No. 119, December 18, 1961, *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS], 1961-1963, Vol. VIII: National Security Policy, Document 65*, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/>.

theory and experience. As stated earlier, MCA was introduced in the 1960s, a product of modernization theory's influence on President Kennedy's foreign policies. Two critical assumptions of modernization theory that shaped MCA are (1) that development proceeds along a common path (i.e. the universal, exportable American model) and (2) that development can be accelerated by more modern societies.⁴ There were (and are) problems not only in how MCA *objectives* were defined but also in how MCA was *executed* to achieve them, because these underlying assumptions of modernization theory were fundamentally flawed.⁵

There are four problems with MCA derived from these assumptions (I will italicize *objective* and *execution* in this paragraph to link these problems to the previous paragraph). First, the *objective* of helping the indigenous military develop the nation's economy and society assumes that economics and social problems are the root of the insurgent problem. The fallacy here is economic determinism. Second, the *objective* of enhancing the image of the indigenous military risks exacerbating political tensions by boosting the military's authority at the expense of a weak civil government. The nature

⁴ Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 4. Latham includes two other assumptions: the sharp dichotomy between traditional and modern societies, and that economic, political, and social changes are integrated and interdependent. These two assumptions are not central to the subject of this paper.

⁵ There is a rich literature on modernization theory and U.S. foreign policy. Michael Latham's *Modernization as Ideology* is already noted. Latham also wrote *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). Other books include Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark H. Haefele, Michael E. Latham, eds, *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

of civil-military relations in other countries often do not match that of the U.S., making the exportation of an American model of MCA inappropriate. Third, while U.S. service members are well trained in their core specialties, training for MCA has always been inadequate. MCA is not considered a primary duty for most military specialties, despite the fact that soldiers, sailors, and airmen from every specialty are used in MCA.

Without sufficient knowledge of the language and culture of the target society, U.S. service members *execute* MCA from an American frame of reference, exacerbating the problems previously mentioned. Fourth, a military doctrine based on political theories will lose direction when there is a change in political thought. Policy determines *what* the military will do, while doctrine explains *how* it should be done. When doctrine is politicized—i.e. policymakers direct *how* as well as *what*—changes in political leadership create a doctrinal crisis. This affects both *objectives* and *execution*.

This paper will take readers back to the inception of MCA in 1961 as part of President Kennedy's foreign policy and follow the process of integrating it into military doctrine and applying it during the U.S. Air Force's (USAF) twelve-year presence in Thailand, ending in 1976. The Kennedy administration directed the U.S. military to execute MCA as part of a larger effort to modernize the so-called Third World in an effort to protect these nations from the false modernity of communism. The USAF, having MCA forced into its doctrine, sought to reverse-engineer the policy to incorporate military experience and thus legitimize MCA as part of military doctrine. Because the policy/doctrine was based on the assumption that the American model was universal and exportable, the USAF failed to provide necessary training in language and

culture for those assigned to perform MCA. Additionally, the belief by USAF leadership that “the capability to defeat an enemy's forces is the only rational objective of military preparedness” ensured the majority of resources went to conventional capabilities.⁶ Despite realities on the ground in Thailand and shifts in foreign policy from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to the Nixon and Ford administrations, the core guidance regarding MCA remained unchanged. Because the definition of MCA was dictated by the White House, the Pentagon had no way to review the development of that doctrine and revise it, creating confusion for those assigned to that role. In the end, USAF MCA in Thailand failed to achieve its objectives of preventing communist insurgency and improving the Thai military’s image because U.S. foreign policy, military doctrine, and USAF training failed to adequately align with the situation in Thailand.⁷

⁶ Testimony of Gen Frederic H. Smith, Jr., Air Force vice chief of staff before the House subcommittee on defense appropriations in 1963, quoted in Robert F. Futrell, *Ideas, Concepts, Doctrine: Basic Thinking in the United States Air Force, 1961-1984* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 1989), 48-49.

⁷ A note on sources: nearly all of my unpublished primary source material is from the U.S. Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) archives at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Some material was classified, but with the help of archivist Tom Lauria the sources were declassified for use in this research. Most of the material consists of weekly reports from various USAF units in Thailand. These provide a look at the day-to-day efforts, frustrations, and perspectives of those engaged in MCA. There are also several unit histories. Even today, the USAF records the activities of its units to provide a historical record. Unlike the weekly reports, however, these are typically more data-driven and largely void of emotion. Reports on military civic action by various commands are the most concentrated record of MCA activities and often make recommendations for improvement in the areas of implementation and training. Regulations, of course, convey the official policy and provide a measurement of whether on-the-ground activities actually met the intent of the program. There are two documents that remain classified that are of extreme salience to the subject of military civic action in Thailand. The “Rural Security, Communist Prevention and Suppression Manual” dated June 1974 (IRISNUM 1023723) is a CIA document. The report on “USAF posture in Thailand 1968 and 1969/COIN in Thailand” (IRISNUM 1028447) is a CIA/State Department document. Both of these require a more extensive declassification process. I hope to get these two documents declassified to aid future work on this topic.

CHAPTER 2: INCEPTION OF U.S AND THAI MILITARY CIVIC ACTION

Military Civic Action and Modernization Theory

The advent of military civic action as an element of U.S. foreign and military policy began with President Kennedy's foreign aid address to Congress in March 1961. In this speech he stated that "military assistance will in the future more heavily emphasize the internal security, civil works and economic growth of the nations thus aided."⁸ Kennedy rooted this statement, along with the rest of his address on the subject of foreign aid, in the social scientific theory of modernization. Kennedy's flavor of modernization is tied most clearly to the ideas put forth by Dr. Walt Whitman Rostow in his 1960 book, *The Stages of Economic Growth: a Non-Communist Manifesto*. Though there is no evidence that Kennedy read Rostow's book, its arguments were widely publicized and its rhetoric pervaded Kennedy's policies on foreign aid due to Rostow's influence as a campaign advisor and later as the chief of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff—a position previously held by such notable Cold War policy makers as George Kennan, Paul Nitze, and Robert Bowie.⁹ In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Rostow to replace McGeorge Bundy as his National Security Advisor. Given his appointment to these high-level policy making positions, Rostow's theory significantly influenced the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

⁸ John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on Foreign Aid," 22 March 1961, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed 26 October 2011, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

⁹ Kimber Charles Pearce, *Rostow, Kennedy, and the Rhetoric of Foreign Aid* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 88.

Rostow's theory outlines five stages of growth, stages that he believed were universal regardless of cultural context: 1) the traditional society, 2) the preconditions for take-off, 3) the take-off, 4) the drive to maturity, and 5) the age of high mass-consumption.¹⁰ All nations fall somewhere within this continuum, according to Rostow. The traditional society is pre-technological, which means production is dependent on the limits of human physical capability. Because production is so limited, the overwhelming proportion of resources are devoted to agriculture. A significant characteristic of this phase is the regional nature of political authority. In these traditional societies, the central government is weak compared to the hierarchical structures at the village level.¹¹ The central government has little influence on the lives of rural citizens, and therefore the citizens pay it little mind. The second phase is transitional, where the necessary institutions and structures are established to enable development. These include increased education, establishment of banks, advances in communications and transportation, and "the building of an effective centralized national state."¹² However, movement from phase one to phase two requires a catalyst.

Rostow argues that a literal or figurative invasion of the traditional society by modern societies usually triggers the transition from traditional society to one that develops the preconditions for economic take-off.¹³ Historically this invasion was colonization. Colonization, according to the theory, plants the idea in the mind of the

¹⁰ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 4.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 4-5.

¹² *Ibid*, 6-7.

¹³ *Ibid*, 6.

traditional society that economic progress is necessary and beneficial, despite the evils that befall a colonized society. In the postwar, postcolonial world, a different trigger was required. David Milne, Professor of U.S. Foreign Relations at the University of East Anglia writes, “Rostow believed that it was incumbent upon the United States to push those nations languishing in the first two stages toward greater material progress—blunting the appeal of Marxism-Leninism along the way.”¹⁴ Modernization, then, became a new iteration of America’s anti-communist foreign policy.

Rostow, an economist, based the five stages of his theory on his interpretation of European and American history. Given the assumption that economics is governed by immutable laws in the same way as scientific theory, and given that the United States represented the world’s highest stage of development, America stood as the example of how to achieve a prosperous society. Rostow’s training in economics meshed well with the economic determinism that drove his understanding of history, an understanding that closely resembles that of his ideological nemesis, Karl Marx. This universal, technocratic perspective is one of the chief post-modern critiques of 1960s foreign policy.

Michael Latham’s path-breaking book, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era*, identifies three initiatives that represented this commitment to modernization as Cold War policy: the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, the establishment of the Peace Corps, and the Strategic Hamlet program in Vietnam. The second topic deals with the creation of a new federal

¹⁴ David Milne, *America’s Rasputin: Walt Rostow and the Vietnam War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 62.

agency, still in existence today, that attempted to use American volunteers to affect grassroots change in “traditional” societies.¹⁵ The other two topics were policy programs that have come and gone. However, behind these two programs are important bureaucratic changes that persist to this day. The Alliance for Progress was executed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Kennedy created USAID in 1961 to advance his goal of making the 1960s the “Decade of Development.”¹⁶ Though the results of the Alliance for Progress were disappointing and, more generally, the decade failed to live up to this promise, USAID endures.¹⁷ The Strategic Hamlet program represented another bureaucratic change that persists today: the enlistment of the military as an agent of modernization. Latham’s narrative of the Strategic Hamlet program only hints at the fact that there was a broader policy to use the military for the purpose of developing so-called “Third World” countries. This is where military civic action comes in.

Military civic action, as a product of modernization theory, shared its assumptions and characteristics. These included faith in economic and social uplift as a panacea for insurgency and the practice of basing the policy’s validity on the “proof” of modernization and military civic action’s role in the history of America’s development. Just as Rostow claimed modernization theory followed the pattern of American development, military thinkers linked military civic action to American military history. For the U.S. Air Force, which is the service of interest in this paper, academic lectures

¹⁵ Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 128.

¹⁶ Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution*, 57 (see n. 5).

¹⁷ For more on the Alliance for Progress, see Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: the Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

and professional journals identified these antecedents as support for MCA's inclusion in military doctrine.

One of the most prolific USAF historians, Dr. Robert F. Futrell, gave a two-part lecture in December 1963 on the "Background and Growth of Military Civic Actions." The first part, entitled "The Role of Military Civic Action in the Development of the United States," covered the time from American independence until the 1920s. The second part, entitled "Recent Military Civic Action in the United States Air Force," covered the interwar years until the early 1960s. As part of his opening comments, Dr. Futrell said, "The United States Air Force believes that its concept of *building nations* through military civic actions is feasible because it recognizes that military men played just this same sort of role in the development of the United States" [emphasis added].¹⁸ Futrell specifically identified how the military contributed to America's progress through Rostow's five stages, thus drawing a direct link between modernization theory and MCA. The assumption that development followed a universal track resonated with some American airmen.

Dr. Futrell made a persuasive but flawed case for the historical example of MCA in American development. He correctly identified Thomas Jefferson as the first president to actively use the military for the social and economic development of the United States. Futrell notes that Jefferson established the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, an institution led by the Engineering Corps and noteworthy for producing

¹⁸ Robert F. Futrell, "Background and Growth of Military Civic Action: the Role of Military Civic Action in the Development of the United States," (lecture, Aerospace Studies Institute, Maxwell AFB, AL, December 1963), 2, IRISNUM 00467848, AFHRA (see n. 7).

more railroad presidents than generals in the years prior to the Civil War.¹⁹ He also identifies the expedition of Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark to the Pacific Northwest.²⁰ The role of the Army Corps of Engineers in developing and maintaining America's waterways and dams is well known. Futrell highlights the 1824 Rivers and Harbors Act as the origin of that responsibility.²¹ In the early twentieth century, the nascent Army Air Corps provided air mail service, took part in firefighting efforts, and performed aerial surveys for various government departments.²² It is clear that the U.S. military did in fact provide technical expertise and infrastructure that was beneficial to civil society. The more recent advent of the internet and global positioning satellites further supports the argument that the military provides economic and social benefits to society.

However, this is not the full story. Futrell is right to focus on the technical contributions of the U.S. military to America's development. This focus is congruent with the argument that the technical competence and discipline inherent in any military institution makes them uniquely suited to push their undeveloped nation toward a better quality of life. Yet omitted from this explanatory framework is the political environment within which the U.S. military operated. Prior to World War II, the military was *not* the dominant government institution in the United States. According to military historian William Skelton, the U.S. Army suffered from popular mistrust of military

¹⁹ Futrell, "The Role of Military Civic Action," 4; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1957), 197-199

²⁰ Futrell, "The Role of Military Civic Action," 4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Futrell, "Background and Growth of Military Civic Action: Recent Military Civic Action in the United States Air Force," (lecture, Aerospace Studies Institute, Maxwell AFB, AL, December 1963), 5, IRISNUM 00467849, AFHRA.

power and high personnel turnover prior to 1815.²³ This was also the time of the famed Lewis and Clark Expedition, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike's mission to the western territories, and the establishment of West Point. As the U.S. Army developed its professional characteristics following its dismal showing in the War of 1812, it remained subordinate to government policy. The political environment enveloping the examples cited by Futrell did not match that of the global South nations targeted by the policy of military civic action, particularly in Thailand.

Thailand: Politics and Development Policies

Marshall Sarit Thanarat, head of the Royal Thai Army, came to power in Thailand after staging a coup in 1958. According to Thak Chaloemtiarana, the Sarit regime imposed a system of "despotic paternalism" that combined the historical Thai heritage of patrimonial governance with Sarit's militaristic background.²⁴ Thailand, formerly the Kingdom of Siam, was an absolute monarchy until 1932, when the military staged a revolution to achieve a constitutional monarchy. The king remained as a symbol of the Thai nation, but the loss of absolute power did not sit well with the monarchy. Tension existed between the king and prime minister until Sarit took power.²⁵ Recognizing the important role of the monarchy in the Thai consciousness, Sarit sought the king's support.²⁶ Having initially established his legitimacy through royal patronage, Sarit

²³ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: the Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1992), xv.

²⁴ Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: the Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 205.

sought to secure popular legitimacy long-term through national development.²⁷ Sarit conceived this policy of development with little Western influence. Unlike later generations of Thai military officers, his generation was not Western-educated due to the economic depression of the 1930s.²⁸

Instead of paralleling the Western concept of development, Sarit's modernization theory arose from a paternal charge within the Thai tradition to care for his "family": "the Prime Minister is the father of the largest family. [He] has the greatest responsibility, and must oversee the happiness and welfare of his brothers and sisters."²⁹ He made frequent trips to the rural areas and also used bureaucrats in the provinces as his eyes and ears on the population. These visits made clear the need for good roads, better sanitation, improved medical care, and education. In 1959 the World Bank published a development plan at the request of the Thai government, which Thailand's National Economic Development Board drew from to create the National Economic Development Plan for 1961-1965.³⁰ This plan represents an actual point of convergence between Sarit's development plans and Rostow's growth model. The plan called for increased per capita output of goods, government investment in education and infrastructure, government expansion of social services, and government assistance.³¹ Funding for development arrived as the United States became increasingly concerned about the deterioration in the neighboring Laotian government's struggle against the Pathet Lao communist guerillas (to be discussed later).

²⁷ Ibid, 147.

²⁸ Ibid, 99

²⁹ Ibid, 147.

³⁰ Ibid, 151.

³¹ Ibid, 151-2.

The U.S. collaborated with Sarit to focus development on the vulnerable northeast bordering Laos and provided \$300 million to fund the plan.³² This combined effort ostensibly put Thailand into the “preconditions for take-off” stage. Thailand appeared to be moving along in a satisfyingly Rostovian manner. In October 1961, Rostow traveled to Thailand and met with Sarit’s chief economist, Dr. Puey Ungphakorn. These two were on the same wavelength regarding the stages of growth in the “developing” world. Rostow called Puey “one of the ablest development economists and government officials I ever met.”³³ It is ironic that Puey received the seal of approval from such a staunch anti-communist yet was later branded a communist by the Thai government for his objection to the 1976 crackdown on student protests while serving as rector of Thammasat University.³⁴ Regardless, by 1961 the United States and Thailand achieved mutual understanding within the framework of social and economic development. Although Sarit first pushed development to legitimize his rule, he and his successors increasingly emphasized its utility in preventing the spread of communism in Thailand. It was not long before Thailand became interested in civic action.

³² Muthiah Alagappa, *The National Security of Developing States: Lessons from Thailand* (Dover, MA: Auburn House Publishing Co., 1987), 180

³³ Rostow, *Theorists of Economic Growth from David Hume to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 419.

³⁴ Thomas Marks, *Making Revolution: the Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994), 182.

Thai-U.S. Security Agreements

The USAF presence in Thailand during the 1960's and 1970s is widely understood to be part of the war in Vietnam. The USAF in Thailand certainly had a significant impact on the Vietnam War; forty-five percent of air missions over North Vietnam came from Thailand in 1965, and by the end of 1966 it was eighty percent.³⁵ However, America's relationship with Thailand during the Kennedy administration had relatively little to do with Vietnam. Rather, communist insurgency in neighboring Laos brought the U.S. and Thailand into a stronger security arrangement. Although the U.S. and Thailand were signatories to the Manila Pact of 1954, which established the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), the Thai government was unimpressed with the effectiveness of SEATO. Communist Pathet Lao forces waged an insurgency in neighboring Laos, threatening to spill over into Thailand and to overcome Sarit's close relative, Phoumi Nosavan, who was the leader of Laos' right-wing government.³⁶ SEATO made no effort to avert this threat. At Geneva, fourteen nations discussed how to settle the crisis in Laos. The U.S. supported a neutral coalition government where Nosavan would share power with a communist leader. Sarit, unsurprisingly, was not enthusiastic about this proposal.

While the world was negotiating the Laotian Crisis at Geneva, Sarit began to doubt America's commitment to Thai security.³⁷ In February 1962, the Pathet Lao attacked Royal Laotian forces in the province of Nam Tha near the northeast Thai border

³⁵ Ibid, 63.

³⁶ Richard Jensen, et al, ed, *Trans-Pacific Relations: America, Europe, and Asia in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 222.

³⁷ Ibid. 223.

in violation of a May 1961 cease fire.³⁸ Sarit responded, without consulting the U.S. or SEATO, by deploying men from bases at Korat and Phitsanulok to show he would act unilaterally in the interest of Thailand.³⁹ The Kennedy administration recognized the need to reassure their critical ally.

A number of meetings took place between the U.S. and Thailand, culminating in the Rusk-Thanat Agreement, a joint communiqué issued by U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman on 6 March 1962. In this agreement the United States reaffirmed its commitment to the SEATO nations (Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United Kingdom) but asserted that support for Thailand did not depend on the support of other SEATO members.⁴⁰ Although this agreement was meant to reaffirm commitments that presumably existed already, it took on the nature of a bilateral treaty.⁴¹ The Rusk-Thanat Agreement became the basis for future military cooperation between the U.S. and Thailand.

After the fall of Nam Tha to communist forces in May 1962, the U.S. followed through on its commitment by deploying Combined Joint Task Force 116 (CJTF-116) to Thailand along with other air and sea assets under U.S. Pacific Command authority.⁴² Approximately seven thousand U.S. troops joined Thai forces as a show of force to the

³⁸ Special National Intelligence Estimate, May 9, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963 Vol XXIV: Laos Crisis, Document 350*.

³⁹ Thak, 164.

⁴⁰ "Rusk Vows U.S. Defense of Thailand," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 7, 1962, <http://news.google.com/newspapers>.

⁴¹ Jensen, *Trans-Pacific Relations*, 224.

⁴² Telegram from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt), May 12, 1962, *FRUS, 1961-1963 Vol. XXIV: Laos Crisis, Document 360*.

Pathet Lao and a signal of commitment to Thailand.⁴³ After the fourteen nations signed the agreement on Laotian neutrality in Geneva on 23 July 1962, the United States began withdrawing these forces. Withdrawal began with 1,800 Marines in July and continued gradually until the last 2,300 Army infantry departed in November 1962.⁴⁴ Thai and American concerns about communism in Thailand persisted, but the focus remained on external communist threats. Even the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was viewed as part of China's strategy for Southeast Asia, not as a domestic force. The Thai government's mistrust of its ethnic Chinese population supported this conclusion.⁴⁵ However, the Thai government failed to see that the growing influence of the CPT was actually the result of "internal contradictions" within the kingdom.⁴⁶

Background on the Communist Party of Thailand⁴⁷

The CPT began in 1942 with over 4,000 Chinese and Vietnamese minorities who opposed the Japanese occupation of Thailand and China; it did not conceive a plan to "liberate" Thailand until several years after the war.⁴⁸ With the communist victory in China in 1949 and the independence of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from France at

⁴³ Barry M. Blechman, and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press), 146.

⁴⁴ "U.S. Infantry Starts Withdrawal from Thailand," *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, November 25, 1962, <http://news.google.com/newspapers>.

⁴⁵ Marks, *Making Revolution*, 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 32.

⁴⁷ An excellent book on the Communist Party of Thailand is Thomas Marks' *Making Revolution* (see n. 34). Marks applies Theda Skocpol's structural perspective to the Thai insurgency and then argues that this perspective is insufficient to explain why the insurgency was unsuccessful. Ultimately, he argues that the Thai government, though constrained by the structure of "the system it was trying to preserve...still had choices to make" (14). See also Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁴⁸ Alagappa, 149-50.

Geneva in 1954, the CPT received more external support from its patrons. Still, the Thai government assumed that the loyalty of the ethnic Thai people would help keep communism at bay.⁴⁹ This loyalty was legislated by anti-communist laws in the 1950s, with sufficiently broad language that the military regime went after political activists, journalists, and students who were not satisfactorily loyal.⁵⁰ Upon taking power in 1958, Sarit further censored the press and banned any political gatherings of more than five people.⁵¹ This repression drove many people who had complaints against the Thai government, not just communists, to the CPT in the 1960s and 1970s. To many, the CPT represented the only organized opposition to the military dictatorship. Despite the increase in CPT ranks, the Thai government continued to believe it was an external threat. As late as 1968, General Saiyud Kerdphol, head of Thailand's counterinsurgency effort, believed, "the insurgency we are faced with today is one that has been forced on us by external powers."⁵² In response, the U.S. and Thai leaders emphasized development projects to cultivate popular loyalty to Bangkok.⁵³ Conspicuously absent was any mention of political reform.

⁴⁹ Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *et al. From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive: Attitudinal Transformation of Thai Military Officers since 1976* (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1990), 34.

⁵⁰ Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: the United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 164-5.

⁵¹ Thak, 93.

⁵² Saiyud Kerdphol, *The Struggle for Thailand: Counter-Insurgency, 1965-1985* (Bangkok: S. Research Center, 1986), 31.

⁵³ Chai-Anan, 52-3.

From Development as Legitimacy to Development as Security

As mentioned earlier, Prime Minister Sarit's initial interest in development was to secure long-term legitimacy. However, by 1962 he became more concerned about the communist insurgency by the CPT and in neighboring Laos. The most vulnerable part of Thailand was the northeast, a poor rural area populated by ethnic Laotians. As the main body of U.S. combat forces began to withdraw following the Geneva settlement of the Laotian Crisis in July 1962, Sarit shifted his focus from nation-wide development to the strategic northeast.⁵⁴ He created a new five-year plan that emphasized community development and more administrative control, with the goal of gaining the loyalty of the populace.⁵⁵ Drawing back from nation-wide development efforts targeted at securing legitimacy and focusing on the northeast indicated a new security focus: counterinsurgency. To execute Sarit's plan, the Thai government took three approaches: community development plans; the Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) Plan, established in 1964; and Thailand's own MCA program consisting of Mobile Development Units (MDUs). The first MDU was dispatched to Kalasin Province on 15 August 1962.⁵⁶ By June 1963, there were seven teams in the field.⁵⁷ These teams, though a creation of the Thai government, were heavily financed through U.S. foreign aid funds.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Thak, 167.

⁵⁵ Alagappa, 179-80.

⁵⁶ Chaiyo Krasin, "Military Civic Action in Thailand," *Military Review* (January 1968): 75.

⁵⁷ Lee W. Huff, *Observations on National Security Organization Mobile Development Unit-2 Operations* (Bangkok, Thailand: Joint Thai-U.S. Military Research and Development Center, 1963), ii.

⁵⁸ Memorandum for the record, January 29, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVII: Mainland Southeast Asia, Regional Affairs, Document 286*.

The stated objective of these units was to “demonstrate to the rural people...the RTG’s interests and capability in improving their living standards and hopefully thereby winning their loyalty.”⁵⁹ However, a report by the Joint Thai-U.S. Combat Development and Test Center in June 1963 indicated these units were not effective in the first year.⁶⁰ According to the report, a team would enter a town, hastily round up the residents, let some officials make speeches, hand out some clothes and pictures of the king, and hurry out of town “as quickly as possible in order to rush to the next village.”⁶¹ Some MDUs stayed in a province for a more extended period in order to establish various community and social development programs. However, the provincial officials did not have the resources to keep these programs going.⁶² The theme of this report foreshadows many future reports on MCA, both U.S. and Thai—the failure of MCA efforts was due to poor execution. There was no consideration that their fundamental assumptions were deficient.

The creation of MDUs closely paralleled the increasing interest in MCA by the U.S.⁶³ However, this interest had its limits in both the U.S. and Thailand. As noted earlier in connection with Futrell’s lecture, America believed that MCA could build nations. Futrell, constructing the case for its importance, quotes none other than the

⁵⁹ Alagappa, 180.

⁶⁰ The Thai-U.S. Military Research and Development Center was highlighted in Eric Wakin’s book *Anthropology Goes to War: Professional Ethics and Counterinsurgency in Thailand* because it conducted research on behalf of the Defense Department’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). Lee Huff, the author of the report cited in this paragraph, was listed by Wakin as a social scientist who compromised professional ethics by offering his services for COIN in Thailand. According to Conrad Crane, co-author with General David Petraeus of the U.S. Army’s current COIN doctrine, this debate continues.

⁶¹ Huff, 2.

⁶² Thak, 172.

⁶³ Chai-Anan, 93.

Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis E. “Bombs Away” LeMay: “We have seen [MCA] operate in our own country for many years. By encouraging and helping the Air Forces of friendly governments make their full civic contribution, we can demonstrate increasingly the superiority of free government on the basis of hard achievements, as well as moral values.”⁶⁴ Contrary to these statements, LeMay was not converted from his belief in the primacy of strategic nuclear deterrence. It is clear that notwithstanding the title of the speech LeMay delivered on 19 October 1963 to the Shriners in St. Louis, “Civic Action by the Air Force,” his purpose was to reinforce the importance of strategic nuclear deterrence: “[T]he strategic advantage we enjoy today is the key to all the tasks we perform,” including MCA.⁶⁵ Interest in MCA seemingly jumped from the White House past USAF leadership to a few airmen who bought in to Kennedy’s vision. This pattern of lofty rhetoric and poor implementation continued for both U.S. and Thai efforts. 1964 marked the beginning of the USAF’s long-term presence and the introduction of USAF MCA in Thailand.

⁶⁴ Futrell, “Recent Military Civic Action in the United States Air Force,” 19.

⁶⁵ Curtis E. LeMay, “Civic Action by the Air Force: the Air Commandos,” October 19, 1963, reprinted in *Vital Speeches of the Day* 30, no. 5 (December 1963): 152, <http://web.ebscohost.com.libproxy.temple.edu>.

CHAPTER 3: THE RISE OF USAF MILITARY CIVIC ACTION IN THAILAND

Escalation in Thailand, 1964-1965

In early March 1964, Detachment 6 of the 1st Air Commando Wing from Hurlburt Field, Florida deployed to Udorn, Thailand under the code name WATER PUMP. This unit was part of the special operations capability created in support of President Kennedy's new national defense strategy of "flexible response." The mission of U.S. Special Operations Forces was to train foreign militaries in counterinsurgency.⁶⁶ Appropriately, then, the Pentagon tasked this detachment with training the Royal Laotian Air Force in airborne counterinsurgency tactics.⁶⁷ Thailand shared its eastern border with Laos, and served as a relatively stable location from which to train Laotian and Thai pilots. Since the mission of special operations forces was counterinsurgency, and since military civic action was a counterinsurgency function, MCA was on the mind of those airmen en route to Thailand. However, for all the rhetoric about the importance of MCA, the U.S. government and USAF leadership were far more interested in the anti-guerilla element of counterinsurgency.

Though Thailand soon became the primary launch and recovery site for American air missions over Laos and Vietnam, this deployment to Thailand was not intended as the initial installment of a larger presence. That is not to say that the U.S. did not see Thailand as a potential base of operations. In 1964 there were numerous

⁶⁶ Warran A. Trest, *Air Commando One: Heinie Aderholt and America's Secret Wars* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2000), 121.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 140.

meetings and memos between U.S. and Thai officials about possible future cooperation in the region. The Thai government was receptive to military training but resisted increased American military presence because it might “‘act as a magnet’ for some Chi[nese]Com[munist] counter-move and...increased pressures on Thailand.”⁶⁸ For the foreseeable future, this was supposed to be the only USAF presence in Thailand. However, that changed after the 2 August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Incident.

This incident was allegedly the result of North Vietnamese Navy ships firing on two American ships, the *Maddox* on 2 August and the *Turner Joy* on 4 August 1964. The details surrounding the 4 August event are still contested, but the vague nature of the incident did not prevent President Johnson and his staff from ordering reprisal attacks on North Vietnam.⁶⁹ This required an increased American military presence in the region. Five days later, the Associated Press quoted a U.S. Embassy spokesman in Bangkok that said two USAF fighter squadrons were enroute to Thailand in connection with the Tonkin Gulf crisis.⁷⁰ These aircraft did not operate over Vietnam at this time; they were used as escorts for search and rescue missions over Laos.⁷¹ After the Vietnamese National Liberation Forces attacked a U.S. military installation near Pleiku Air Base, South Vietnam in February 1965, President Johnson ordered Flaming Dart I,

⁶⁸ Paper Prepared by Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Bundy), May 23, 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVII: Mainland Southeast Asia; Regional Affairs, document 270*.

⁶⁹ For more information on the debate surrounding the Gulf of Tonkin incident, see Edwin E. Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Moïse argues that the 2 August attack on the *Maddox* was legitimate but the 4 August incident that prompted LBJ to launch attacks on North Vietnam was a mistake resulting from false radar returns.

⁷⁰ “Fighters Flown into Thailand,” *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, August 7, 1965, <http://news.google.com/newspapers>.

⁷¹ Jeffrey Glasser, *The Secret Vietnam War: the United States Air Force in Thailand, 1961-1975* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., Publishers, 1995), 39.

the first attack on North Vietnam involving U.S. aircraft from Thailand.⁷² Following this, the USAF presence in Thailand increased. By the end of 1965, there were well over 8,000 USAF personnel in Thailand distributed among five Thai bases.⁷³ This increased presence, which grew in the coming years, eventually became an important factor in the conduct of USAF MCA.

As the U.S. conflict in Vietnam escalated, the Communist Party of Thailand also stepped up its efforts. Though it declared armed struggle as its revolutionary strategy in 1961, the first confrontation with Thai government forces did not take place until 7 August 1965, a date annually celebrated by the CPT as “Gun Firing Day.”⁷⁴ The Chinese Foreign Minister had already made a statement in January 1965 that Thailand was to be the site of the next “war of national liberation.”⁷⁵ By the end of 1965, the Thai government organized its counterinsurgency effort by establishing the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) under the leadership of General Saiyud Kerdphol.⁷⁶ The CSOC called for a new way of fighting the insurgents through a combination of civil, police, and military efforts. Though tasked with overseeing the Thai counterinsurgency effort, the CSOC did not have sufficient authority to muster resources. General Saiyud and the CSOC emphasized the necessity of MCA to address the sources of unrest, but the Thai military leadership disagreed and implemented

⁷² Ibid, 42.

⁷³ Ibid, 58-9.

⁷⁴ Thomas Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1996), 23.

⁷⁵ Saiyud, 23.

⁷⁶ Marks, *Maoist Insurgency*, 35.

brutal suppression tactics.⁷⁷ Like the U.S. military, the Thai military put more emphasis on killing guerillas than winning the people.

USAF Military Civic Action Begins in Thailand, 1964-1966

Until 1966, USAF MCA remained the domain of the Special Operations personnel of Detachment 6. Shortly after arriving in 1964, the flight surgeon for Detachment 6 began a medical civic action program in the villages surrounding Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB).⁷⁸ At this time, however, there was no provision for a dedicated, full-time MCA program. Detachment 6 medical personnel undertook this effort during off-duty time in addition to their primary responsibilities.⁷⁹ Despite this, it took on the appearance of an all-out effort. The flight surgeon coordinated with the detachment commander to spend up to a week at a time in remote villages, leaving behind a skeleton crew to tend to the American clinic on base. Nearly every week, from 20 December 1965 to 24 April 1966, a team was out for at least one day, usually more.⁸⁰ The Detachment 6 flight surgeon did his best to follow his understanding of MCA policy guidance, despite the lack of real interest by Air Force leadership.

From the outset, Detachment 6 personnel found themselves working against the context of Thai politics. Recall that the U.S. concept of MCA required the use of indigenous military forces for the purpose of enhancing the image of the host nation

⁷⁷ Saiyud, 5-6, 16.

⁷⁸ Trest, 142.

⁷⁹ Michael E. Haas, *Apollo's Warriors: US Air Force Special Operations During the Cold War* (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University Press, 2000), 240-1.

⁸⁰ Detachment 6, 1st Air Commando Wing (Weekly Activity Reports, 20 December 1965 to 5 June 1966), IRISNUM 00446512, AFHRA.

military in the eyes the Thai people. This was based on the American framework of civilian control of the military. In Thailand the military controlled the government. Since the military and the political realms were intertwined, all development efforts were both military and civil in nature. In an effort to make the Thai people agents of their own (American-style) modernization, Detachment 6 medical civic action teams (MEDCATs) were accompanied by representatives of the Thai government: Ministry of Health medical officers, Thai Information Service personnel, representatives of the provincial and district governments, and MDU personnel. This arrangement failed to fully meet the intent of U.S. MCA policy because the principal Thai element was civilian rather than military. Even the MDU's, identified as Thailand's *military* civic action teams, were comprised primarily of civilians, with the military serving in administrative or leadership roles.⁸¹ In this arrangement worked a cross purposes with the U.S. MCA goal of improving the image of the indigenous military. The Thai emphasis on suppression despite the rhetoric of development further degraded this effort. The USAF in Thailand was unable to meet the objectives of MCA because the Thai context did not match that of the U.S.

Detachment 6 personnel did their best to follow MCA principles despite these unfavorable conditions. The vigor of the USAF MCA program is impressive considering that the Detachment 6 flight surgeon had only one other doctor and four technicians to

⁸¹ A January 1968 article published in the U.S. Army's *Military Review* by Royal Thai Army Colonel Chaiyo Krasin described MDU teams as a military civic action effort. However, the teams consisted of officials from civilian ministries such as health, education, public health, agriculture, development, public relations, etc. with a military officer as the head (see n. 56). This structure changed little from the report by Lee Huff in 1963. Huff described a 17-person team consisting of a military officer leading a team of civil officials (Huff, 5).

divide between two MEDCATs. His remaining medical personnel were frequently parceled out to other locations, and one doctor had to remain at Udorn at all times. The scope of the military civic action program caused the flight surgeon to protest the detailing out of his personnel to sites—presumably in neighboring Laos—with code names like CHARLIE and VICTOR.⁸² He argued that his primary mission and responsibility was to northeastern Thailand, “the area of greatest need and potential benefit” due to the strong communist influence there.⁸³ This officer’s comments, which were endorsed by his commander Lt Col Benjamin M. Washburn, emphasized his belief that of MCA efforts were equally if not more important than other USAF efforts in the region. This argument would be repeated frequently in the coming years and largely fall on deaf ears.

Another complaint, beginning with the Detachment 6 effort and continuing throughout the USAF presence in Thailand, was that the USAF MCA teams were poorly equipped. For weeks the detachment commander complained of the failure of Pacific Air Force headquarters to deliver vehicles, radios, and other required equipment. On 2 January 1966 the commander wrote, “[T]here might soon be some shadow of doubt [within the Thai government] as to what official backing we have back home so long as we continue to operate with such deplorable equipment.”⁸⁴ There is no indication that

⁸² The identities of these locations are not clear, but if the flight surgeon was arguing that his unit’s responsibility was to Thailand, and given the secrecy requiring code names for sites despite the already SECRET classification of these reports, it is likely they were in Laos. This is corroborated by a website containing stories from two veteran Air Commandos who trained the Laotian Air Force. On this site, VICTOR was identified as Vientiane, the capital of Laos (<http://www.ravens.org/Adventures/Episode0000.htm>, accessed 31 October 2011).

⁸³ Detachment 6, Weekly Activity Report for 2 Jan 66.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Detachment 6 ever received additional manpower or equipment for use in the military civic action mission. Even the medical supplies used by the MEDCATs came from a non-profit charity out of Detroit, Michigan called World Medical Relief, which donated five thousand pounds of supplies on a bimonthly basis.⁸⁵ Despite these frustrations and shortcomings, the MCA efforts continued.

The Udorn team continued military civic action activities until May 1966, in cooperation with the Thai MDU teams. In the weekly activity reports, the teams identified increased communist insurgent activity, such as assassinations of teachers and village leaders, followed by requests from Thai officials for teams to respond to those areas.⁸⁶ Despite lack of support from headquarters and the increase in communist agitation, the MEDCAT personnel felt their work was making a difference. In his report for the week of 14 through 20 March 1966, the flight surgeon wrote, "The goodwill generated in the Thai Government by the MEDCAT visits has been credited with a great deal of the information leading to the arrest of [sixty] communist sympathizers."⁸⁷ Three weeks later, communist insurgents offered 30,000 bhat for the assassination of any American (equivalent to \$1,442, a princely sum considering that at the time the per capita income in the northeast rural areas was only 818 bhat).⁸⁸ The MEDCATs were unconcerned, but not because of their confidence in the success of MCA. Instead, the report for that week argued that "people in the village know from

⁸⁵ Trest, 142.

⁸⁶ Detachment 6, Weekly Activity Report for 14-20 March 1966.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Average income listed in Hayao Fukui's *Food and Population in a Northeast Thai Village* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 293. Currency conversion provided by www.bahtrate.com which states that the baht to U.S. dollar exchange rate from 1956 to 1973 was 20.8 baht to 1 dollar.

experience that the money will never be paid.”⁸⁹ Such a statement raises the question of whether there would be cause for concern if the communists were known to pay as promised. Would MCA have been enough to gain the protection of the villagers?

The MEDCATs may have not been alarmed, but the Thai government was. On the second week of May 1966, the flight surgeon reported he was “quite concerned over the impending finish of our civic action program.”⁹⁰ The following week the flight surgeon reported MEDCAT programs were canceled indefinitely “at the request of the RTG [Royal Thai Government], because of concern for the safety of the team members.” Though disappointed, the Detachment 6 flight surgeon writes, “For two years the mobile teams have been operating full time with the final objective being the absorption of our program by some agency or the RTG....Our only desire at this point is to insure that all future activities continue to prove as successful as past operations.”⁹¹ The Udorn program fizzled out in May 1966, but this was not the end of USAF military civic action in Thailand.

USAF Presence Grows; MCA Effort Resurges, 1966-1968

Between 1 January and 31 December 1966, the USAF presence in Thailand increased from just over 8,000 to 24,783.⁹² As USAF forces in Thailand surged, U.S. policy emphasis on MCA resurged. In his foreign aid address to Congress on 1 February, President Johnson announced his proposal for the Military Assistance and Sales Act of

⁸⁹ Detachment 6, Weekly Activity Report for 4-10 April 1966.

⁹⁰ Detachment 6, Weekly Activity Report for 9-15 May 1966.

⁹¹ Detachment 6, Weekly Activity Report for 16-22 May 1966.

⁹² Glasser, 82-4.

1966. In it, he called for “[g]reater emphasis on civic action programs. We shall give new stress to civic action programs through which local troops build schools and roads, and provide literacy training and health services.” He also reemphasized the importance of indigenous military participation to improve their image: “Through these programs, military personnel are able to play a more constructive role in their society, and to establish better relations with the civilian population.”⁹³ In its first iteration, MCA was treated as more of a hobby than a policy. Johnson intended to reverse this.

General John P. McConnell, U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff after LeMay’s retirement in January 1965, made President Johnson’s policy into Air Force policy. Later in 1966, McConnell said, “Second to combat operations our efforts in the area of civic action are the most valuable contribution we can make to the defeat of communist insurgency, the establishment of solid and progressive governments, and lasting peace in SEA [Southeast Asia].”⁹⁴ A working paper published in August 1970 as part of the USAF Corona Harvest program stated that “in 1966, the Civic Action Program in SEAsia transformed from a voluntary humanitarian effort into an official program.”⁹⁵ In November 1966, the Pentagon published the Joint Manual for Civil Affairs, signed by all three service departments. Unsurprisingly, the definition of MCA did not change from 1961. What is of note is the priority given to MCA: “military civic action projects are fully as important in promoting security and stability as are conventional tactics,

⁹³ Lyndon B. Johnson: "Special Message to the Congress on the Foreign Aid Program," February 1, 1966, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>.

⁹⁴ “Report on USAF Logistics Activities in Support of Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 January 1965-31 March 1968” (working paper for Corona Harvest , August 1970), III-6-149, IRISNUM 1007067, AFHRA.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

weapons, and roles.”⁹⁶ Despite this policy statement, MCA continued to suffer from sporadic support from leadership and confusion over its objectives and implementation.

From 1965 to 1968, United States Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm S. Bounds was assigned to Headquarters Pacific Air Force (PACAF), the USAF command responsible for operations in Asia. In 1966, he produced official guidance for a PACAF Military Civic Action Program.⁹⁷ This guidance made no dramatic departures from the objectives of MCA already put forth by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and understood by the USAF Special Operations community. The real difference was that PACAF created full-time civic action positions and periodic reporting requirements to provide necessary oversight. For Thailand, this program came on line shortly after the Detachment 6 MCA program ceased operations in mid-1966. The 606th Air Commando Squadron (606 ACS) advance team arrived at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB in April 1966, followed on 5 July by a formal Civic Action Section.⁹⁸ The new program also came with a funding line. Unlike the Detachment 6 program, which received donated medical supplies and rehabilitated broken vehicles for their use, the 606 ACS received a slice of foreign assistance money. Because those funds came primarily through State Department channels, the new program required the USAF to coordinate MCA activities with the U.S. Operational Mission at the Embassy in Bangkok. As with the original Detachment 6 effort, the focus

⁹⁶ *Joint Manual for Civil Affairs* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1966), 29, accessed November 2, 2011, <http://www.marines.mil/news/publications/>.

⁹⁷ Malcolm S. Bounds, “Military Civic Action,” *Air University Review* (May-June 1969), accessed April 7, 2011, <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1969/may-jun/bounds.html>.

⁹⁸ “606th Air Commando Squadron (Lucky Tiger) Activities,” 5 October 1966, 5, IRISNUM 00451168, AFHRA.

of the 606 ACS MCA effort was medical activities.⁹⁹ By fiscal year 1969, their budget was over \$800,000, not including military personnel pay or operation and maintenance of vehicles and aircraft.¹⁰⁰

Initially, the USAF medical civic action teams (MEDCATs) had to carve out their own niche. Their primary activities included assistance at Thai clinics and dispensaries. However, this quickly expanded beyond helping staff and train at clinics to providing medical care and training in the remote corners of northeast Thailand.¹⁰¹ This later expanded to include use of riverboats to reach previously inaccessible areas along the Mekong River.¹⁰² One activity initiated by the U.S. Air Force that later had significant support and profound impact was veterinary assistance. By November 1966, the USAF veterinarian coordinated with Thai Public Health to institute a rabies control program in addition to the livestock program he started in August.¹⁰³ Based on the success of these efforts, USOM, the U.S. State Department, and the Thai Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation signed Project Agreement 180-8045 in June 1968, establishing a livestock civic action program to be staffed by four USAF veterinarians and five USAF technicians.¹⁰⁴ By the middle of 1968, USAF MCA activities by the 606 ACS were expansive and robust and the MCA section grew to nearly one hundred personnel.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Report for 28 March to 30 September 1966, "606 ACS (LUCKY TIGER) Activities," IRISNUM 00410604.

¹⁰⁰ "USAF Military Civic Action," (Semiannual Report, October 1968), 93, IRISNUM 00470520, AFHRA.

¹⁰¹ "Medical Training for Royal Thai Government Health Workers in remote site operations," December 26, 1969, IRISNUM 00451168, AFHRA.

¹⁰² "Medical Training for Royal Thai Government Health Workers, Riverboat Medical Operations," December 27, 1969, IRISNUM 00451169, AFHRA.

¹⁰³ Report for 15-22 October 1966, "606 ACS (LUCKY TIGER) Activities," IRISNUM 00410604, AFHRA.

¹⁰⁴ "Veterinary Assistance to Royal Thai Government Livestock and Rabies Programs," December 25, 1969, IRISNUM 00451167, AFHRA.

¹⁰⁵ "Medical Training for Royal Thai Government Health Workers in remote site operations," December 26, 1969, IRISNUM 00451168, AFHRA.

This new PACAF program also established smaller MCA offices at all seven Thai bases with a USAF presence. Unlike the 606 ACS group, however, this was a more gradual program. By the end of 1968, PACAF was still in the process of shifting from the initial part-time effort to a full-time base-level MCA officer (BCAO).¹⁰⁶ This increased manpower requirement, not only in Thailand but in Vietnam as well, exceeded the capacity of the 1st Air Commando Wing. To meet the increased demand, the Air Staff drew officers from a variety of Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs). These officers were not thoroughly trained in military civic action or provided requisite language and cultural training. Instead, they received a brief two week training course before going “down range.”¹⁰⁷ It appears there was a trade-off between quality and quantity. Though the 606 ACS program was strong during this time, failure to properly train BCAOs added to the confusion over the objectives and conduct of MCA in Thailand in the years to come.

The PACAF MCA program remained essentially unchanged while Colonel Bounds was in charge. In one of the final reports during his tenure, PACAF informed Headquarters Air Force about the status of the program after two years. The primary concern was lack of Royal Thai Air Force participation. As the USAF counterparts on the Thai Air Force bases, U.S. MCA personnel frequently tried to encourage RTAF personnel to go along on MCA projects, but to no avail. The October 1968 USAF MCA report

¹⁰⁶ “USAF Military Civic Action,” (Semiannual Report, October 1968), 127.

¹⁰⁷ Betty Barton Christiansen, *The United States in Southeast Asia: Military Civic Action*, (unpublished manuscript, Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998), 189, accessed September 6, 2011, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/af/usaf_sea_civic_action.pdf. Despite the title, Captain Christiansen’s focus was on MCA in Vietnam. Nonetheless, her analysis of the MCA training program is relevant Air Force-wide for this period.

stated three reasons for the lack of RTAF participation: fear of crossing into the lane of other Thai agencies, insufficient resources to divert from other RTAF missions, and “reluctance on the part of military men to get involved in programs that they consider civilian in nature.”¹⁰⁸ There remained a belief within the U.S., both at the policy making level and in the Defense Department, that the purpose of MCA was to improve the image of the indigenous military. The Thai military, however, had its own ideas.

In January 1968, Colonel Chaiyo Krasin of the Royal Thai Army published an article in the U.S. Army’s *Military Review* entitled “Military Civic Action in Thailand.” Colonel Chaiyo identified presumed links between economic development and counterinsurgency similar to those found in modernization theory. One of the essential objectives he listed for MCA, aside from agricultural development, transportation, public health, and education was to increase contact between the people and the central government.¹⁰⁹ He also described the structure of the MDUs, demonstrating that civilian ministries worked under a military officer.¹¹⁰ The emphasis on enhancing the *government* rather than military image and the lack of participation by military personnel was likely the result of the conflation of the military and political roles. As already discussed, this had been a point of divergence between U.S. and Thai concepts of MCA since 1964.

Despite USAF efforts to further involve RTAF personnel, the Thai military remained unresponsive. A memorandum dated Christmas Day 1968 to the chief of the

¹⁰⁸ “USAF Military Civic Action,” (Semiannual Report, October 1968), 127.

¹⁰⁹ Chaiyo, 77 (see n. 56).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 75.

Civic Action Center reinforced this difficulty. The USAF advisor to the RTAF Surgeon General, Marshall Tragool, reported, "Marshall Tragool has no interest whatsoever in civic action activities....Tragool senses the U.S. desire that he take an interest in civic action, but intends to do nothing about it."¹¹¹ Without the cooperation of such an influential Thai officer, USAF MCA would fail in its goals.

The end of 1968 witnessed a major setback to USAF MCA. Guidance from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok prompted the creation of 7th/13th Air Force Operations Plan (7/13 AF OPLAN) 451-68, "Orient Express," on 16 October 1968. This guidance required USAF MCA efforts to withdraw to within a 16 kilometer radius of each base and gave the 606 ACS approximately twelve months to phase out their work in rural areas.¹¹² The restricted movement of the 606 ACS made the seven BCAOs the means for reaching the broadest area. Unfortunately, BCAO training remained "hardly adequate to prepare them for the social, economic, political and military problems that will frustrate them during their one year sojourn in Thailand."¹¹³ Inability to reach remote areas, reliance on poorly trained BCAOs, and RTAF intransigence led to adaptations that effectively undermined the purpose of military civic action. These factors were compounded by changes in U.S. and Thai foreign policy in 1969.

¹¹¹ Memorandum from Major Grant H. Wagner to Chief, CAC, "RTAF Interest in Civic Action Activities," December 25, 1968, IRISNUM 00517096, AFHRA.

¹¹² "Medical Training for Royal Thai Government Health Workers in Mobile Medical Team Operations," (Semi-Annual Civic Action Report, December 28, 1969), IRISNUM 00451166, AFHRA.

¹¹³ "USAF Military Civic Action," (Semiannual Report, October 1968), 127.

CHAPTER 4: MILITARY CIVIC ACTION IN DECLINE

Shift from Nation-Building to Air Base Defense, 1969-1972

Differences of opinion between the U.S. and Thai militaries on the conduct of MCA did not mean the Thai government rejected MCA out of hand. A February 1969 memorandum by the Acting Director of USAF Civic Action provided an account of a meeting with the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok on the subject of Thai MCA. In the meeting, the Embassy conveyed that General Kriangsak, commander of Thai Supreme Command, opposed “the remote operations of the 606 CAC [Civic Action Center] primarily on the basis of the high exposure of US troops in a person-to-person medical care situation with Thai citizens...General Kriangsak feels that Thai counterinsurgency efforts must be manned by Thais.”¹¹⁴ In accordance with this line of reasoning, the Thai Supreme Command organized a 40-man tri-service mobile medical team in December 1968, “entirely separate from the military input to Mobile Development Units.”¹¹⁵ The MDUs were already infiltrated by the USAF; Kraingsak apparently felt the need to make a clean break with a new MCA effort.

Reading these comments, it seems clear that the Thai military wanted to take complete control of MCA efforts within their country. This sentiment was reinforced by General Saiyud Kerdphol: “We must make it clear that this counter-insurgency effort is being directed and fought by Thais and not our allies whose role must be an indirect,

¹¹⁴ Major Grant H. Wagner, Memorandum for Record, 19 February 1969, IRISNUM 00517096, AFHRA

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

supporting one.”¹¹⁶ These sentiments combined with several events in 1969 to indicate a significant change in the nature of U.S.-Thai relations, change that significantly influenced the conduct of USAF MCA in Thailand.

The development emphasis inaugurated by Prime Minister Sarit in 1958 continued in Thailand through 1968. Though modernization theory presupposed that development programs would raise the quality of life for the disaffected northeastern population, they actually created socio-economic changes that boosted the core areas of Thailand such as business growth and increased urbanization.¹¹⁷ These phenomena not only resulted in greater wealth but also disenchantment from the urban pressures of increased crime, housing shortages, and other social ills. Political scientist Michael Kelly Connors argues that by the late 1960s there were “increased demands for political liberalization by the new social forces that growth had spawned.”¹¹⁸ In order to appease these forces, emanating primarily from students and intellectuals, the government under Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn (who replaced Sarit after his death in 1963) announced the completion of a constitution in 1968 with elections in February 1969.¹¹⁹ This constitution created a very weak representative parliament that “reelected” Thanom as Prime Minister. Though this new constitution was short-lived—ending in a November 1971 coup by Thanom himself and a return to military rule—this temporary bending of military control to the will of the Thai people indicated the erosion of the Thai military’s political influence. The heretofore loyal Thai government

¹¹⁶ Saiyud, 93 (see n. 52).

¹¹⁷ Thak, 227.

¹¹⁸ Michael Kelly Connors, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2007), 62.

¹¹⁹ Thak, 228

would become less supportive of American policy as it became vulnerable to objections by the Thai people.

American military presence had long been resented by the Thai people. The U.S. military in Thailand was associated with undesirable changes such as prostitution increased crime, biracial children, and the erosion of culture, particularly in the smaller towns.¹²⁰ Additionally, the massive flow of money into the Thai economy by nearly 47,000 American servicemen led to wild inflation and deep economic dependence.¹²¹ Thai officials and businessmen enjoyed the benefits of increased American investment, but the declaration of the Nixon Doctrine in July 1969 threatened this growth. Previously, the objections of the Thai population to America's negative influence were subordinated to the close military and economic relationship between Thai elites and the U.S. However, facing the possibility of U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia under Nixon's initiative, these elites began to explore their options. Additionally, the CPT, largely absent from this discussion since the beginning of armed insurgency in 1965, seized on the growing political consciousness of the Thai people and the declining influence of the United States in 1969 to regroup.¹²² Thailand was approaching a cataclysmic domestic crisis with the start of a new decade.

The "Nixon Doctrine" represented an abandonment of modernization theory. Johnson and his strategy in Vietnam had been discredited by the Tet Offensive and his domestic policy, the Great Society, failed to achieve its purposes. This led him to

¹²⁰ Glasser, 102-3.

¹²¹ Suchita Ghosh, "Thailand's Relations with the US and China: the Search for an Independent Foreign Policy," *China Report*, (1976): 51, accessed November 3, 2011, doi: 10.1177/000944557601200405.

¹²² Marks, *Making Revolution*, 121.

announce he would not run for reelection. Many in Congress believed it was the focus on modernization, the cornerstone of both Kennedy's and Johnson's foreign policy, that "eventually produced the political and military commitments that ended in mire like Vietnam."¹²³ Criticism of modernization came from left-wing voices that highlighted the damaging effects of capitalism (economic development) on poor nations and from right-wing critics of social engineering (social development).¹²⁴ In concrete terms, America's failure to create a modernized nation in South Vietnam exposed the flaws of modernization theory. In November 1968, Richard Nixon was elected with a clear mandate to rethink America's foreign policy.

By 1969, the critical elements of the USAF MCA effort—Thai government support and the U.S. emphasis on modernization in counterinsurgency—were exhausted. Additionally, the lack of RTAF participation and the restriction to a 16 kilometer radius around the seven Thai air bases prevented USAF BCAOs from accomplishing the stated objectives of the MCA program. Despite these crushing blows, and despite the historic lack of significant support from USAF leadership, the idea of abandoning MCA in Thailand was never considered. Instead, proponents of MCA sought a new objective.

By the end of 1969, the withdrawal of USAF MCA activities within 16 kilometers of each base was complete. The role of the 606 ACS was limited to providing medical training in and around Nakhon Phanom RTAFB. The BCAOs, now the best means of reaching the widest Thai population, were "primarily concerned with community relations, humanitarian, and good will projects designed to enhance the image of the

¹²³ Ekbladh, 222 (see n. 5).

¹²⁴ Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution*, 157.

U.S. in the eyes of the Thai people,” despite the fact that the image of the U.S. was never previously a goal of MCA.¹²⁵ The following year, 7th Air Force Regulation (7AFR) 55-8, *Operations: Military Civic Action*, dated 28 August 1970, explicitly stated, “MCA must not be confused with community relations or humanitarian programs.”¹²⁶ The BCAOs were responding to present realities in contradiction to doctrine. In the face of changing conditions both politically and on the ground, MCA doctrine did not experience a complete reappraisal. The goals of MCA remained social and economic development—elements of modernization theory—and improvement of the indigenous military’s image. The fundamental assumptions of modernization still existed in MCA doctrine at a point when modernization was on the outs, and the Thai military was keeping its distance from USAF MCA. These factors created a fundamental crisis in the purpose and practice of USAF MCA.

Despite the lack of a complete review of MCA in USAF doctrine, there was one small change that took on major significance in the concept and execution of MCA. In July 1969, the same month President Nixon declared his intent to gradually withdraw from Southeast Asia, the USAF added base security as a goal of MCA.¹²⁷ This objective was listed as the last priority of MCA below all the previous objectives: improving socio-economic status, improving the host nation military’s image, and encouraging the host nation air force to participate. However, being unable to participate in activities aimed at the first three objectives the last quickly became dominant in USAF MCA. It gave

¹²⁵ “Medical Training for Royal Thai Government Health Workers in Mobile Medical Team operations,” 8.

¹²⁶ *Operations: Military Civic Action* (7th Air Force Regulation 55-8, 28 August 1970), 4, IRISNUM 00524873, AFHRA.

¹²⁷ *War Planning: Civic Action Program* (7AFR 28-1, 5 July 1969), 6, IRISNUM 00524870, AFHRA.

purpose to an otherwise frustrating program that was rapidly losing meaning amid policy changes in the U.S. and Thailand. It was also a purpose in which BCAO's had a vested interest as America's influence in the region receded. Dissatisfaction with American presence and policy in Thailand increased the need to ensure the safety of U.S. forces. However, this objective, combined with inadequate training stateside, also changed the methods of conducting MCA. These factors created so much confusion within the USAF that individual BCAOs, tasked with a job and hell-bent on doing it, began interpreting both means and ends as they saw fit.

The account of one officer, Captain Charles Murphy, Jr., is particularly illustrative of the frustration and confusion over USAF MCA in the early 1970s. Captain Murphy was the BCAA at Korat RTAFB from July 1971 to December 1972.¹²⁸ In both his end-of-tour report and an oral interview in 1973, Murphy addressed the lack of adequate training, lack of support from leadership, the frustrations faced when trying to work with the Thai military, and his personal interpretation of the proper purpose and execution of MCA. Murphy considered his training insufficient, though he professed to be better prepared for MCA than most. His experience included voluntary MCA work in Vietnam in 1968 and some graduate work in cultural anthropology.¹²⁹ In 1969, Murphy began teaching at the Special Air Warfare School at Eglin on the subject of civic action. There is no indication, however, that he received formal training on military civic action before he began instructing others. Instead, he claims to have walked into the

¹²⁸ While it may be tenuous to assume that Murphy's experience reflected that of all USAF BCAOs in Thailand during this time, his account of MCA efforts contain a level of detail and honesty missing from other available sources.

¹²⁹ Charles G. Murphy, Jr., interview by Lyn R. Officer and Hugn N. Ahnmann, June 4, 1973, interview #675, transcript, IRISNUM 00904782, AFHRA.

commanding general's office and told the general "I wanted to instruct because I thought I knew something about what was going on."¹³⁰ Though he may have had some idea of the complex nature of cultural factors (and practical experience to a degree in Vietnam), he never received training in the context of Thai culture. In his end of tour report, he states that his lack of language training was a "serious limitation to my effectiveness in this program."¹³¹ His recommendations for enhanced training for future BCAOs indicate preparation remained deficient into the 1970s.

The "concept of operations" put forth in Murphy's end-of-tour report reveals vestiges of the original modernization and development assumptions. He identified the need to "eliminat[e] sources of discontent which could be used by an insurgent to get support for his own cause," harkening back to the social and economic conditions identified by Rostow and others as targets for counterinsurgency.¹³² However, the object was no longer nation-building. Instead, he identified the goal as "keeping the base safe from hostile action."¹³³ In his oral history, Captain Murphy asserted that he came to this conclusion following his tour in Vietnam: "I get back to the states...and suddenly I find out that the purpose for the civic action program, the whole basis of the thing, is not just development or 'do gooder' or anything like that. It is...creating an environment around an installation [and] you deny it to the enemy."¹³⁴ Since MCA as

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Charles G. Murphy, Jr., "Base Civic Action Program" (End of Tour Report, July 1971-December 1972), 16, IRISNUM 00517604, AFHRA.

¹³² Ibid, 8.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Murphy, interview, 13.

defined in USAF doctrine was no longer part of the U.S. government's foreign policy strategy, airmen like Captain Murphy adapted it to a more limited purpose.

Captain Murphy may have departed from the script to a greater extent than other officers, though his reasons for doing so reflect the situation already described in Thailand. When asked in his interview where he received operational guidance, he answered, "Me."¹³⁵ He asserted that the USAF policy guidance, Air Force Regulation 55-7, was useless and that the base commander "doesn't even know why he's got you."¹³⁶ In his end-of-tour report, Murphy indicated additional reasons for pursuing his own course with the MCA program. Most significant was the elimination of the civic action program manager position at 7/13th Air Force headquarters and that "PACAF had for all practical purposes lost all interest in the programs."¹³⁷ As the war in Vietnam drew to a close, there was little interest at all levels in the official goals of MCA. Yet as the USAF presence receded in Thailand, MCA was assigned one last purpose.

Thai Instability and USAF Withdrawal, 1973-1976

1973 was a landmark year in Southeast Asia. For the United States that year meant the Paris Peace Accords in January, withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam by the end of March, and the beginning of the drawdown in Thailand. With the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, there was no longer a need for the huge presence of American combat aircraft and their associated support personnel. Air combat

¹³⁵ Ibid, 55.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 54.

¹³⁷ Murphy (End of Tour Report), 16.

operations continued over Laos and Cambodia, which were not signatories to the Paris Peace Accords, until the congressional cut-off on 15 August 1973.¹³⁸ On 1 January 1973, before the signing of the accords, the USAF presence was nearly 36,000 (total U.S. military presence was 43,550).¹³⁹ By 1 January 1974, USAF presence was down to 30,646, and by 1 January 1975 it was 20,576.¹⁴⁰ At this time there was still an expectation on the part of both U.S. and Thai officials that the USAF may retain a presence in Thailand to protect Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean interests.¹⁴¹

As late as July 1974, the U.S. was negotiating to retain a permanent presence at U-Tapao RTAFB with minimum forces necessary for intelligence, the Military Assistance Program, search and rescue, U.S. Embassy support, and Diego Garcia operations.¹⁴² Since MCA was now concerned with airbase defense, 13th Air Force leadership saw a need to continue the program for the foreseeable future, albeit with limited aims.¹⁴³ In the 13th Air Force's second semiannual report for 1974, the advanced echelon (ADVON) stated that its MCA objective was to, "assist the Royal Thai Government in strengthening the country's overall economic posture, thus building the confidence of the local villagers in both the RTG and the American forces [to]...encourage these individuals to report any suspicious activity."¹⁴⁴ At first it appears there was still a

¹³⁸ Glasser, 196-7.

¹³⁹ Harold J. Smarkola, Jr., *History of Thirteenth Air Force Advanced Echelon, 1 July-31 December 1974* (Office of History, 13AF Advanced Echelon, June 20, 1975, portions declassified August 2, 2011), 134.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 135.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ The command element in Thailand was no longer 7/13th Air Force. 7th Air Force was responsible for Vietnam operations, including air operations from Thailand. When that conflict ended, only 13th Air Force remained in Thailand.

¹⁴⁴ Smarkola, 25.

modernization element in the program. Later in the report, however, discussion of MCA activities dropped all references to nation-building and mentioned only “goodwill projects” done in hopes that “villagers would provide defense related intelligence information with regard to planned insurgent attacks on U.S. tenanted military bases.”¹⁴⁵ Beyond that, BCAOs hoped MCA efforts would help the Thai people view U.S. personnel as “a friendly partner...apart from the larger political issues concerning U.S. units in Thailand.”¹⁴⁶

The domestic environment in Thailand reached its most volatile point in 1973. The repressive military government of Thanom Kittikachon collapsed amid student and labor protests demanding a new constitution and greater democracy.¹⁴⁷ Over the next several years, Thailand struggled to develop a stable government as forces from the right and left attempted to seize political influence.¹⁴⁸ In September 1974, a meeting between Thai Ambassador Anand Panyarachun and U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger indicated that the fall of the military regime would require a significant reevaluation of the Thai relationship with the U.S.¹⁴⁹ Less than a year later, relations

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 168.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 169.

¹⁴⁷ Thak, 230.

¹⁴⁸ Marks, “Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory,” *Military Review* (January-February 2007): 43, accessed March 20, 2011, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/landingpage/collection/p124201coll1>.

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, September 12, 1974, *FRUS 1969-1976, Vol E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Document 388*. The exchange between Anand and Kissinger was very frank, as this excerpt shows (the State Dept historian incorrectly used Anand’s second name rather than the Thai convention of using first name):

PANYARACHUN: We think that the relationship needs a new basis. You have cooperated with the military faction. This was understandable since the military ran the government. Now that image needs to be rectified. There are some irritants in the relationship that need to be removed.

KISSINGER: Like what?

PANYARACHUN: Your military presence. Not the military presence itself, but the number and the

between the U.S. and Thailand became strained nearly to the breaking point. In May 1975, the Khmer Rouge from Cambodia boarded the U.S. cargo ship *S.S. Mayaguez*. Without consultation with the Thai government or notification of the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, American aircraft launched from Thai bases and successfully secured the release of the ship.¹⁵⁰ The Thai government felt its sovereignty was violated and demanded all U.S. forces withdraw within one year.

With the end of the USAF presence in Thailand in sight, so-called MCA efforts actually increased while other efforts were winding down. At this point, however, military civic action barely resembled its original purpose. Rather than the once lofty goal of NSAM 119 to “undertake civic action projects as [an] indispensable means of strengthening their society’s economic base and establishing a link between army and populace,” the program now sought to “minimize the social and economic impact of base closure on the local community.”¹⁵¹ At Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, the BCAO continued supporting “humanitarian projects,” long forgetting that humanitarian and community relations work was not MCA. In addition, the BCAO was now responsible for making excess office supplies and other materials available to Thai officials for redistribution.¹⁵² At Udorn RTAFB, the MCA office worked to “leave the civilian and

way they came in. It gave the impression that Thailand is not master in its own house. We need to adjust to the new realities of the situation.

¹⁵⁰ Telegram 8690 from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State, May 13, 1975, “MEASURES TO OBTAIN RELEASE OF THE MAYAGUEZ,” *FRUS 1969-1976, Vol E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976, Document 399*. In this telegram, Ambassador Masters write, “I cannot stress to[o] strongly the damage to U.S.-Thai interests which is likely to result from this unilateral action.” He finishes the telegram with this statement: “May I know what is going on?”

¹⁵¹ *History of 656th Special Operations Wing* (Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, 1 July-31 October 1975), 5, IRISNUM 1009402, AFHRA.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

military community with a lasting impression of beneficial and friendly U.S. involvement.”¹⁵³ It is interesting to note that military civic action, one of the first functions of the USAF in Thailand, “continued at a high level...until the final moments of base closure.”¹⁵⁴ Compared to the initial program in 1964, however, this effort was almost unrecognizable.

Thailand after the U.S. Withdrawal

By July 1976, American forces completed the withdrawal and American counterinsurgency aid dropped precipitously.¹⁵⁵ In October 1976, a violent assault by the Thai government on Thammasat University drove thousands of students and other activists into the jungle.¹⁵⁶ With the Americans gone and the Thai government in a fragile state, the CPT had its most promising opportunity. As in South Vietnam, USAF MCA in Thailand failed to curtail the rising insurgency. Thai development efforts failed to address the sources of discontent and suppression created more insurgents than it eliminated. Unlike South Vietnam, however, the Thai government eventually recognized the political nature of the insurgency.

General Kriangsak Chomanan, installed as Prime Minister after 1977, recognized the need to react differently to the communist insurgency and ease the political disenfranchisement of the populace. His main action was to distinguish between true communist subversives and those who simply wanted greater democracy. To the latter

¹⁵³ *Terminal History of the 432d Combat Support Group* (Udorn RTAFB, 24 December 1975-15 March 1976), 1, IRISNUM 1011581, AFHRA.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵⁵ Alagappa, 189.

¹⁵⁶ Marks, “Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory,” 43-44.

he granted amnesty. He also eased press censorship and extended recognition to moderate trade unions.¹⁵⁷ This took the pressure off those who were not true communists but associated with the CPT as their best chance for political change. In 1978 and 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia followed by China's invasion of Vietnam. The CPT, with loyalties to both Vietnamese and Chinese communist parties, lost their external support.¹⁵⁸ Many of those who fled to the jungle in the aftermath of the 1976 assault on Thammasat University were reintegrated into Thai society, and those who were students resumed their education.¹⁵⁹ With the loss of foreign communist support and receding disaffection with the Thai government, the CPT began to lose influence.

In March 1981, Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond, a close friend of Saiyud Kerdhpol, emphasized the need for a "political offensive" against the CPT which involved "destroying dictatorial power...to make sovereignty truly the people's, to give people...true Thai-style democracy, which is democracy with the king as head of state."¹⁶⁰ He continued Kriangsak's amnesty program as well as Saiyud's counterinsurgency program, and by 1983 the CPT was little more than an annoyance.¹⁶¹ It was not until the Thais abandoned the Rostovian idea of economic and social progress as the answer for political problems that Thailand could effectively defeat the communist insurgents. The United States provided training and resources to the Thai government and military, but it also earned the resentment of the Thai people. It is possible that the U.S. presence and assistance helped forestall a communist spillover

¹⁵⁷ Alagappa, 190

¹⁵⁸ Marks, "Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory," 44.

¹⁵⁹ Alagappa, 190.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 107.

¹⁶¹ Marks, "Anatomy of a Counterinsurgency Victory," 48.

from Laos and that the war in Vietnam helped ensure the independence of Thailand.

But at the end of the day, it was the Thai people themselves that demanded greater

political liberalization and the Thai leadership that recognized the need to change the

political environment to separate the communists from the disaffected. It was not USAF

military civic action that ended the insurgency; it was Thai political reform.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Given the spotted history of USAF military civic action in Thailand, it is remarkable that MCA remains part of U.S. military doctrine. Perhaps, like modernization theory and all its underlying assumptions, MCA went dormant in the late 1960s but never actually went away.¹⁶² Perhaps, like counterinsurgency, MCA fell out of favor only to reemerge following 9/11. In 1992, members of the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute edited a volume of essays entitled *Winning the Peace: the Strategic Implications of Military Civic Action*. All of the essays were written prior to the first Gulf War to ask whether military civic action had any relevance in the post-Cold War environment. To answer this question, the editors and authors had to remove civic action from its anti-communist context, and in doing so they provided a different framework for examining the objectives and execution of military civic action efforts during the Cold War.

Colonel Richard L. Sutter, then a civil affairs officer in the U.S. Army Reserve, wrote an essay for *Winning the Peace* entitled "The Strategic Implications of Military Civic Action" in which he argued the fallacy behind military civic action policy and doctrine was economic determinism.¹⁶³ According to Sutter this fallacy—which is also a significant criticism of modernization theory—oversimplifies insurgency and "permits

¹⁶² Michael Latham claims modernization was recast as "globalization" which celebrated the potential for meeting rising expectations with free market capitalism. *The Right Kind of Revolution*, 191.

¹⁶³ Sutter, 167 (see n. 1).

the least-informed and experienced...to provide ready solutions to insurgency.”¹⁶⁴ He rejects the non-military objectives and ad hoc employment of civic action, saying “every military capability has some particular target as its object and the corollary assumptions of economic determinism and American liberalism do not describe this target.”¹⁶⁵ This describes one of the main failures of MCA during the 1960s and 1970s: MCA was focused on a form of American liberalism—modernization theory—as its target, and when policies and ideologies shifted in the late 1960s MCA lost its focus and become something else altogether.

This examination of USAF MCA in Thailand during the 1960s and 1970s points to several larger issues that transcend that time and place. One issue is the proper employment of military forces to achieve foreign policy goals. The military unquestionably exists to help achieve policy objectives, but there is a tendency to use the military even when another instrument of power is needed (economic, diplomatic, information, or military). Often this is the result of convenience. Though not perfect, when compared to many other bureaucratic agencies the U.S. military is organized, efficient, fast, and obedient. President Theodore Roosevelt put it well when he handed the building of the Panama Canal from civil agencies to the U.S. Army: “the great thing about an Army officer is that he does what you tell him to do.”¹⁶⁶ Perhaps the reason the military seems suitable for nearly every foreign policy problem is the overwhelming focus on military capability compared to other instruments of power. Budget numbers

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 169.

¹⁶⁶ Quote in Rudolph C. Barnes, *Military Legitimacy: Might and Right in the New Millennium* (London: Routledge, 1996), 147.

do not reveal the whole story, but it is telling to note that in fiscal year 2011 the State Department was allocated over \$50 billion for its entire budget, including the Peace Corps and USAID, whereas the Defense Department received \$718 billion.¹⁶⁷ When your best tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Another subject that arises when examining the origins of MCA is the proper role of political policy in the development of military doctrine. When doctrine is created from the top down, it becomes dogma and is more resistant to change than doctrine shaped by military theory and experience.¹⁶⁸ Policy determines *what* the military will do while doctrine explains *how* it should be done. *Air Force Doctrine Document 1*, dated 17 November 2003, states, “Military doctrine is authoritative, but unlike policy, is not directive.”¹⁶⁹ Doctrine provides guidance to be applied flexibly. When policymakers create doctrine, the military is unable to use the doctrine flexibly or apply experience to change the doctrine. What happens then is either the military follows a doctrine unsuited to the situation or the military abandons the doctrine and thus loses direction. Both occurred with USAF MCA in Thailand.

Turning the microscope from the politicians to the military, this work points to the problem of inadequately preparing soldiers, sailors, and airmen for the conflict at

¹⁶⁷ U.S. Government Printing Office, “Budget of the United States Government: Browse Fiscal Year 2011,” accessed November 21, 2011, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy11/index.html>. The military obviously requires more money to operate than the State Department, particularly given the expense of caring for military families, base infrastructure, and top-end military equipment. However, to put it into perspective, 10% of the State budget went to Foreign Military Financing, meaning State funded the DoD’s foreign military assistance mission. The DoD provides a ready pool of manpower that receives funding to accomplish projects for other departments. Military research and development alone exceeded the entire State budget by nearly \$20 billion.

¹⁶⁸ Andrew Birtle’s book *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* addresses the politicization of doctrine during the Kennedy administration and how that changed COIN doctrine from flexible guidance to inflexible dogma (chapter 6 and page 490).

¹⁶⁹ *Air Force Doctrine Document 1* (Washington DC: Air Force Departmental Publishing Office, 2003), 11.

hand. The Pentagon spends years training service members and continually exercises performance in core specialties. The belief that developing a quality airman, soldier, or sailor can overcome a lack of culture, language, and diplomatic skills leaves service members frustrated and grasping to demonstrate performance. This was true in 1961 and remains true in 2011. Although U.S. Army Civil Affairs and USAF Special Operations personnel receive training in MCA, they cannot bear the load alone. This fact was proven when the USAF MCA program expanded in 1966 from Special Operations to all Air Force Specialties, and General Petraeus affirmed it again in 2006 by saying, "Civil Affairs are not enough...*everyone must do nation-building.*"¹⁷⁰ Given constraints on time, money, and manpower, policymakers and military leaders must reevaluate whether they are willing to sacrifice proficiency in core specialties to enhance capability in culture and diplomacy. This requires a fundamental reevaluation of U.S. foreign policy. Ultimately, the U.S. must decide whether to continue nation-building.

¹⁷⁰ David Petraeus, "Learning Counterinsurgency: Observations from Soldiering in Iraq," *Military Review* (January-February 2006): 6, accessed October 27, 2011, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/petraeus1.pdf>.

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