

# A coup in Thailand may trigger new war

The situation in Southeast Asia is now poised on the edge of war. The question now in Asian capitals is not *if* the People's Republic of China will invade Vietnam, but *when*.

The trigger for war is being set in Thailand where, according to French intelligence sources, a pro-Peking coup against the present government is "imminent." A Peking puppet regime installed in Bangkok could be counted on to escalate tensions on the Thai-Cambodian border, leading to clashes between Thai armed forces and the Vietnamese. In keeping with such a plan, Chinese Vice-Premier Teng Hsiao-ping stated that China will "respond" to any Vietnamese "attack" on a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—i.e., Thailand.

## The coup plot

French sources report that the visit to Bangkok of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrook two weeks ago is linked to preparations for a coup against the relatively pragmatic, military-backed government of Thai Premier Kriangsak. Holbrook, the sources report, "broke all the rules" in his meeting with Kriangsak and is encouraging the Bangkok rulers to take a tougher stand against Vietnam. Thailand has already drawn diplomatic fire for supporting the bands loyal to deposed Cambodian butcher Pol Pot, who receive not only sanctuary, but supplies on Thai territory.

U.S. pressure on the Thais is occurring in close coordination with the Chinese. The head of the Thai airforce received VIP treatment during a mid-October visit to Peking, including meetings with top Chinese officials. Reportedly, the Chinese gave secret assurances of military backing for Thailand in the event of war with Vietnam. The visit was followed with Chinese announcements this past week of oil shipments to that country. Within Thailand itself, the "expatriate" Chinese are notorious for controlling most business, including the lucrative drug traffic of the Golden Triangle.

The Kriangsak government, while welcoming the rush of U.S. arms to the country announced by Holbrook, has not been eager to provide the battlefield for Chinese and U.S. wargames against Vietnam. While Holbrook was in Bangkok, Vietnamese Foreign Secretary Nguyen Co Thach was also there, holding talks with Kriangsak. The Vietnamese offered assurances that they had no military designs on Thailand, but warned against Thai support for Pol Pot. Warnings

were also delivered by Defense Minister Giap, in an article published in the Czech party daily Rude Pravo, where he accused the United States and China of using Thailand to build up Pol Pot and other Cambodian armed bands for renewed attacks on Cambodia.

## Question of timing

The timing for a Chinese attack on Vietnam, according to a dispatch last week in the Paris daily Le Matin, will probably be linked to the outcome of Chinese Premier Hua Guo-feng's visit to Europe last week, and the outcome of a United Nations General Assembly debate on Cambodia in mid-November. Vietnamese diplomatic sources have pinpointed November as the month in which they anticipate a Chinese military move.

The American people are not generally aware that the Carter administration has lined up behind China militarily—a feature of the much rumored "secret agreements" between the two nations. The agreements virtually grant Peking a "sphere of influence" throughout East Asia, and place a U.S. nuclear umbrella over China in the event of a strong Soviet response to China's planned attack on Vietnam.

## The relief issue

More immediate is the propaganda storm raised in the United States following the State Department's recent, admittedly belated "discovery" of famine conditions inside Cambodia. Of course, the State Department has nothing to say about the role of the Chinese-created, backed, and controlled regime of Pol Pot in creating those conditions as a matter of Peking's policy.

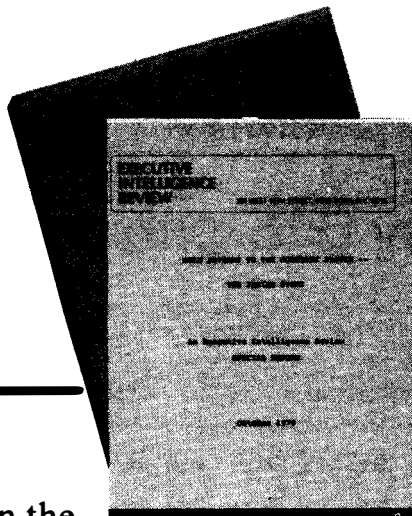
The United States and China are both now insisting that relief be "divided" between two "contesting authorities," the legitimate government and the Pol Pot murderers. The Heng Samrin government refuses such characterization and charges that supplies—under the cover of relief—are being funneled to Pol Pot soldiers. And in fact, Vietnam is giving tens of thousands of bushels of grain to the Cambodians, even as grain rationing is underway inside Vietnam itself. Meanwhile, reports abound that well-fed, well-armed Pol Pot troops are freely picking up UN supplies in Thailand.

That is the point of Phnom Penh's objection to the U.S. proposal of delivering relief supplies via a "land bridge" easily accessed by the Pol Pot marauders. The Heng Samrin government has opened airports, ports and waterways to relief agencies. The refusal of the United States to employ this route is sufficient demonstration that State Department policy is dictated by its alliance with Peking, not by humanitarian concerns.

The question remains: What will the United States do, if the Soviet union comes smashing down on China's dreams of Asian domination. Will Cyrus Vance honor the secret agreements, and go to war with the Soviets?

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