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THE SENIOR SEMINAR IN FOREIGN POLICY

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COMMUNIST RESURGENCE IN WEST MALAYSIA:
AN EPISODE IN A CONTINUING SAGA

A CASE STUDY

BY

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PREFACE

Malaysia confronts two active Communist revolutionary movements. This paper deals with only one. It is confined to the Malay peninsula (now called West Malaysia), was formed originally as an anti-Japanese guerrilla movement in World War II, later launched a major insurgency which lasted for twelve years before it was put down, and has reappeared as a growing problem both inside West Malaysia and in a long-established sanctuary in Southern Thailand. The other movement is in Sarawak (part of East Malaysia). It gained its main impetus from the Indonesian Communist Party during the days of Sukarno's confrontasi policy, and is today much more active militarily than the West Malaysia movement.

This study deals only with the former for two reasons. First, the writer's purpose was to make comparisons between experiences of today and those of the 1948-1960 Emergency, which antedated the formation of Malaysia and the incorporation of the Borneo states. Second, it is difficult to gain access to East Malaysia. There is no direct connection between the two movements. However, the much higher tempo of current activity in Sarawak inevitably draws off resources and attention which would otherwise be focused on West Malaysia. Perhaps this is offset by the on-the-job training which Malaysian security forces are receiving in Sarawak.

Officials of the Thai, Malaysian, British and U.S. governments were consulted in the course of this study. Numerous private individuals were also interviewed. However, the opinions expressed herein are strictly those of the writer except where otherwise indicated.

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THE BACKGROUND AND THE SETTING

The Malay peninsula jangle from mainland Southeast Asia like a bony finger scratching the back of the tiny island of Singapore. The peninsula's shape, its topography, and its strategic location have had a profound effect on its development. Malay states, lying astride east-west trade routes, historically dominated trade during periods of power, and served as lucrative entrepôts even when they were weak. Cross-currents of trade also brought outside cultural influences. Indian traders began establishing city-states on the peninsula in the first centuries A. D., bringing with them Hinduism, Buddhism, and eventually Islam.

Transportation among Malay states was always difficult except by sea and to a very limited extent by rivers into the interior. The spine of the peninsula consists of rugged mountains and some of the most impenetrable jungle in the world. Rugged terrain caused the development of small rather than large states. Various empires waxed and waned through the centuries, depending on the strength of individual leaders, but the states retained their identity, paying tribute to the powerful. Islam had not yet fully penetrated at the time of the first Portuguese contacts with Malacca. However, once a ruler became a convert to Islam his subjects quickly followed suit, since the Indians had taught the Malays to consider their temporal rulers as their spiritual leaders.

Historically the business of Malay ports had been conducted by resident aliens (Chinese, Indians, Arabs, etc.) who, in effect, paid taxes to the local rulers. European penetration of the area began with a desire for trade, and expanded because of a determination to control trade and the shipping lanes on which it moved. First came the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and then the British, setting up trading posts which soon became forts.

The British East India Company moved slowly and timorously into the Malay states; its major investments were in India. However, it eventually supplanted the Portuguese and the Dutch. The British gained control of the Straits of Malacca with fortified trading posts which became the "Straits Settlements". By 1867 the Straits Settlements had become a crown colony and not merely an appendage of the Indian empire, but the Malay states remained untouched.

It was the discovery in the middle of the nineteenth century of large tin deposits in the western sultanates of the peninsula which deepened British involvement. Malay sultans and chieftains invited Chinese entrepreneurs to come in and exploit their tin deposits. The Chinese imported indentured labor from China, since the Malays were little inclined toward hard labor. In the "gold rush" atmosphere which soon developed, disputes arose over mining concessions and taxes, and clan wars broke out among the Chinese, giving the British an excuse to step in "to rescue, if possible, these fertile and productive countries from the ruin which must befall them if the present disorders continue unchecked." In treaties (beginning in 1874) with various sultans the British guaranteed protection in return for the placement in each court of a British "resident" whose "advice" had to be followed except in matters of Malay religion and custom. Sultans and other aristocrats were kept happy with substantial stipends, the British reaped handsome profits, and the groundwork was laid for what later became the Federated Malay States, still later the independent Federation of Malaya (1957), and ultimately Malaysia (1963), which still retains a federated form of government.

The British also continued (until the Depression of the 1930s) the practice of importing alien labor, Chinese for the tin mines and other enterprises, and, beginning with the rubber boom of the early years of this century, Tamils of southern India to work as rubber tappers on the giant rubber estates. Thus the Malays became a minority in their own land.

According to the 1970 population census, Malays constitute 46.8 percent of Malaysia's 10.5 million people, Chinese make up 34.1 percent, and Indians, Pakistanis and various non-Muslim indigenous peoples account for the remainder. So concerned are the leaders of Malaysia's Malay-dominated government about their minority status that the report on the 1970 census was suppressed until April 1972.

Racial conflict lies at the bottom of almost all of Malaysia's internal problems. It was because of Malay fears of being out-numbered by the Chinese that the British agreed to include the crown colonies of Sarawak and Sabah along with the overwhelmingly Chinese state of Singapore in order to form Malaysia in 1963. And it was a continuation of fundamental racial problems which led to Singapore's secession in 1965. Racial hatred in Malaysia erupted into bloody rioting on May 13, 1969. Official government reports listed almost 200 killed.

The government and civil service of Malaysia are predominantly Malay, as are the armed forces and police. The economy, however, is primarily in the hands of foreign interests (principally rubber and tin) and secondarily in the hands of Chinese (trade and commerce, some industry, and smaller holdings in rubber and tin). Most Malays are still subsistence farmers. The Malay-dominated government is determined to rectify the economic imbalance. Its Second Malaysia Plan, which went into effect only a few months ago, is specifically designed "to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function." ^{1/} Even if the Plan were implemented in a more objective manner than might be expected of a Malay-controlled bureaucracy, it would sow the seeds of further racial tension, for governmental efforts to improve the economic lot of Malays would inevitably be viewed by some non-Malays as a threat to their economic status.

The only significant power retained by the states under the federal system derives from their responsibility for land questions. State authorities naturally feel that every acre of land relinquished means a diminution of state power. Malaysia's land codes and tenure systems are exceedingly complicated, but the essence of their meaning is that land is the property of the state, which can grant usufruct (which sometimes has evolved into grants in perpetuity to Malays), but cannot grant freehold. However, among the many special privileges enjoyed by Malays under the constitution is the designation by state law of large areas of land exclusively for Malays. Therefore, it has been virtually impossible for the average non-Malay to own land, and in practice it has been difficult for a non-Malay to obtain a lease. Indeed, the non-Malay encounters obstructions and bureaucratic delays in trying to get a mere Temporary Occupation Licence (TOL) valid for one year.

The very real and understandable Malay fear of an alien takeover found expression in attempts to place restrictions on citizenship at each stage of their political evolution. For example, Malays objected violently to Britain's attempt to establish a national rather than a state citizenship as one of the provisions of the abortive "Malayan Union" in 1946, since this would have granted citizenship to virtually all residents, including those in the crown colonies of Malacca and Penang who were British subjects but mostly Chinese. The citizenship controversy

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continued during discussions leading to the founding of the Federation of Malaya on February 1, 1948. Describing this, historian Henry Miller states, "Citizenship -- and Malay privileges -- became the whetstone on which the Chinese particularly were to grind their racial dissatisfactions for some years to come." 2/ Under the 1957 constitution various categories were established for acquisition of citizenship, most of them designed to place restrictive qualifications on non-Malays. However, the constitution stipulated that citizenship would be granted to all persons born after independence. Therefore, in a few short years the ranks of Chinese and other non-Malay voters will be swelled by an entire new generation which has citizenship by right of birth. Malays are aware of this and apprehensive. This is one of the many reasons for the government's push for economic advancement of the Malays under its current five year plan.

Religion is an even more divisive force than race. Islam is the state religion (except in the Borneo states which became a part of Malaysia with a number of special arrangements for their largely non-Muslim population).

"The Islamic laws of Malaysia discourage wedlock with non-Muslims and still stipulate that the infidel bridegroom or bride must first embrace the faith. Intermarriage between Malays and pork-eating Chinese has therefore been relatively rare, and these two strong, mutually suspicious racial groups which dominate the Malay peninsula cannot blend into a harmonious community. Islam lies between them like a sword." 3/

THE EMERGENCY - 1948 - 1960

In 1948 Communist revolutionary warfare erupted in Malaya. The stage had been set for violence by post-war actions of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and by the British colonial administration's reactions. The CPM, given legal recognition following World War II at the insistence of the British Labour government, attempted a heavy-handed takeover of the labor movement and embarked on a campaign of strikes, subversion, terrorism and sabotage which provoked such a strong governmental reaction that the CPM was faced with two alternatives: knuckle under, or go underground.

The CPM had the strength, the weapons and, most important, the organization needed to launch guerrilla warfare. The Party had been in existence since 1930, and had a highly developed cell structure and a large and disciplined membership -- almost entirely Chinese. In Malaya as in so many countries the Communists had been the first to form a guerrilla organization during World War II; they had organizational genius and iron discipline. In Malaya they had the added advantage of the anti-Japanese fervor of Malayan Chinese who resented Japan's inroads in China, which most still considered as their homeland.

Christening themselves the Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army, they built a large force in the jungles of Malaya, trained their troops well, and indoctrinated them constantly with heavy doses of Communist propaganda, while contriving somehow to initiate remarkably little contact with the Japanese Army. They obviously had their eyes on the future. Circumstances gave the CPM another boost. The British, having maintained tenuous contact with the MPAJA through a few stay-behind officers, 4/ began in early 1945 airdrops of huge quantities of weapons, ammunition, medicines and other supplies in preparation for liberation of the peninsula from the Japanese. The war was over before the British could send in any troops other than the handful of liaison and communications

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personnel who had been airdropped with the supplies or inserted by submarine. 5/ And, because of a series of blunders too complicated to detail here, the British were painfully slow in returning with even the minimum personnel necessary to restore a semblance of governmental administration. The delay not only left Japanese troops wandering around in confusion for weeks, it also gave the MPAJA more than ample time to execute many of its enemies, propagandize, conduct "peoples' courts" for trial of alleged collaborators, disarm police and, above all, to bury weapons and supplies for future use.

Following the war the MPAJA basked in the warm glow of public adulation as heroes of the resistance. They objected to the colonial government's call to disarm, but gave in when it became clear that the CPM was to gain recognition as a legal political party. Guerrillas turned in weapons (in return for government bonuses), but it was clear that many weapons were unaccounted for.

The "legal struggle" was launched. Concentrating on the labor movement, the CPM fomented a wave of strikes, terrorism and other disorders. In time the Party founded a Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions and began forcing its chosen CPM men into key offices in all unions, despite the fact that few of them were practitioners of the trades they supposedly represented. Although the CPM had the advantage of the naively benign attitude of the British Labour government toward any but the most extreme trade union activities, it nevertheless pushed too far too fast. Extremism provoked an amendment to the Malayan Trade Union Ordinance, disqualifying from union office any office-holder who had not had at least three years actual employment in the trade represented by his union. The amendment also disqualified any office-holder who had been convicted of a serious crime. This broke the back of CPM control of the unions. The only alternative to conceding defeat was to go underground, which the CPM did, setting in motion twelve years of bloody revolutionary war.

On July 12, 1948 the Government of the Federation of Malaya declared a State of Emergency. The CPM was banned, but almost all its members had already returned to the jungle under the leadership of a young Chinese named Chin Peng. Chin Peng had been one of the chief guerrilla leaders during the war, and was now Secretary General of the CPM. The Communist Terrorist Organization (CTO), numbered only about 5,000 at the outset, but it came frighteningly close to succeeding. Twelve years of war cost 11,000 lives and almost US \$800 million, involved 41 British battalions, tens of thousands of police and, at one point, 350,000 Home Guards. The Emergency was declared at an end on July 31, 1960, by which time the CTs had been reduced to less than 500, almost all of whom had taken refuge in the jungles of southern Thailand.

What were the reasons for the British/Malayan success? The reasons were many, but most of them are implicit in the designation of a "state of emergency". Some writers such as Noel Barber 6/ ridicule this, saying that it was of course a war but was called an Emergency only because powerful interests in Britain prevailed upon the government to avoid calling it such in order to hold down insurance rates on tin mines, rubber estates, etc. However, the essential difference is that between civil power and military power, civil law and martial law. In a state of emergency the rule of law prevails. Barber himself concedes that "...what was needed /in Malaya/ was armed support for a political war, not political support for an army war." 7/ In short, the revolutions was quelled by the police power of the state applied in strict accordance with law.

The situation could hardly have been worse for the British colonial government when the Emergency began. The colonial economy had not yet recovered from wartime dislocation and neglect. Britain herself was in serious economic straits. The police were tainted with wartime collaboration, and were corrupt and demoralized. Furthermore, they were much under strength. Racial tensions were high; Chinese distrusted Malays because Malays had generally not resisted the Japanese invaders, and Malays distrusted Chinese because they identified them with the Communists, almost all of whom were Chinese. The CTs were already in de facto control of much of the countryside and apparently expecting a quick victory. "Captured documents showed later that the CPM leaders hoped to declare a Communist Republic of Malaya on August 3, 1948." 8/

The most serious problem aside from the armed insurgents themselves was the Chinese squatters. Human jetsam cast adrift by depression and war, half a million Chinese lived on the fringes of Malaya's jungles illegally cultivating small plots of rice, vegetables and tapioca. The squatters were the water in which the guerrilla fish swam. Although the CTs got considerable support, particularly in the early days, from wealthy urban Chinese, sometimes voluntarily but often through extortion, the principal base of the Min Yuen, or "People's Movement", was the squatters. They provided food, supplies and intelligence. The squatters were also the main source of recruits. The CTs were led by a small group of educated urban ideologues, but the rank and file were Chinese peasants.

This was the setting in which the Emergency began. The country was in the grip of fear as a consequence of repeated acts of terror and brutal assassination. The CTs roamed at will in many parts of Malaya. Seeking to paralyze the already disrupted economy, they were nightly attacking mines and estates, often with forces of company size or larger.

The British reaction was measured, patient and thorough. They initially underestimated the threat. They made many mistakes. Economic necessity, however, dictated that costs be minimized and that the insurgency be paid for if possible from current revenues. From this evolved a low-cost, long-haul strategy that proved to be effective and appropriate to the circumstances. Harry Miller describes the strategy of General Harold Briggs as meaning, in essence, "Protect the populated areas, cut the enemy lines of communication, prevent food and other supplies getting to him and force him out to battle." 9/ Underlying this strategy were several fundamental principles, chief among which were: the political subversion must be defeated before the guerrillas can be beaten; and the rule of law must prevail. 10/ Putting these principles into practice meant that civil authority had to remain paramount and that the primary action arm had to be the police, with the army used as a striking force but not in any enforcing role.

Meticulously detailed Emergency Regulations were enacted by the Federal Legislative Council. "The detail they cover may seem surprising, but in fighting an insurgency of this kind, it is vital that every action by government officials, policemen and soldiers be strictly within the law. The law can be as tough as is needed, provided that it is properly enacted and that officials are manifestly subject to it themselves." 11/ The regulations were extremely harsh, including such Draconian measures as protective detention up to two years without trial and death penalties for unauthorized carrying of arms or consorting with armed terrorists. The government was given power to resettle squatters, to create prohibited areas where violators could be shot on sight, to impose curfews, to restrict residence, to control the conditions of sale and transport of food, to search, seize or arrest without a warrant, and to register all

persons over the age of twelve and require them to carry identification cards. The government was also empowered to banish aliens. Harsh as these regulations were, they were not often harshly applied. The courts still retained their powers. All of the aforementioned offenses were subject to trial except protective detention. It was usually necessary to conduct trials in camera for the protection of witnesses, but due process continued. Even cases of detention were subject to rigorous periodic review.

"A notable feature of the U.K./GOM counterinsurgency effort was the primary role assigned from the outset to the police. Their importance was stressed by both Briggs and Templer, the two senior military officers who were the chief architects of this effort. In fact, the police and the paramilitary forces under their aegis fielded far more men and had a far larger hand than the military in providing local security, thus helping to free the troops for the offensive role (in which the police participated). The police also played a key role in enforcing the rule of law so essential to separating the insurgents from the people. Policemen suffered far more total casualties (2,947) than did soldiers (1,478) during the Emergency; of the regular police alone, almost as many were killed (511) as military men (519)." 12/

To equip the police for their major role in the Emergency it was necessary to reorganize and enlarge the force. The coincidental dissolution of the Palestine Police Force provided many new officers. Particular attention was given to a buildup of Special Branch for production of intelligence. Special Branch and the police in general were critically short of Chinese and Chinese-speaking personnel. Chinese-speaking British civil servants who had been retired when the old "Chinese Protectorate" was dissolved at the time of the formation of the ill-fated Malayan Union were sought and brought back when feasible. Ethnic Chinese were recruited and trained.

More than half a million people were relocated and placed in approximately 500 New Villages. The overwhelming majority of those resettled were Chinese squatters. The usual method was to surround a squatter settlement in darkness, swoop in at first light, and require all residents to pack their belongings and move by truck to an already-prepared New Village. Squatters were compensated for anything which could not be moved, such as growing crops. In the New Village each family was provided one sixth of an acre for a house and a garden plot; another plot was provided outside the village for cultivation. The New Village was protected with barbed wire, pillboxes, floodlights and watchtowers as appropriate to the location and the security in the area. Most had electric lights, running water and other amenities not available in squatter areas. Rigid population and resources control were instituted to deny recruits, intelligence and food to the CTs. No food could be carried out of the village. In extreme cases all cooking was done in communal kitchens, and only cooked (and thus highly perishable) food could be carried home to be eaten. Village shopkeepers were required to record every sale, and at times they were forced to open all canned goods at time of sale. Initial resentment of those resettled usually gave way in a short while as villagers realized that harsh measures were just as unpalatable to the government as to them and were relaxed when cooperation of the villagers and improvement in security permitted. Furthermore, most villagers found themselves soon enjoying a higher living standard than they had before.

Workers in mines and rubber estates were given protection and divorced from contact with the CTs, the "people on the inside". Worker habitations were regrouped as necessary, and barbed wire and other security measures used. Many mines and estates had hired and armed security guards during the first wave of terrorist attacks. Such guards were later incorporated into the police as "special constables", their numbers were increased and their functions expanded.

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Various types of village guards and militia were formed in the early days. The government shrewdly fostered this development and gradually formalized the force as the Home Guard. In time even Chinese in the New Villages were brought into the program, trained and armed to help in protecting the New Villages. This not only relieved other security forces of static defense duties, but gained the commitment of many of the Chinese to the government. By the end of 1955 Home Guard members had become fully responsible for defense of more than 40 percent of the New Villages.

After early mistakes demonstrated the need, a unified command was formed, completely integrating the army, police and civil administration. A Federal War Council was formed, and War Executive Committees were set up at state and district levels.

The British broadened the base of the Malayan Government and proceeded with plans for Malaya's independence, thus depriving the communists of a target for anti-colonialist propaganda.

As the various Emergency programs were put into effect (and the process is smoother in the telling than in the doing), the government secured its own base areas, cut the enemy's lines of communication, literally starved the enemy by cutting him off from contact with the people, forced the enemy to break up into ever smaller units in a desperate effort to escape detection and live off the land, and pursued him relentlessly with a combination of bullets, propaganda and tantalizing offers of amnesty and rewards. By the middle of 1954 the back of the resistance was broken. Painstaking mopping up continued for several more years. When the Emergency was officially ended in 1960 not more than a score of the terrorists remained on Malaysian soil.

The hard core of the Communist Party of Malaysia never surrendered. As late as the mid-1960s Brig. Clutterbuck wrote, "The true communist, the true believer, should never be underestimated or despised." He added, "Chin Peng is such a man, and so no doubt are some of his diehards on the Thai border. Militarily, they are unlikely to be destroyed; nor, now, are they likely to surrender." 13/

Summing it up, Noel Barber wrote, "It was a major defeat for Communism; but it was an episode in a continuing saga, whose next installment may yet be to come..." 14/

THE RESURGENCE

Communist activity remained at a low ebb in West Malaysia for several years. The CTs were licking their wounds in the Thai sanctuary and trying to reorganize and rebuild their military forces. The open and legal struggle was resumed with united front activity, particularly through the Labour Party of Malaya and the Partai Rakyat Malaya, later known as the Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaya. But by late 1967 cadre began to move underground in preparation for resumption of the armed struggle. As open activity was phased out underground organizations took shape, principally the Malayan National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Malayan Communist Youth League (MCYL). Estimates of MCYL strength vary, the highest official figure being 3,000. Gerald de Cruz, Singapore journalist and one-time official of the CPM, feels that actual MCYL strength is much larger and is hard to estimate because most of the youth who have been trained and indoctrinated have been sent home to await orders. 15/

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The entire process of moving from illegal to legal struggle and back has a familiar ring, and not surprisingly so, since the GPM has made these moves several times. Indeed, the reports of recruitment, training and indoctrination of youth which have been published in recent GOM White Papers seem almost like verbatim quotations from Spencer Chapman's accounts of such activities when he was serving with Chin Peng's MPAJA guerrillas in 1943! 16/

Some observers feel that the resumption of the armed struggle was launched with a CPM statement of June 1, 1948. This statement, later publicized by Radio Peking and the Peking People's Daily, was to mark the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the "Anti-British Liberation War" and called upon "Malayan people of all nationalities" to "intensify our struggle in various fields especially the Armed Struggle; launch a sustained and vigorous offensive against the enemy ..." Whatever directives may have called for the resurgence, it got a big boost from the bloody race riots of May 13, 1969. The riots were followed by a spate of terrorist incidents -- murders, ambushes, road mining, sabotage -- apparently staged at least in part to maintain the credibility of the threat to stage an armed return to Malaysian soil.

The brief period of violence was succeeded by a period of studied avoidance of contact with Malaysian security forces. The CTs apparently did not want to attract continuing attention to a significant resumption of infiltration. Since the end of 1969 the emphasis has been on infiltration, renewal of old contacts in the New Villages and the making of new contacts, recruitment, training and a buildup of supply caches. Most contact between CTs and government security forces within the past two years appear to have been initiated by the government forces, either intentionally or by accident during jungle patrols. Some incidents which have been clearly initiated by CTs are believed to have been staged for the purpose of drawing attention and troops away from areas of planned clandestine operations.

It is estimated that not more than 200 CTs are currently in Malaysian territory at any given time. They are using more than a dozen locations, principally in Perak and Kedah states. A few camps are in Kelantan. Most of these sites are quite close to the Thai border, but some in Perak are as deep as 60 miles inside Malaysia. The major force remains on the Thai side of the border.

The CPM has been slavishly Maoist ever since the Communist takeover of China. Yet, China has apparently not given the CPM any material support. Propaganda support has been heavy; the clandestine Radio Suara Revolusi Malaya has operated from south China since 1969, and now broadcasts four times daily in Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Material help could be supplied quickly and with relative ease, however. In one night small boats could put ashore in southern Thailand enough modern weapons and ammunition to spark a major flareup of terrorism in West Malaysia.

THE THAILAND SANCTUARY AND THAI ATTITUDES

Southern Thailand has never in modern times been governed with a strong hand by a central authority. It has been a center of unrest ranging from secessionism to plain, ordinary garden-variety banditry for many years. The Communist Party of Malaysia has found sanctuary there whenever it desired since World War II.

The Thai kingdom's expansion down into the peninsula occurred in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Boundaries of the various Malay sultanates of the south remained fairly constant, but the extent of Thai control shifted back and forth depending on the power and inclinations

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of successive Thai kings. It was not until the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 that Thailand relinquished to Britain "suzerainty, protection, administration and control" over the Malay states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Trengganu, which comprise approximately one fourth of what is now West Malaysia. When the border was redrawn Thailand regained control of four other Malay states, and the Thai Muslims have been a problem ever since.

The Thai Government must now contend with three separate insurgent movements in peninsular Thailand.

The guerrillas of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) operated chiefly in the mountains of Nakon Si Thammarat and are found as far north as Surat Thani and as far south as Satun and northern Songkhla Province. This group seems to have developed gradually on its own and has only within the past few years made contact with CPT groups in north and northeast Thailand.

Ethnic Malays -- Thai Muslims -- are in open rebellion in Pattani and Narathiwat Provinces, advocating not affiliation with Malaysia but establishment of an independent republic.

Malaysia's CTs control two districts of Yala Province, including the salient which juts deep into Malaysia, and the Thai do not seriously contest CT control of the border areas of Songkhla and Narathiwat Provinces. The CTs retain a regimental organization structure and regimental unit designations although no unit is of regimental strength. The 8th Regiment is in southern Songkhla Province, the 12th in Yala Province, and the 10th in Narathiwat Province. The 12th Regiment is the largest; estimates of its strength range as high as 800. The 8th Regiment is the smallest. The 10th Regiment has long been advertised as a predominantly Malay unit, but recent evidence indicates increasing numbers of Chinese in it. Estimates of total strength vary widely, but those considered most reliable run between 1,500 and 2,000. The mode of operation is typical of Communists in sanctuary; they "tax" the people and recruit from among them. Many Thai officials at province and district level follow a live-and-let-live policy; the writer traveled through areas which national-level officials frankly acknowledge to be under Malaysian CT control and found routine Thai government services such as transport, posts and telecommunications, schools and even police functioning in an apparently normal manner.

Discussion with Thai officials in Bangkok revealed that they are unanimous in viewing their own Thai Communist insurgency as their most serious problem in the south. Most consider the separatists as the next, and Malaysia's CTs as the least serious.

None of Thailand's widespread internal security problems is getting the attention it deserves. Corruption is rampant. While high-ranking officials are running guns to Burmese rebels and smuggling opium, a regional Asian newspaper publishes an article with the headline: "Easy-going Thais Not Worried About Insurgency." 17/ A sweeping generalization, but basically true.

Under a Thailand/Malaysia "Joint Border Agreement" of March 1970 a Regional Border Committee Office was created to handle border matters. Indicating Thai attitudes toward Malaysian CTs, the Thai element of RBCO functions under Thailand's Department of Central Intelligence, an organization with only foreign functions. In effect, the CTs are viewed as an external menace even though they are within Thailand's borders. Under RBCO coordination joint Thai/Malaysian police operations are supposed to be conducted in border areas. In practice, such combined operations seldom occur and accomplish little when they do.

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Thai officials view the Malaysians with such suspicion and distrust as to obviate any genuine cooperation in border matters. Provincial and district level officials in border provinces are convinced that the Government of Malaysia is aiding and abetting the separatist movement. There is no evidence whatsoever to substantiate charges of official Malaysian complicity in separatist activity, but the Thai are nevertheless convinced that it is true.

One experienced American official even went so far as to say, "The Thai look upon the Malaysian CTs [in sanctuary in Thailand] as hostages for the good behavior of the Malaysians toward the separatists."

THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAYSIA REACTS TO THE RESURGENCE

The Malaysians never dropped their guard. When the Emergency Regulations were rescinded in 1960 they were promptly replaced with Act of Parliament No. 18 of 1960, The Internal Security Act, giving the government more than ample powers to deal with future threats to security. The act was amended in 1971 and softened somewhat in response to complaints about its severity. Through the years the government has kept its people well informed of Communist machinations by means of regular press publicity and the issuance of a series of White Papers which have explained the situation in detail.

The Malaysians have also maintained a fairly high level of competence to deal with insurgency, although some weaknesses exist. The civil service and the security forces remained quite stable following independence in 1957. Quality was unimpaired; in fact, the government still retained many Britons in key positions. As more Malaysians rose to replace the expatriates, the latter were gradually phased out. Some deterioration ensued. The armed forces and police, including the Police Field Force (a paramilitary organization born during the Emergency) maintained high standards of leadership at the top, but weaknesses appeared at middle and junior levels. Special Branch, an elite organization which played the key intelligence role in the Emergency, developed deficiencies, especially in racial balance, i.e., the Malays got the promotions and the Chinese stagnated or left the service. The government is aware of weaknesses in leadership and training and is working to improve them. However, it is difficult to find more than token improvement in racial balance, even in Special Branch where a full complement of Chinese personnel could be vital if insurgency increased significantly.

One serious deficiency which appeared after independence was in the administration of the New Villages which had been created by forced relocation of Chinese squatters during the Emergency. A huge resettlement administration had been created at the time the squatters were resettled; each New Village had a resident Resettlement Officer or, more often, an Assistant Resettlement Officer, and the apparatus extended up the line to district, state and national levels. The resettlement administration had already passed its peak before independence, consequent to improved security and increased self-sufficiency of some of the New Villages. After independence, however, with a Malay-dominated government making policy decisions, the administration was dismantled too rapidly. To be sure, many New Villages no longer needed government help. Some had grown into towns. Those located near centers of urban employment became suburbs. Others were not so fortunate. Located in rather remote rural areas or in economically depressed regions, they languished in neglect. By 1965 there was not a single full-time government officer left in any New Village.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

Why was the resettlement administration dismantled so rapidly? As with so many aspects of Malaysian life, there was a racial element in this. Most resettlement personnel posted in New Villages were Chinese, (initially most were expatriates, but they had been phased out). Almost all New Villagers were Chinese. It would be incorrect, however, to brand the reduction in government assistance to New Villages as purely an act of racial discrimination; it was an instance of action affected by racial stereotypes. In the mind of the Malay the Chinese is visualized as urban and relatively well off. And no matter what statistics to the contrary may be placed before the average Malay bureaucrat, he simply cannot conjure up a mental image of a Chinese who is rural and poor.

A number of the New Villages which have suffered most from governmental neglect are in areas which were long dominated by CTs during the Emergency. Once models of neatness and efficiency, they are now dirty and disorganized. Villages which once had electric power now have broken and rusted generators and no fuel. Sanitation is bad and disease is common. Past attempts to form responsible village councils ended in failure. Few young men are to be found. Some might have gone off to join the CTs, but most have left home to look for work. Villagers do not know where to turn for help: almost all District Officers in West Malaysia are Malays.

Villages such as those described above are once again being exploited by CTs. The GOM White Paper of October 1, 1971 acknowledges that "Their intention is to penetrate into areas that were CTO strongholds during the first Emergency," and states that "CTs' relatives and personal contacts are being exploited ...," 18/ but never addresses itself directly to the reasons why the penetrated areas are so exploitable.

In mid-1971 Malaysian security forces stumbled upon a CT jungle camp within a few miles of Ipoh, a large tin mining and commercial center approximately 60 miles from the Thai border. Several of the neglected New Villages were near the camp, and it is almost inconceivable that some of the villagers, who cultivate illegal plots in the jungle fringes did not know of the presence of the CTs, if indeed they were not supporting them. The government over-reacted. Back went the barbed wire around the villages. Curfews were imposed. Questionnaires were passed out with orders for the villagers to provide information about the CTs. "Reflecting pique at the paucity of response from the villagers, the Prime Minister, during a visit to Tanah Hitam New Village on October 23, in angry tones, gave the villagers an ultimatum to change their attitude and cooperate with the Government or else." 19/ A dozen years of neglect, and then an ultimatum!

The government has recently begun to respond to complaints by Chinese politicians about neglect of New Villages. Effective January 1, 1972 the Prime Minister appointed a well-known and respected young Chinese doctor as Minister With Special Functions (For New Village Affairs). The doctor, one of the "young Turks" of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Chinese element of the coalition which makes up the ruling party, is attracting considerable attention, and some action has resulted. For example, Chinese-speaking civil servants have been put back in some of the villages. To date, however, this is only a secondment of personnel from various state governments and not a permanent arrangement.

Unsolved is the problem of land for the Chinese rural poor. A New Villager who cannot legally get land to farm goes into the jungle, clears a plot of land and cultivates it illegally. If district officials find out about it they may destroy his crops and any temporary structures he may have built.

While the writer was in Kuala Lumpur the Straits Times reported an appeal by the chairman of the Sungei Siput branch of the MCA for the government to "consider the humanitarian and economic aspects when dealing with illegal cultivators." The article quotes the chairman, Dr. Kok Chee Min, as saying that recent destruction of illegally grown crops and temporary buildings in the area had been carried out by the district office "because the people in the area did not have Temporary Occupation Licences (TOL)..." The article continued, "Pointing out that he did not condone illegal cultivation, Dr. Kok said that in this case, the people had applied for TOLs about a year ago but had received no reply so far." Dr. Kok's statement concluded with a charge that some of the files, with their applications, had been lost. "Why does it take such a long time to make a decision, he asked." 20/ It seems hardly necessary to add that the area where the crops were destroyed, Sungei Siput, was an area of considerable CT operations during the Emergency and one of the areas recently re-entered. And it seems almost superfluous to add that any illegal cultivator who escapes government detection is a prime candidate for communist blackmail.

Militarily, the GOM has reacted well to the resurgence of CT operations in West Malaysia. On the whole there have been too many large sweep actions involving too many army troops and not enough police, but there has been enough "jungle bashing" to keep some of the CTs off balance.

The prospect of effective Thai/Malaysian joint operations in border regions is just as bleak from the Malaysian side as from the Thai side. The Malaysians look down on the Thais and do not respect their fighting ability. And, while no Malaysian official advocates support for Thai Muslim separatists, many nevertheless feel sympathy for their brethren across the border and believe that the Thai Buddhists are not treating them fairly.

THE FUTURE?

Could it happen all over again? Could the CTs once again become a major threat? Most qualified observers, whether American, British or Malaysian, think not. However, every one qualifies his response by adding, "Provided there is no repetition of the race riots of May 13, 1969," or words to that effect. The riots left deep scars. In conversation one repeatedly hears references to the date without mention of the year -- "the 13th May affair", or "the May 13th thing".

Will the CTs try to do it all over again? Most experts think so, and most predict that it will come in about eighteen months to two years from now. They explain the many differences between today's conditions and those of a quarter of a century ago: fewer CTs today, few left with combat experience who are still young enough to fight, lack of the rich weapons caches they had before, Malaysia's healthy and expanding economy, etc.

If the CTs launch another campaign of violence requiring strong counterinsurgency responses, can the GOM apply effectively the same sort of stringent regulations as the British instituted in 1948? Most observers seem convinced they can. However, some of the certitude begins to dissolve when probing questions are asked about the extent to which Malaysians have absorbed British concepts of impartial administration and fair-minded justice, or when one points out the fundamental difference between the vulnerability to public opinion of a colonial administration on the one hand and an elected parliamentary democracy on the other.

Victor Purcell, writing an apologia for the Malayan Civil Service of colonial days, said, "With no political parties to defer to, the Malayan [British] civil servant had only his conscience and sense of fitness to guide him in the performance of his duties." 21/ This was certainly true. The

British colonial civil servant was not swayed by political pressures from above, and he treated those whom he administered with even-handed fairness, whatever their ethnic or religious background. The situation of today's Malaysian administrator is quite different.

What of the future of race relations in Malaysia? Most government officials, American, Malaysian and British, expressed optimism, an optimism which the writer regrets he cannot share.

Sincere Malaysians are working hard to increase the integration of their society. Their efforts have borne fruit. One seen encouraging instances of Malays and non-Malays, particularly the young, working together in harmony. Unhappily, this progress itself bears the seeds of potential future conflict. The situation is somewhat analogous to the civil rights revolution of recent years in the U.S. where we have seen that one who has been denied equality of opportunity needs to get only a taste of it to develop an enormous appetite for all of it -- NOW!

Malaysians have papered over racial divisions for a long time. Their ruling Alliance Party is itself a classic example of papered-over differences. But the deep divisions and animosities are still there. And they may become more accentuated politically as the older political generation passes from the scene. Many of those still in power are British-educated and western-oriented, sharing common experiences and similar views regardless of racial background. The real struggle for national leadership will occur soon. The Communists are trying to hasten the beginning of the struggle, a struggle which they hope to win.

If another violent racial quarrel occurs it will benefit the Communists. If, on the other hand, the Communists succeed in stirring up trouble again, without the impetus of racial violence, the Communist resurgence will itself heighten racial antagonisms; despite constant and assiduous efforts to broaden the base, the CPM remains essentially a Chinese organization. And if stern restrictions are once again imposed on the rural Chinese, all Chinese will resent what Han Suyin once called "the whole appalling obtuseness of treating half the population of Malaya as dangerous aliens and the other half as pampered puppets." 22/

NOTES

- 1/ Second Malaysia Plan, 1971-1975, Government Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, Foreword, p. v. The plan emphasizes that "Malays now outnumber non-Malays by a factor of nearly 3 to 1 in the Traditional Rural Sector" of the economy. p. 38.
- 2/ Harry Miller, The Story of Malaysia, Faber & Faber, London, 1965, p. 171.
- 3/ Dennis Bloodworth, An Eye For The Dragon, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1970, pp. 179, 180.
- 4/ F. Spencer Chapman, The Jungle Is Neutral, Chatto & Windus, London, 1949.
- 5/ The MPAJA leaders were such masters of obfuscation that no British officer working with them was ever privy to their secrets. No outsider ever had a complete picture of their operations, and no British personnel were able to keep track of the airdropped supplies.
- 6/ Noel Barber, The War of The Running Dogs, Collins, London, 1971.
- 7/ Ibid., p. 62.
- 8/ R. W. Komer, The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect, ARPA Report No. R-957, February 1972, p. 6.
- 9/ Miller, op. cit., p. 177.
- 10/ R. G. K. Thompson, No Exit From Vietnam, David McKay Co., Inc., New York, 1969, p. 163.
- 11/ Brig. R. E. Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War, Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., New York, 1966, p. 37.
- 12/ Komer, op. cit., p. 38.
- 13/ Clutterbuck, op. cit., p. 171.
- 14/ Barber, op. cit., p. 275.
- 15/ Conversation with the writer, Singapore, May 6, 1972.
- 16/ Chapman, op. cit., p. 146.
- 17/ The Asian, Hong Kong, Issue No. 28, 16-22 April 1972.
- 18/ Government of Malaysia White Paper, The Resurgence of Armed Communism in West Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1971.
- 19/ Embassy Kuala Lumpur A-67, April 7, 1972 (LIMITED OFFICIAL USE) This airgram gives a vivid picture of neglect of certain New Villages as seen by a Chinese-speaking FSO. I have drawn on it heavily for description of New Village problems and Malay attitudes.
- 20/ The Straits Times, May 2, 1972.
- 21/ Victor Purcell, The Revolution in Southeast Asia, Thames and Hudson, London, 1962, p. 172.
- 22/ Han Suyin, And The Rain My Drink, Mayflower Edition, London, 1970, p. 188.

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