

Thailand: New Cast, Same Play

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IN THE EARLY HOURS of the morning of September 17, a nervous colonel called at the homes of the U.S. and British ambassadors here to assure them that Thailand's foreign policy would remain unchanged. The assurance was needed. The army, under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, its commander in chief, had just occupied the city and overthrown the pro-West government of Field Marshal Pibul Songgram. And nobody knew just where Marshal Sarit stood in the East-West struggle for the hearts and minds of Asians.

For a long time, although his ninety-thousand-man army was supported by U.S. aid and backed up by the other Southeast Asia Treaty Organization powers, it had appeared that Marshal Sarit was not wholly sympathetic to the West and might even favor neutralism and a greater orientation toward the Communist powers.

But during the long struggle for power in which Sarit had been involved, both the field marshal and his rivals had played politics with leftist leaders who obviously didn't like the United States and its policies, so that it had become extremely difficult to guess exactly where either Sarit or his enemies stood at any given moment. The Left was a weapon—two-edged as it turned out—that all of them had used.

Pibul Upsets the Balance

Field Marshal Sarit is a stocky, blunt man, once well-fleshed but now wasted by a liver ailment. He led a Bangkok regiment that played a strategic part in the *coup d'état* of 1947 that brought back to power Field Marshal Pibul Songgram, who had been prime minister during

the wartime Japanese alliance. Sarit was rewarded by promotion from major to field marshal, and was made commander in chief of the army and minister of defense. He and General Phao Sriyanond divided the military power of the country between them, the latter taking over and building up the thirty-thousand-man police force, which he equipped with armored cars, helicopters, and automatic weapons.

Rivalry between Phao and Sarit goes back to their school days, when Sarit was always top man and Phao always ranked just below him. For years their rivalry was confined to nongovernmental affairs. Both entered business on a large scale, becoming board chairmen of banks, commercial concerns, and factories. Marshal Sarit ran the rich national lottery. They both owned newspapers. And they both saw that their followers were placed in as many positions of influence as possible. In this last, General Phao seemed to excel.

When Marshal Pibul returned from the United States and Europe in the summer of 1955 and introduced *prachathipatai*—his version of democracy—the rivalry came into the open and began to have repercussions throughout the country. Marshal Pibul's problem was to keep the two balanced against each other without letting either get strong enough to take over. The task proved too much even for a master politician like Pibul, and it was a miscalculation on his part that led to his downfall and, according to one of his ministers, created the antagonism Sarit was said to have developed for the United States.

Two years ago, according to the minister, General Phao, with United

States help, tried to oust Sarit from command of the army and take over himself. When Pibul heard of it he moved quickly to prevent the ambitious police general from becoming too big to handle. He stripped him of power in the political and financial fields and left him dependent upon the prime minister for survival. Unfortunately for Pibul, he cut General Phao down too far and upset the balance of power. From that moment onward, for almost two years, the prime minister directed a good deal of his energy toward trying to build Phao back up to a point where he could again provide a counter to the now-ascendant Commander in Chief Sarit.

The Evolution of Resentment

The United States became inextricably involved in the struggle that followed. In the effort to placate the leftist group, whom Sarit's followers appeared to be winning over, even Pibul and Phao seemed willing to bite the hand that was feeding them. As for Sarit, he alone may have had a logical reason for resenting United States influence, despite the fact that his army was dependent for its modernity upon American aid.

It may have been Phao's reported attempt to oust him with American connivance that soured Sarit on the United States. Or it may have been any of a number of other incidents which made it appear that the United States was fated, not without a helping hand from Pibul, always to stand in Sarit's path.

A couple of years ago the field marshal announced that he wanted an army twice its present size. United States aid was, of course, to finance it. But JUSMAG (Joint United States Military Advisory

Group) officials here let it be known that they considered the present army sufficient and the country incapable of supporting a larger one. Sarit grumpily announced, "We will pay for it ourselves," but the army didn't expand.

Late last year, the army fuel-oil department campaigned, mainly through Sarit's two popular newspapers but with the willing help of the predominantly leftist press, for permission to compete with the "imperialist" American and British oil companies on the domestic market. This was followed by a campaign that seemed dear to Sarit's heart, to build a large refinery at Farng, Thailand's only oil field, in order to free his army from dependence upon foreign supplies. When a committee reported that reserves were insufficient to warrant the construction of a large refinery, Sarit's newspapers, with the leftist press joining in, pointed out that the head of the committee was an American and wrote up the whole affair as another attempt to prevent Thailand from freeing itself of its dependence upon American imperialists.

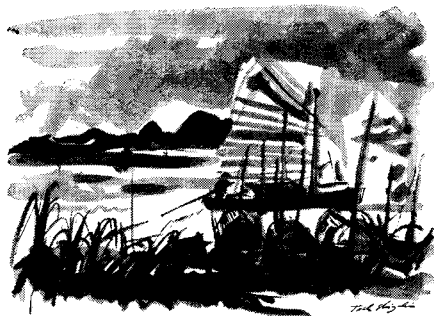
When the government was negotiating with the World Bank, which many Thais think is a purely American institution, for a loan to build a power and irrigation dam at Yanhee on the Ping River, Marshal Sarit put forward a plan for a smaller power project to supply an immediate source of electricity for power-hungry Bangkok. The World Bank said Sarit's dam would cancel the value of the Yanhee project and refused to make a loan for the larger dam if it was carried through. Sarit angrily took up the challenge and said that Thailand would build its own dam with its own money. As head of the lucrative national lottery, he announced a new five-dollar draw, half the price of each ticket to go into prize money and the other half to give the buyer a share in the power company. As dearly as the Thais love lotteries, this one didn't go over, and the project had to be abandoned. The Yanhee dam was decided upon, a World Bank loan was negotiated, and Sarit refunded the lottery money.

Even in the political field the United States seemed always to be in Sarit's way. During his life-and-

death struggle with his old colleague Phao, the American cloak-and-dagger, CIA-sponsored SEA (Southeast Asia) Supply Corporation was furnishing General Phao's armylike border patrol with weapons and his secret police with cash rumored to be used for purely political ends.

IT WOULD be hard to say how much of what appeared in Marshal Sarit's newspapers reflected the army chief's reported resentment against the United States. Even if he was only partially in favor of their editorial policies, he couldn't have had much love for Americans.

His two newspapers, *Sarn Seri* and *Thai Raiwan*, gave banner-headline play to every unfavorable incident involving an American. Dutchmen and Danes and other *farangs* changed their nationalities overnight to suit the paper's policies. The United States was blamed for making Thai soldiers insolent. Even JUSMAG, the main support of Sarit's army, was attacked as an instrument of "dollar imperialism" and its members



were chastised for throwing their weight around and humiliating Thais. USOM (United States Overseas Mission), whose counterpart funds were made to appear a drain on Thailand's resources, was accused of attempting to prevent the country from developing its industry. SEATO was presented as another instrument of American colonialism, draining the wealth of the nation and threatening Thailand's neighbors by giving the United States bases here (although there were no bases).

What troubled western diplomats even more was the newspapers' advocacy of Red China's cause in the United Nations, and their insistence that Thailand should be permitted to trade with Peking (which it already did, except in strategic goods), receive Red Chinese and Soviet

"stringless aid," and join India and Burma in neutral amity with all countries and especially with Red China and Russia.

Sarit's papers were not alone in their affection for the Reds and distaste for Americans. The rest of the press, with very few exceptions, pitched in with enthusiasm.

The campaign, linked as it was with the attempt to oust Pibul and Phao, had its effect in the universities, where strong leftist cells were planted and political action started, and in labor groups. It has left its marks on the general public, too, although the feeling toward individual Americans seems unchanged.

Pote and Peacemaking

For all these reasons, when Field Marshal Sarit's tanks rolled into Bangkok and sent Marshal Pibul fleeing into Cambodia, there was need to send an emissary to the U.S. and British ambassadors to reassure them. And there was need for positive action to give weight to the reassurances. The military junta began dumping its leftist friends and withdrawing its support for leftist ideas almost immediately.

Under the constitution, the national assembly can be dissolved by the king—Sarit had the monarch dissolve it immediately after the coup—but it must be replaced by an election within ninety days. Therefore, the king appointed 123 "second-category" members, as is permitted under the constitution, who promptly chose as prime minister Pote Sarasin, former ambassador to the United States and later secretary general of SEATO. Pote called for elections and promised, during his ninety-day term, to support SEATO, continue American aid, and, in short, follow approximately the same foreign policy as before.

When disappointed reporters, whose papers headlined the policy as "the same old thing," asked Marshal Sarit hopefully for a comment on Pote's policy, the field marshal, now supreme commander of all the armed forces, smiled and said, "The prime minister made a very good statement, didn't he?"

With Sarit's blessing, the new government made its peace with the various organizations maintained in Thailand by the United States. Even

SEA Supply, after some backtracking and rationalization, was kept on, but under the auspices of USOM and, for the moment at least, minus its cloak-and-dagger aspect.

The Yanhee Dam, too, had begun to look like a good thing. After Pote ordered a hearing on its virtues, the government decided to go ahead with the project.

The press, including Marshal Sarit's two newspapers, was not happy at the turn of events. The Americans still took a beating in its columns. However, a recent government statement warned newspapers which it claimed were receiving Communist support that unless they stopped propagating Communist ideas the government would take action under the powers given it by martial law, which has been in force since the coup and will probably remain in force in the capital until the elections of December 15.

Late in October, the government announced through its spokesman General Surachit Charuserani that the Pibul government "had done very little to make the people understand what we take from other countries." He promised that the Pote government "will make the truth known to the people without having to throw dirt on the opposition." He especially referred, he said, to the assistance given Thailand by the United States.

He also promised, as Pote had before him, that the importance of SEATO would be impressed upon the people. Further, the people would have American aid funds explained to them, because the United States had contributed \$347 million against Thailand's \$23 million in counterpart funds. General Surachit said, "We should be sorry that we have made the United States a wrong target of criticism."

ILL AND RESTING at a seaside resort, Marshal Sarit was obviously speaking through his aides. Responsibility had come with power. But along the way ideas had been planted in the minds of a lot of people. Whoever takes over after the December 15 elections will have to cope with the leftist movement, which, during the long fight for power, was encouraged by the very men who now must strive to control it.



Pakistan: A Land In Search of Nationality

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WHEN Ismail Ibrahim Chundrigar took over in mid-October as the new prime minister of Pakistan, he made a point of emphasizing his country's intention to stick by its alliances and to continue its cooperation with the West. This statement was only mildly reassuring to Pakistan's worried western friends, who are not so much concerned over Pakistan's attitude toward East and West as over the Pakistanis' attitude toward Pakistan itself.

A discerning Pakistani once described the problem that his country faced as being the precise opposite of the historic one of the Jews: The Jews regarded themselves as a nation but were deprived of recognition as such because they had no base. The Pakistanis had a base and the world recognized their status as a nation, but the Pakistanis themselves were loath to accept it.

This rejection of the fundamental premises of nationality is much more than an attitude to be found in the bazaars and over the countryside; it is also evident in places of high authority. It was, indeed, a major factor in the events surrounding the ouster of the preceding prime

minister, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy. Suhrawardy, who had seemed on the verge of exercising effective national leadership, was removed by men who were themselves unable to exercise such leadership but were nonetheless determined that no one else should.

As a result, Pakistan today looks less and less like a going concern politically, and therefore is becoming an increasingly unstable partner of the West. The conditions underlying this situation go back to Pakistan's provincial rivalries and divisions, to its negative political combinations and party deals, and to the new constitution of the country itself.

THE TWENTY-MONTH-OLD constitution set up a federal structure of government, with powers distributed among a central capital at Karachi and two provincial capitals—at Lahore, in West Pakistan, and Dacca, a thousand miles away in East Pakistan. The form is parliamentary. At the center, formal executive power is vested in a president. In general, he is supposed to function as ceremonial chief of