

Sino-Thai Military Relations

~~(S)~~ Since early 1987, military relations between Beijing and Bangkok have taken on a new dimension which transcends support of the Cambodian resistance. China now serves as a major supplier of military end items and ammunition for the Royal Thai Armed Forces. This represents a reversal of Bangkok's policy of importing arms only from Western-oriented, non-Communist countries, primarily the United States. (See Attachment).

~~(S/NF/NC)~~ Military cooperation between Bangkok and Beijing in areas other than weapons sales continues to grow.

- o ~~(S/NF/NC)~~ From 29 January to 2 February 1988 China and Thailand conducted their first formal military intelligence exchange.
- o ~~(S/NF/NC)~~ Beijing and Bangkok are currently involved in working out the details for a joint war reserve stockpile of Chinese spare parts and ammunition on Thai soil. Both of the above initiatives mirror programs between the United States and Thailand.

~~(S/NF/WH/NC)~~ Thailand's motives for pursuing a security relationship with China are twofold. At a time of decreasing US security assistance and Thai fiscal constraints, Bangkok found China's offer of weapons at cut-rate "friendship prices" attractive. Thailand's military relationship with China also sends a clear message to Hanoi that Bangkok and Beijing are resolved to work in concert to counter Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.

~~(C)~~ While arms sales worldwide provide China with supplemental funds to continue modernization of its Armed Forces, strategic considerations far outweigh economic motives in the case of Thailand.

- o ~~(S)~~ China's primary strategic goals have been to contain Vietnamese expansion in Southeast Asia, develop a counterweight to the Soviet presence there, and accrue influence in the region. Fostering friendly relations with Thailand through military trade and assistance allows China to achieve these goals.
 - o ~~(S)~~ The presence of a militarily strong Thailand will ensure that China will remain a major participant in the Cambodian peace process and will retain a measure of influence in a post-settlement Cambodia.
- ~~(S)~~ China will aggressively pursue increased sales of weapons and attempt to broaden the military relationship in other areas.
- o ~~(S/NF)~~ Contacts between the Armed Forces of Thailand and China are expected to increase. Such contacts will take the form of continued friendship visits, professional exchanges, equipment demonstrations, and perhaps even the matriculation of a small number of Thai officers into Chinese military schools. One Thai naval officer has already been reported as attending language training in Beijing for the first time. Formal intelligence exchanges, such as the one held earlier this year, may become regular events. Thailand, however, will be more circumspect than China in its vision of how close the relationship should be. Thailand will continue to purchase competitively priced Chinese-made arms.
- ~~(S/NF)~~ The relationship already complicates US-Thai military relations. Logistical and interoperability problems aside, US intelligence and technology now runs the risk of being compromised. Moreover, the United States for the first time has a major competitor for influence within the Royal Thai Armed Forces and, by implication, the government as well.

Sino-Thai Weapons Deals (U)

1987 Purchases

30 T-69-2 main battle tanks (delivery confirmed)
24 57-mm air defense artillery
37-mm air defense artillery
419 armored personnel carriers (100 reported delivered)

1988 Purchases

23 T-69-2 main battle tanks
360 armored personnel carriers
28 130-mm long-range towed artillery
155-mm long-range artillery

Possible Future Purchases

4 frigates (possibly JIANGHU Class)
2 WUHAN or MING Class submarines
SILKWORM antiship missiles
Training ship
HN-5A shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles
37-mm air defense artillery
130-mm artillery shells