

SITUATION IN THAILAND
(April - June 1945)

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this report will present the effects of the present war and international situation on Thailand's political and social life.*

So far as the people of Siam were concerned, the first disturbing factor in Japanese-Siamese relations occurred in March 1945 when the Japanese disarmed the French forces in Indo-China and commenced the complete military occupation of that territory. Although the Japanese repeatedly assured them that the French were to blame for the "incident", a feeling of distrust for Japan grew, and when the Japanese defeats in the Pacific were followed by rapid Allied advances in neighboring Burma, a feeling of apprehension became widespread.¹

Typifying the attitude of the populace towards Japan, the following statements became commonplace conversation along the streets of Bangkok:—"just how long is Japan going to try to fight

*Because the power plant in Bangkok has been repeatedly damaged by Allied air raids during the last three months, Japanese messages have been sorely scarce. However, Japanese Ambassador Yamamoto managed to send several lengthy, complete messages during each month.

¹ 14 March 1945, _____ E-173295
4 April 1945, _____ E-176292
10 April 1945, _____ E-178106

the whole world. —This war will ultimately wind up in the total destruction of Japan. —Japan should make peace as quickly as possible especially before an invasion is made on our land.¹ Whatever faith the people may have had in the Japanese Army had now been completely dispelled, and the prospect of having the Allied Eastern battle-front at their doorstep was indeed "shocking".² The uncomfortable Japanese officials complained to Tokyo that cooperation from the Siamese people had become more and more passive and that even the high officials in the government had been influenced by the attitude of the common people. To exemplify this attitude Japanese Ambassador, Yamamoto, told how one important official in the office of the home ministry had failed to carry out his instruction which he had received from the ministry. When questioned about his negligence he explained, "If I had done such a thing I would have been punished by the anti-Japanese English Army".²

Cooperation with Japan was even more passive when the Japanese soldiers and civilians began to retreat from Burma to Thailand.

*Apparently they did not even consider that their own army should fight with the Japanese. Thus far the Thai Army—although potentially strong (numbering 160,000 ground forces in April 1945)—has played no part in the Greater East Asia War. Since the Alliance, the disposition of the Thai forces has been dictated in part by the Japanese. They have stationed the Siamese soldiers near the China and French Indo-China border. However, whenever difficulties have arisen, the Thai army has been conveniently absent.

² 5 May 1945,
DS, 16 May 1945

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In April 1945, 18,000 troops had been serving in Thailand but by mid-June the total had increased to 40,000.³ Also retreating from Burma came Ba Maw (the Puppet Burmese Premier), Bose (The Indian Provisional Premier), and their followers. Ambassador Yamamoto, who had strenuously opposed such a move, reported to Tokyo. "This fact (the presence of the fallen puppets in Bangkok) has gradually become known to the Thai officials and people and has served to deepen the tendency of both to have less and less faith in Japan."⁴

This lack of faith in Japan caused the people to join the fifth column activities which had spread all over Thailand. Although the Japanese tried to instigate propaganda measures to check these activities, their efforts were unsuccessful. Even the newspapers gave far more attention to the abrogation of the Neutrality Pact and the San Francisco Conference than to the propaganda material submitted by the Japanese." Japan's situation grew even

*In May, after the fall of Burma, the Japanese Army advocated complete military control of three Japanese owned newspapers in Bangkok, but Yamamoto's vigorous protests caused the Tokyo Foreign Office to veto the suggestion.

³Figures from "Order of Battle Bulletin of Japanese Ground Forces".

⁴28 April 1945, _____ H-181826
19 May 1945, _____ H-185997
5 June 1945, _____ H-190365
10 June 1945, _____ H-190345. Later the Japanese decided to transfer Ba Maw and his party to Kompanchan near Prompanh in Indo-China.

darker in the eyes of the Siamese as they predicted that Russia would also join in the Pacific War. The grandness of the San Francisco Conference so completely overshadowed the Conference of the Greater East Asia Ambassadors that (as Yamamoto commented) "the people have practically no concern about the matter". Everyone hoped that the presence of the Free-Thai group at San Francisco indicated that the Allies understood Thailand's position and that they would be kindly treated in Allied hands. Pamphlets, reading "The Anglo-Americans do not consider Thailand an enemy" or "Thailand, a country now in bonds of Japan, will be liberated by the Anglo-Americans", supported that hope. In addition to the pamphlets dropped from the air the Allies also dropped medical supplies.

When the parachutes were observed, many people supposed that it was a landing of the paratroopers, and cheering broke out almost everywhere.

Such a "spontaneous reaction of the population could not have escaped the attention of the Japanese".⁵ Since this growing friendliness of the Siamese for the United States and Great

⁵9 May 1945,
DS, 29 May 1945
DS, 28 May 1945
DS, 3 July 1945

H-187648

Britain had not escaped the Japanese. Yanamoto warned Tokyo that "we must give a great deal of consideration beforehand to the form these tendencies on the part of the people would take in the event of an enemy invasion of Thailand".⁶

Aside from the unrest caused by the war situation, Thailand was suffering from serious inflation. This economic instability had come about largely from the expansion in currency caused by the increased Japanese war expenditures. The history of these expenditures dates back to the signing of the Japanese-Siamese alliance of December 1941. Since that date the government of Thailand had defrayed one-half of the military expenditures of the Japanese troops stationed in Siam. From 1942 to 1944 inclusive the Thai government had turned over--at an almost constantly increasing rate--a total of 840,000,000 bahts.* During that same period currency in circulation rose by 931,000,000 bahts--from 230,000,000 to 1,170,000,000. During the first half of the calendar year 1945, 420,000,000 bahts had been requested and received by the Japanese.⁷

Shortly after Rangoon fell, the subject of Japanese war expenditures began to cause increasing unpopularity for the Abhaiwong

*The baht has an average value of \$.38 or approximately 1½ yen.

⁶6 May 1945, H-183858

⁷DS, 19 May 1945

faction. (Abhaiwong had been Premier since July 1944.) On 16 June an election was to be held in Bangkok for one seat in the assembly. There were nine candidates and a fierce election feud was carried on. The platforms of all candidates centered around the economic and financial problems. As the campaign progressed, the criticism of the present administration spread. Their chief contention was that Abhaiwong had been "excessively cooperative with Japan". Yamamoto warned Tokyo that Prida Banomyong, the powerful anti-Japanese regent of Thailand, had been contacted by many government assembly officials of late. He also stated that there was a "rumor" of a new cabinet to be headed by the present Director of Police, Adul Adetcharat. The Japanese Ambassador hoped that "in view of the myriad of difficulties facing the present government, Japan would do everything possible to aid the position of the Abhaiwong administration".⁸

86 May 1945.

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NOT RELEASABLE

Thailand and the Soviet Union
have entered into diplomatic relations with
each other, and are in a position to
take over all such enterprises with the

Returning to Siamese-Japanese relations, a message from
Tokyo dated 22 June presents a probable change in Japanese policy
towards Thailand. This message read:

"In order to bring about strong and dynamic
operations of business enterprise located in
Thailand and Indo-China, in keeping with the
present War situation, it was decided on 10
June to have the Army take over and manage
those enterprises which are most vitally es-
sential to the prosecution of the war."¹⁵

This order, as referring to Thailand, could have one of two mean-
ings. First, the Japanese may be prepared to abandon their policy
of respecting Thai independence, or secondly, they may mean to
take over only those enterprises already Japanese owned or operated
(and possible joint Thai-Japanese operated). Traffic to date
does not reveal which step the Japanese intend to take, but even
if only Japanese concerns are affected by this order, the program
will be badly received by both Thai officials and people.

¹⁵DS, 29 June 1945, The designated enterprises were:
mining, manufacturing, public utilities, transport and communications, and information and propaganda.

As the summer months of 1945 progress, the situation in Thailand becomes increasingly difficult for the people and government. The Siamese people, harrassed by economic hardships, view the news of numerous Japanese defeats with little faith in or loyalty to Japan. Premier Abhaiwong, whose hope of establishing diplomatic relations with Russia has not as yet materialized, has been placed in a precarious political position by the mounting social unrest in Thailand. Meanwhile the Japanese have become increasingly alarmed at the probable behavior of the Siamese military and civilian should an Allied invasion of Thailand occur. With this worry foremost in their minds, the Japanese may intend to initiate either abrupt or gradual military control of Thailand.