Between Safe Havens in Cross-border Insurgency: Malaysia, Thailand and the Second Emergency (1952-89)

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Abstract: From a local insurgent movement in the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) transitioned into a cross-border one in the Second Emergency (1968-89) with regional links and implications. Due to the fixation on the Malayan Emergency period, the transition of the CPM insurgency from local to cross border during the Second Emergency period remains underexplored. This article shows how the CPM insurgency transitioned from a local one in Peninsular Malaysia to a protracted cross border conflict with a safe haven in Southern Thailand and how this significant development allowed the CPM to set the conditions of a persistent slow burn conflict in Southern Thailand that was difficult to defeat by security operations alone. This article also addresses how Malaysia, the counterinsurgent state dealt with the unique set of challenges associated with a cross-border insurgency that was subject to the ebb and flow 'good neighbourly' relations with Thailand. Finally, this article examines the negotiation process and how the lessons learnt from the failure of the Baling Peace Talks in 1955 were translated into an enduring peace at Haadyai in 1989.

Keywords: Safe havens, cross-border insurgency, Communist Party of Malaya, Second Emergency, negotiations.

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Introduction

Reminiscent of Mao's Long March, the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) began a phased withdrawal of its main combat units to the jungles of Southern Thailand in April 1952. From the early 1960s to the 1980s, Southern Thailand was the safe haven from which the CPM could reorganise, rebuild and bide it's time for the right opportunity to rekindle the armed struggle.[1]

At the outbreak of the so-called Second Emergency in 1968, the CPM had a HQ in the Betong Salient, Yala Province, and fighting units deployed along the Thai-Malaysian border. Control of the Betong Salient provided the CPM with permanent bases to launch cross-border operations into Malaysia and a sanctuary in which to organise, train, recruit and gain support from the local Thai population. For Malaysia, the Second Emergency (1968-89) was a continuation of a 'long war' that now took on a regional dimension that had not previously existed. Firstly, unlike the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), CPM insurgency in the Second Emergency had been transformed from an internal to a cross border insurgency. It became a Thai-Malaysian security issue rather than simply a Malaysian one. Secondly, the CPM insurgency was transformed by the changing dynamics of the Cold War in Asia. As Mao's support for revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia reached its zenith during the Cultural Revolution, the CPM could count on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for both fraternal and material support in the Second Emergency.[2] That support, however, was gradually withdrawn in the Deng Xiaoping Era - which adversely affected the CPM's chances of success at armed struggle.

In the Second Emergency, the CPM insurgency became more than just a local insurgency in Malaysia – but a cross border conflict with regional links and implications. The impact of external influences, cross-border cooperation and the formation of sub-national identities are pronounced features of the Second Emergency that needs more scholarly attention. Due to the fixation on the Malayan Emergency period, the transition of the CPM insurgency from local to cross border during the Second Emergency period remains underexplored. Karl Hack's 'Negotiating with the Malayan Communist Party, 1948-89' seems to suggest a redress of this lacuna, but Hack's focus was on the negotiations that led to the Baling Talks of 1955.[3] Along similar lines, David Ucko emphasises the negotiations and

diplomatic process that gave strategic meaning to COIN operations – but again the Malayan Emergency was the canonical case study.[4] He Yanging, Cheong Kee Cheong and Li Ran examined the role of the CCP in steering the CPM away from armed violence to peaceful negotiations in Baling, but did not address the influence of the CCP in persuading the CPM to resurrect their armed struggle.[5] The historiography on the post-1968 phase of the CPM insurgency remains underdeveloped for two main reasons. The first is that the back of the CPM insurgency was largely considered to be broken by 1952 and thus the Second Emergency can be interpreted as a non-event of esoteric interest. The second is the limited access to primary source material for the 1968-89 period. In recent years, however, sufficient material has been made available at the National Archives of both the United Kingdom and Australia to allow scholarly work on the subject. This is a timely development as 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the Haaydai Peace Treaty signed between the Governments of Malaysia and Thailand and the CPM that marked the end of the CPM insurgency. As more sources become available, a fuller picture of the Second Emergency and by that extension, the CPM insurgency emerges. Rather than a non-event, the Second Emergency is a revealing case study of how a cross-border safe haven allowed the CPM to survive, resurge and persist as a latent insurgent threat that could not be defeated by military means and ways alone.

Drawing on recently available records, this article shows how the CPM insurgency transitioned from a local one in Peninsular Malaysia to a protracted cross border conflict with a safe haven in Southern Thailand. This development was significant as this allowed the CPM to set the conditions of a persistent slow burn conflict in Southern Thailand that was difficult to defeat by security operations alone. This article intends to fill the gap by addressing the antecedents, planning and execution of the CPM's revived armed struggle that turned a local struggle to a broader conflict that involved not just the CPM cadres that crossed the border, but

also local Thais in the CPM safe havens and Chinese external support. This article will address the two main focal points in the local to cross border transition of the CPM insurgency – namely, the CPM attempts at reviving its armed struggle and the COIN response of the affected border states (Malaysia and Thailand) in this cross border insurgency.

This article begins with an examination of the CPM's decision in 1952 to conduct a phased withdrawal to Southern Thailand and its 1958 'Put away the flags and silence the drums' directive, followed by that of its 'resurrection strategy' in 1961 to rebuild its strength and finally that of its revived armed struggle in 1968. It then proceeds to highlight how the CPM insurgency transitioned from local to cross border in Southern Thailand. The article then proceeds to address the role of external influences on the CPM insurgency, particularly the cutting of Chinese support and Thai initiatives to dismantle the CPM strongholds in Southern Thailand. In short, this article documents the changing character of the CPM insurgency from a localized conflict at the highpoint of the Malayan Emergency to one that crossed national boundaries in the Second Emergency.

Finally, this article addresses how Malaysia, the counterinsurgent state dealt with the unique set of challenges associated with a cross-border insurgency with transnational elements. In his study of transnational insurgents, Idean Salehyan makes the case that once insurgents bases are established in a neighbour state across the border – with or without consent of the host state – tensions are likely to rise between the neighbour states and domestic conflicts turn into a matter of state-to-state relations.[6] This was the case when the CPM began to make its presence felt in Southern Thailand. Due to the localised character of the CPM insurgency in the Malayan Emergency period, tensions between neighbour states was less of an issue for the British colonial

authorities. This was not the case for Malaysia. In the Second Emergency, success in COIN was subject to the ebb and flow of Thai-Malaysian relations whilst requiring the assistance of a 'good neighbour' to provide intelligence, maintain military pressure and, at the same time, open a channel of negotiation with the insurgents that led to the signing of the Haadyai Peace Treaty in December 1989. Thai initiatives in the negotiation process began in the early 1980s were crucial in the long road to a final peace settlement. In a cross-border insurgency such as the Second Emergency, neighbourly cooperation at all levels plays an instrumental role in determining the success or failure of a COIN campaign. If the preceding section documents the transition of the conflict from local to cross border from the insurgent perspective, the final section charts the rocky path of effective cross-border COIN and the adaptation and change in COIN strategy from the counterinsurgent side. More importantly, this study of change and adaptation in the Malaysian COIN approach addresses a hitherto ignored aspect of ending the CPM insurgency - how the lessons learnt from the failure of the Baling Peace Talks in 1955 were translated into a 'peace with honour' that has endured.

The CPM's Long March: From Malaya to Southern Thailand

Despite the inadequate British response during the first five months of the Malayan Emergency, the CPM failed to seize and establish a rural base area that could support large scale operations. Concentrating and maintaining a battalion size force of 500 men presented a major logistical challenge for the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA).[7] Even at the height of MNLA violence, the CPM never succeeded in forcing the British administrative withdrawal from key areas. The MNLA's 'surge' in armed attacks from 1950 to 51 were sporadic small-scale attacks and did not represent any real increase in scale or impact.[8] The CPM leadership sought to

salvage the situation by issuing the 'October Directives' which called on its cadres to cease unrestricted terrorism. The 'October Directives' proved to be too little too late. According to Kumar Ramakrishna: 'By the end of 1951, the MCP had inadvertently provoked general aversion towards itself amongst the mass of the rural Chinese, a situation that proved impossible to redress, and all but destroyed any prospect of success in the shooting war'.[9] The MNLA's armed operations were on the whole sporadic. They lacked force-concentration, attacks were ill-coordinated and attempts at establishing liberated areas were beyond the MNLA's limited military capabilities.

Chin Peng moved his Headquarters to Cameron Highlands in 1952. From thereon, the events that unfolded were reminiscent of Mao's Long March. Chin Peng admitted the situation in both Perak and Kelantan was so dire that: "We had no other way to go, we had to move across the border into Southern Thailand. Actually, it was not a plan of our Headquarters, we were forced by circumstances to move, one step after another, further north and further."[10] The CPM began a phased withdrawal of its main combat units to the jungles of Southern Thailand in April 1952. By 1954, prospects of winning the armed struggle in Malaya looked rather bleak. When the Chinese and Soviets met in 1954 to discuss the future development of the CPM, it was recommended that since it was difficult for the CPM to wage an armed struggle, it 'should change its tactics by adopting a peaceful and democratic approach to develop its strength'.[11] This shift from armed struggle back to 'peaceful coexistence' implied that armed revolution no longer enjoyed legitimacy in the eyes of Beijing and Moscow.[12] Chin Peng was however unwilling to accept the party's dissolution and surrender; pre-conditions laid down by the Tunku in exchange for involvement in main stream Malayan politics. The formal declaration of Malayan independence on 31 August 1957 further undercut any political manoeuvre room for the CPM. Kumar Ramakrishna noted that by 1958, the 'operational realities of irreversible

military failure', the 'unsalvageable political position of the Party' coupled with the generous *Merdeka* amnesty produced mass surrenders which effectively ended the shooting war.[13] Similarly, Karl Hack viewed the 1956-1958 period as one in which the intensified use of amnesties combined with operations in key areas and mass betrayals resulted in 'a virtual collapse of the MNLA within Malaya' and a 'virtual mothballing of the military struggle'. Hack makes another critical observation, namely, that by August 1957, the CPM was 'on its way to becoming not a Malayan-based party, but a mainly Thai-based, Communist organisation in exile'.[14]

Recognising the failure of its initial armed struggle, The CPM issued its 1958 'Put away the flags and Silence the Drums' Directive. The remaining 500-odd cadres now in Southern Thailand were demobilised and encouraged to enter Thai civilian life to act as 'sleepers'.[15] Most of the CPM's Central Committee members were exfiltrated to Beijing which became the CPM's new headquarters for directing the political and later armed struggle in Malaysia. As early as 1961, most of the CPM's Central Committee members were effectively persuaded by Beijing that the time was ripe for a second attempt at armed revolution. According to Chin Peng: 'strategically, the whole region, Deng insisted, would become ripe for the sort of struggle we had been pursuing in Malaya for so long [and] there could be no question Deng had been persuasive'.[16] Just as the case in Baling, the push by the Chinese was influential in shaping CPM decision-making.

From 1962 to 1968, the CPM laid the ground work in Southern Thailand for armed struggle. Old networks were reactivated, Kuomintang and criminal gangs targeted and new training camps were set up in the border area. CPM strength within this region grew from 300 to 2,000 cadres in the first year, with a core of about 800 fighting personnel by 1964.[17] Since

1964, the CPM had been actively recruiting Thai Chinese and Malays in Southern Thailand. The Chinese recruits came mainly from the Betong and Sadao areas while the Thai-Malays were largely from Narathiwat.[18] The CPM managed to establish a level of influence and authority primarily with the rural Chinese by chasing away the bandit-robbers plaguing the border area, sharing food and providing hope and empowerment to deprived youths. Indeed, the CPM considered the Betong Salient inhabited by about 29,000 Thai Chinese, 5,000 Thais and 2,000 Thai-Malays as a 'liberated area'.[19] Membership of the Thai Chinese diaspora and local Thai Malays within the CPM suggests a sense of identity and belonging that transcended national borders. The Second Emergency presents a case whereby subnational affiliations and relations were forged and sustained amongst the Thai Chinese and local Thai Malays in a cross-border insurgency. By 1967, preparatory moves for a renewed armed revolution in Malaya were at an advanced stage.

The Resurgence of CPM Armed Violence: Safe Havens and External Support

Having documented the establishment of an insurgent safe haven in the previous section, this section explains how the CPM used its safe haven in Southern Thailand to execute its armed struggle and the critical role of external Chinese support. On 1 June 1968, in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of their armed struggle, the CPM publicly announced their intention to revive the armed struggle in Malaya. The importance of Southern Thailand as a safe haven cannot be emphasised enough. Cadres formerly engaged in the constitutional struggle with the Labour Party of Malaya (LPM) and Partai Rakyat Malaya (PRM) went underground and some were sent to CPM bases in Southern Thailand for further training.[20] As the CPM underground progressed from the preparatory stage to the establishment of jungle operational bases, many of these highly-trained cadres were infiltrated back into

Malaysia in the latter half of 1969.[21] The main objectives of these infiltration groups were to penetrate the area, recruit and train locally, return cadres to Thailand for training, establish bases, training camps and supply dumps, revive the communist underground network and avoid contact with the security forces wherever possible.[22]

At the outset of the CPM's revived armed struggle, the CPM had a HQ in the Betong Salient and three regiments deployed along the Thai-Malaysian border: the 8th Regiment in the Sadao area, the 12th Regiment in the Betong Salient, and the 10th Regiment in the Weng district. All three regiments (each regiment range in size from approximately 220 to 570 fighters) had subordinate assault units (AUs) in Kedah, Perak and Kelantan respectively.[23] For its mass persuasion work, the CPM could now broadcast to potential recruits and communicate to its cadres, supporters and sympathizers in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore from its *Suara Revolusi Malaya* or the *Voice of Malayan Revolution* (VMR) radio station in Hunan, China.[24] The VMR station ran from 1969-1981 and its operation was a constant issue in Sino-Malaysian and Sino-Singaporean relations in the 1970s and early 80s.[25]

A sustained recruitment drive in mid-1969 increased the CPM's combat strength in Southern Thailand from an estimated 1100 to 1300 in February 1970 to an estimated overall strength of 2,000 in October.[26] In 1970, the estimated strength of the three CPM regiments in Southern Thailand was listed as 226 in the 8th Regiment, 566 in the 12th Regiment and 220 in the 10th Regiment.[27] Documents captured by security forces in May 1971 revealed that both the 8th and 12th Regiments in Kedah and Perak respectively were to 'engage in a long term build-up of 2-5 years for Phase II operations' which implied either 1975 or 1976 as the kick-off point.[28] However, 1974 proved to be a turning-point year which witnessed a significant increase in CPM armed violence. In October/November 1973, as part of its 'Southward

Advance' into the heartlands of Malaysia, the CPM made a thrust through the Cameron Highlands into Central Pahang with the intention of establishing a permanent presence in the Jerantut, Kuala Lipis and Raub areas. Once in Central Pahang, the infiltrated insurgents could rely on a network of food dumps established by the MNLF. These infiltrators in conjunction with the CPM front organisations were to extend their support amongst the Chinese population in the penetrated areas.[29] The CPM's thrust into Central Pahang was however severely hampered in November/December 1973 when the Security forces discovered and seized 42 of the CPM clandestine food dumps and arrested twenty-two of its cadres.[30]

The inaugural visit of Tun Razak to Beijing in May 1974, the first ever visit by a Malaysian Prime Minister since the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) prompted a response from the CPM. Some 100 insurgents crossed the border from Southern Thailand and destroyed sixty-three pieces of heavy equipment that were used to build the East/West Highway.[31] Progress on the East/West Highway project was set back by an estimated twelve months.[32] Such tactical successes of the CPM and the inability to the security forces to decisively engage the CPM in its strongholds in Southern Thailand masked the strategic and political setbacks suffered by the Malaysian communist movement as a whole. Between 1970-1974, the CPM was riddled with factionalism and internal schism within the party. By 1974, the CPM had separated into three separate factions: CPM Main, CPM Marxist Leninist (CPM-ML) and CPM Revolutionary Faction (CPM-RF). Moreover, the Sino-Soviet split and the PRC's growing pragmatism drove both China and Malaysia towards a closer relationship and the CPM further apart from the CCP.

In a joint communiqué issued in Beijing on 1 June 1974, China and Malaysia made formal pledges of mutual recognition that effectively established diplomatic relations between

the two states.[33] The communiqué also declared Malaysia's decision to close down its Taipei consulate and recognised the PRC 'the sole government of China'.[34] In return, Razak received an assurance from Zhou Enlai that 'we regard the people of Chinese origin who are your citizens as Malaysians.[35] What this meant was that ethnic Chinese Malaysians could no longer divide their loyalties. Razak failed to obtain any concessions on the closure of the VMR station in Hunan, China, but the Chinese did confirm that the CPM insurgency was an 'internal matter'. 'It was up to the Malaysians to deal with it.'[36] On his return from China, Razak made it clear that 'the establishment of relations with China, and the mutual recognition by the Malaysian and Chinese governments, removed the basis for the terrorists' activities'.[37] In conceding that the CPM insurgency was a Malaysian domestic problem while, at the same time, establishing diplomatic relations with the Malaysian Federation, the Chinese delegitimized the CPM's central objective of establishing a People's Republic in Peninsular Malaysia.

Unlike the Malayan Emergency period, the CPM was heavily dependent on the Chinese for material and political support in the Second Emergency. As the Cold War progressed, the War in Indochina and Chinese foreign policy towards Southeast Asia were two key developments that influenced outcomes in the Second Emergency period. In the 1960s, Mao Zedong's foreign policy of expanding revolutionary war to the rest of the Third World was the push that the CPM needed to resurrect its armed struggle. By the late 1970s, however, the CPM was on the defensive and 'probably guided by China which because of the Indochina situation wished to mend fences with ASEAN countries, the CPM line was softening'.[38] As Deng gradually pulled the plug on Chinese aid, the CPM's cause was severely crippled.

Rather than export revolution as a means of legitimising CCP rule, Deng's focus was engaging the non-communist ASEAN bloc in countering the Soviet Union. In February 1981, Premier Zhao Ziyang announced in Bangkok that CCP support for Southeast Asian Communist parties were only 'political and moral', and that China would 'make efforts to ensure that party-to-party ties did not affect friendship and cooperation with ASEAN countries'.[39] By then, even the moral support was slowly eroded to the point whereby the VMR station was eventually closed at the 'request' of Deng. The VMR station had been a visible thorny issue in Sino-Malaysian and Sino-Singaporean relations. In his third official visit to China in September 1985, Lee Kuan Yew sought an assurance from the Chinese that its support for communist parties in Southeast Asia had been discontinued. In response, Deng maintained that: "China gave no support to the [CPM] and was causing no problems or trouble for South East Asian countries. But for China to abandon moral support for Communist Parties anywhere in the world would be betraying its soul and its fundamental beliefs".[40] The VMR closure and the withdrawal of all but moral support for the CPM was a clear signal that as a cross-border insurgent movement making little headway in the Thai-Malaysian border, the CPM was ill-placed to bear the full impact of Deng's pragmatism. The cessation of Chinese material support adversely affected the CPM's ability to rebuild its shattered underground network, recruit new members and adequately arm its fighting units.

By mid-1978, the 3,300 or so CPM insurgents were supported by approximately 1,000 communist underground members in Peninsular Malaysia. Despite a need to rebuild its severely crippled underground strength and lifelines in the Northern States of Peninsular Malaysia, CPM Central Committee in Beijing continued to assert the correctness of its revolutionary violence. By June 1980, the CPM's armed struggle was

becoming unsustainable and prospects for success unrealistic. Nevertheless, the CPM Central Committee considered legal constitutional means an even more misguided option. The lack of direct high-level contacts between the Malaysian government and the CPM until the 1980s certainly did little to change perceptions.[41] The CPM's lack of dialogue with the Malaysian political establishment meant that negotiation channels were simply was not open. The 'local difficulties between the Thais and Malaysians' which resulted in the cessation of joint Malaysian-Thai border operations in 1980 potentially provided the CPM with a window of opportunity.[42] By then, however, the CPM was in no position to undertake any significant major offensive action. The emphasis was on rebuilding and consolidation rather than open confrontation with the government forces. Direct anti-security force actions were largely confined to the luring of security forces into newly planted booby trap locations.[43] By 1982, the CPM insurgency 'represented a latent rather than an actual threat to Malaysia'.[44] By 1984, an estimated 2,000 insurgents of all three CPM factions continued to occupy strongholds in the inaccessible mountains of Southern Thailand.[45] Weakened by defections and the failure to attract new recruits to replace its aging cadres, the CPM (RF) was persuaded to merge with the CPM (ML) to form the Communist Party of Malaysia (CPMa).[46] Despite the consolidation of the two splitist CPM factions, this reorganisation did little to turn the fortunes of the CPM insurgency.

The Challenge of Insurgent Safe Havens: Towards a Joint Thai-Malaysian Approach in Cross Border COIN

Moving away from the insurgent perspective, this section now focuses on the challenges of the counterinsurgent in dealing with cross border safe havens and how success in

cross-border COIN was subject to the ebb and flow of Thai-Malaysian relations. The period between 1969 and 1974 has been described as 'one of the most challenging to the Security Forces' – particularly for the Malaysian Army'.[47] Following the withdrawal of British Forces in 1967, the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) took over full responsibility of the defence of both Peninsular and East Malaysia with two infantry divisions. The 1st Infantry Division was responsible for East Malaysia and the 2nd Infantry Division Peninsular Malaysia.[48] Thus, the Malaysian army had to deal with the resurgence of the CPM threat and soon after, restore public order in the aftermath of the May 13 1969 riots with a single infantry division. The Thai-Malaysian border region was divided into nine sectors, but not all were permanently occupied by Malaysian security forces.[49] The overstretched Malaysian security forces often sustained heavy casualties in CPM initiated actions in the border states. In one such incident on 27th July 1969, Malaysian security forces suffered six dead and eight wounded in the village of Sintok, Kedah. The 100-odd Chinese inhabitants of Sintok were resettled in Perak and further plans were made to resettle the landless and unemployed groups living along the Perak Border.[50] Plans were also put in place to expand the quantity and quality of the security forces but implementation and results took time.

It was, however, more than just a case of too few boots on a ground. The lack of effective Malaysian-Thai cooperation and virtual absence of coordinated and effective Malaysian-Thai liaison was a significant barrier to any sort of successful COIN action. In 1970, it was apparent that the Thai authorities had 'far too little precise knowledge' of the CPM presence within their borders and there was no clear definition of responsibilities within the Thai chain of command. [51] In February 1970, responsibility for COIN in the Malaysian-Thai border areas was transferred from National Security Command to Communist Suppression

Operations Command (CSOC) under a Thai General, but the National Security Command, not CSOC was still responsible for Thai-Malaysian cooperation.[52] CPM infiltration of the Southern border villages and concerns over political indoctrination of the rural youth led the Thai authorities to take a more serious view of the CPM threat.[53] Moreover, the establishment of contact between the CPM and the CPT and the potential threat that the 'presence of the CTOs cannot simply be winked at on the comforting assumption that they only intend to be nasty to Malaysia' could not be ignored.[54]

In recognition of the severity of the CPM threat to their own security, a New Border Cooperation Agreement was concluded by Malaysia and Thailand on 7 March 1970. For the first time, security forces from each country would be permitted across the border for joint operations in 'hot pursuit' of up to five miles and a period of seventy-two hours.[55] The 1970 agreement was the third between Malaysia and Thailand since the CPM completed its 'long march' into Southern Thailand. In a display of their new found willingness to cooperate, the Thais mounted a series of joint operations with the Malaysians. The Thai practice of giving notice of their operations often forty-eight hours in advance, however, frequently resulted in the capture of empty enemy bases – and after the CPM had vacated in good time.[56] Although this was less than ideal, it was nonetheless a demonstration of the readiness on the part of the Thais for greater cooperation. For the Malaysians, the 1970 agreement was a significant improvement in that for the very first time, joint military-police forces and command centres were now incorporated into the agreement – including the use of combat aircraft.[57] Compared with the 1959 and 1965 agreements, the 1970 agreement elicited more systematic cooperation from the Thais. HQ Fifth Combined Communist Suppression Force was officially opened in Songkhla in May 1970. As joint commanders of the new local CSOC HQ, the Colonel of the

Fifth Combined Army Regiment and the Superintendent of Zone Nine Border Patrol Police (BPP) had the authority to order operations without the approval of CSOC HQ in Bangkok.[58]

Alleged violations of Thai territory by Malaysian security forces led to the termination of the 1970 Thai-Malaysian Border Agreement and withdrawal of 378 Police Field Force (PFF) and 21 Malaysian Special Branch (MSB) personnel from the Betong Salient on 7 June 1976.[59] The major setback was not the withdrawal of the PFF per se, but more importantly, the loss of MSB intelligence cover in the Betong Salient and granting the CPM a secure base from which to spread and retire at will.[60] Since the revival of the CPM's armed struggle in 1968, one of the impediments to any effective response by the Malaysian Government was the inability to crack the CPM strongholds in Southern Thailand. A concerted joint Thai-Malaysian response in uprooting the CPM sanctuaries was even more elusive in 1976 than it was in 1968.

A slew of unilateral security measures was implemented by the Malaysians to compensate for the lack of joint border operations. As part of Operation Kota, the Temenggor Dam was flooded, that and a defensive line along the constructed East/West Highway were established as physical barriers to deny the CPM its main border infiltration routes.[61] The East-West Highway defence line was conceptualised as a series of linear dug-in platoon locations at one kilometre intervals backed by fixed fire-support bases. Together with the flooded Temenggor Dam and minefields, these defensive positions blocked the CPM's main infiltration routes, thereby potentially channelling the CPM infiltrators into designated kill zones.[62] In addition to this corralling effect, the MAF believed that as the CPM probed for gaps, the built-up of supply dumps in support of such missions would enhance the likelihood of contacts and planned ambushes.[63] The increased reliance on a linear defence strategy to contain the CPM border infiltration threat reflected the limited options available to the Malaysians in the absence

of Thai cooperation. The linear static defences did force CPM infiltrators to seek more difficult routes across the border, but could not in themselves significantly change the direction of the cross-border conflict.

The change of Thai Prime Minister in the aftermath of the 6 October 1976 military coup was a positive development for Thai-Malaysian cooperation. The CPM bases in Southern Thailand was seen as a problem by the new Thai Prime Minister Tanin Kraivixien's anti-communist government. Soon after the formation of the Tanin administration, an agreement was reached to mount a series of joint operations against CPM sanctuaries in the border area – although the revised Border Agreement was not formally signed until 4 March 1977.[64] Once such major joint operation was carried out in January 1977 against the CPM (RF) in east Sadao.[65] Operation Daoyai Musnah (Big Star) involving some 3,500 Thai-Malaysian troops began on 14 January in an area fifteen miles northwest of Padang Besar, a border town on the Perlis-Thai border in the Sadao district of Songkhla province.[66] Lasting a full month, it was a 'blocking' operation that relied on airstrikes and artillery fire to flush out the insurgents from known bases before the follow-up search and destroy mission. During the operation, two large camps and ten smaller ones were located and destroyed. Large quantities of ammunition, explosives and both CPM and CPT literature were also recovered.[67] As with previous similar large scale joint operations, most of the insurgents flushed out simply moved on to another, but Operation Big Star opened the way for future joint operations in Thai territory.

A further operation involving 3,000 Malaysian and 2,000 Thai security forces codenamed Operation Daoyai Musnah (Big Star) II was launched on 14 March 1977, again in the Sadao district against the CPM (RF).[68] The search, cordon and clear operation led to the discovery of eighteen major CPM (RF) camps and a single insurgent killed.[69] Operation Big

Star II witnessed the first combined coordinated airstrikes by the RMAF and RTAF in Thai territory.[70] The operation demonstrated the determination of the MAF to refine techniques and establish operating procedures for further joint operations against the more formidable CPM forces in the Betong Salient.[71] Operation Big Star II also uncovered rubber estates, a tin mine and a heroin laboratory that the CPM RF were using to finance their organisation and activities.[72] Having been left largely unmolested by the Bangkok government since the 1960s, the CPM had set up parallel socio-economic infrastructures that confirmed its existence as a state within a state in the Southern Thai provinces. Operation Big Star II was a clear signal that the Thai government would no longer tolerate the existence of the CPM within its borders. A review of both Big Star operations by the Joint Border Committee led to a cognisance of the need for standard operating procedures and combined standing operating procedures for further joint border operations. HQ 2nd Malaysian Division and HQ 5th Royal Thai Army Division were designated as Combined Task Force Headquarters (CTFHQ). In order to ensure effective communications, both Headquarters were to be linked by a system of military communication and liaison staff.[73]

The improvement in Thai-Malaysian relations permitted Malaysian troops to be stationed in Southern Thailand, but only on short operational tours 'as and when requested by the Thais'.[74] A Malaysian proposal to leave a single battalion in Betong to guard the civilian population at the end of operations was rejected as 'politically unacceptable' by the Thai government.[75] The Thais recognised that the villagers must be protected but had neither the manpower nor money in the Southern provinces to implement such a policy.[76] Stretched with operations against the CPT in other parts of Thailand, in the circumstances, the Thai Armed Forces had to allow the Malaysians to undertake operations in Southern Thailand 'on an unprecedented scale'.[77] The inability of the Thais to leave behind enough security forces at the

end of operations to ensure the protection of the villagers and the politically unacceptable long-term presence of Malaysian security forces meant that the locals frequently felt unable to come out in support of the government for fear of reprisals when the CPM returned.

By 1978 the tempo and quality of Thai-Malaysian cooperation improved further. April 1978 was to mark a new phase in joint Thai-Malaysian operations.[78] As part of the Selamat-Samadee series of joint operations, continuous operations were conducted from April 24, 1978 to July 5 1980 in the Betong salient, Kroh and Banding in Northern Perak.[79] These operations were conceived as a series of several short, sharp military thrusts to prevent the CPM from regaining its jungle bases and a shift from the '1977 sledgehammer technique'.[80] The first phase was launched on 24 April 1978 against the CPM-ML in the west of the Betong Salient particularly against the 25th Company.[81] In June 1978, Operation Selamat-Samadee moved into the crucial second phase to be conducted in the South and Southeast of the Betong Salient.[82] During this period, a small scale joint operation targeted the 3rd Combat Company of 12 Regiment – widely considered to be the toughest nut in the CPM.[83] Two companies of Malaysian Rangers and one company from the Thai army entered from the north and swept south towards a squadron of Malaysian Special Service Regiment (MSSR) and a battalion of PFF. Company-level positions that dominate the sector while inhibiting insurgent movement and disrupting food collection were also established.[84] The security forces suffered between forty to seventy booby-trap casualties as a result of the operation which demonstrated their willingness to close with the enemy despite the booby-trap threat.[85] Thai-Malaysian border cooperation against the CPM was now run on smaller, more efficient, and realistic lines.[86] Joint Thai-Malaysian operations were ended in January 1980, but the General Border Committee meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 12/13 May 1980 agreed that "combined operations would be

launched when needed and intelligence gathering through long range patrols would be increased".[87]

Despite the low level of CPM activity in 1981, the financial cost of deployment in the border area for Malaysia continued to be high. Under the Fourth Malaysian Plan, a quarter of government spending was earmarked for the expansion of the armed forces and police.[88] Between 1948 to 1980, an estimated 10 billion Malaysian Ringgit was spent by the Malaysian police to combat the CPM.[89] In 1984, no less than five MAF brigades as well as PFF units were deployed on the Thai-Malaysian border. A Malaysian official commented that "The fight against the CT was like trying to fell a tree in your neighbour's garden by merely lopping off the branches which happened to be within reach from your side of the fence".[90] The level of CPM armed violence was lower, but security forces on both sides of the border continued to suffer casualties. Contemporary observers note that the fundamental problem facing the MAF was akin to that confronting British forces in Northern Ireland - namely the existence of safe havens across the border.[91] By 1981, the CPM had become a cross-border insurgent movement that presented a latent rather than existential threat to Malaysia. Defeating the CPM insurgency by destroying the CPM's armed units through military ways and means however continued to elude the MAF.

Negotiated Peace in a Cross-border Insurgency

For much of the Second Emergency, both the CPM and the MAF viewed armed violence as a key instrument. Right up to the early 1980s, the CPM publicly stuck fast to its belief that armed struggle was preferable to the misguided path of constitutional struggle. In the case of Malaysia, the prevalent belief in the MAF was negotiation was unnecessary since the CPM

would eventually be defeated through sustained military pressure. The lack of direct high-level contacts between the Malaysian government and the CPM until the 1980s certainly did little to change perceptions of both sides of the conflict. The CPM's lack of dialogue with the Malaysian political establishment meant that channels of conflict resolution were closed to the Party. Unfettered by their less adversarial experience with the CPM (when compared to the Malaysians), the Thais began to adopt a more conciliatory approach in the 1980s.

By the early 1980s, the CPM leadership tacitly acknowledged that the armed struggle had failed. Surreptitious initial contacts were made between the local CPM and Thai Army commanders such as Lt Col Akanit Muansawad and these local successes subsequently led to the gradual pursuit of more formal talks between the senior leadership of both the CPM and Malaysia.[92] The talks that ultimately led to the Haadyai Peace Accords began with CPM and Lt Col Akanit Muansawad from 1985 to 1989.[93] The high level of trust established between Lt Col Akanit and his CPM contact subsequently allowed him to reach out to members of the CPM politburo in Southern Thailand.[94] Room for dialogue between the CPM and the Thai government gradually began to grow under the initiative of General Kitti Ratanachaya, Commander of the Thai Fifth Infantry Division (later Commander of Fourth Army Region). Taking advantage of this window of opportunity, the Thai military were instrumental in facilitating a dialogue between the CPM and MSB which gradually progressed into talks with the Malaysian government that culminated in the signing of the Haadyai Peace Agreement.

The Thai position was that 'To permanently end the war in the Thai-Malaysian border region negotiations would have to come to the fore based on the conditions that the CPM disband its forces, cease armed hostilities and that Malaysia allow the CPM to fight through peaceful political channels within its country'.[95] Thai policy towards the CPM was similar to that it pursued in for the CPT insurgency. The approach was to maintain military pressure whilst adopting 'an open arms political policy towards those willing to forsake the armed

struggle and join in national development.[96] With the aid of infiltrated sympathizers and trusted negotiators, 'from the bottom to the top, from sympathizer to activist, from activist to party member', Gen Kitti planned to negotiate with the CPM to disband and 'participate in the development of the Thai nation'.[97]

Prior to the peace treaty with the CPM in 1989, the Thais were successful in negotiating the surrender of the CPMa faction in 1987. In March/April, more than 600 CPMa insurgents surrendered to the Thai Army – of whom eighty percent were of Malaysian or Chinese nationality and none wished to return to Malaysia.[98] Rather than adopt a policy of forced repatriation, the CPMa insurgents were resettled in villages where each family unit received 15 rai of land and an allowance for the first year.[99] Despite accepting Thailand's amnesty policy, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed publicly rejected the idea 'on the grounds that it would create political difficulties, especially at the state level, and that there was no suitable land scheme on which to settle terrorists'.[100] This was not to say that Mahathir was against the idea of a negotiated peace between the Malaysian government and the CPM. Publicly, Mahathir had to be seen as taking a tough line against the CPM, but as a matter of policy, channels for negotiations with the CPM had been established by MSB.

When Rahim Noor took over the reins of Director MSB in 1986, he was able to persuade Mahathir, then Home Affairs Minister to pursue negotiations with the CPM.[101] Mahathir's position on negotiating with the CPM did not change when he assumed the leadership of Malaysia both as Prime Minister and leader of UMNO in 1987. Unbeknown to the Malaysian Army, MSB Deputy Inspector Yau Kong Yew worked closely with the Thais in ascertaining the prospects of a negotiated peace. [102] Some senior MAF commanders were confident of a military victory and saw no need for a negotiated peace. As such, MSB negotiators such as Inspector Yau had to proceed under the radar of their military colleagues.

Only towards the closing stages of the negotiations was the Chief of Defence Force, General Hashim informed and invited to participate.[103]

Crucial to the success of the negotiation process were the lessons learned by MSB from the failure of the Baling Talks in 1955. This time MSB negotiators avoided the imposition of terms that were unacceptable to the CPM such as 'surrender of weapons' and 'dissolution of the party'.[104] Unlike his MAF counterparts, Director Noor could approach the CPM issue unhindered by the bias of past experience. On taking the path of negotiations, he noted that: 'This can happen because you were not involved in fighting. But if you were, probably different. Because so many military chaps killed so how to do peace'? [105] Director Noor was also mindful of that harsh tone on the government side that prevented a negotiated peace at Baling. He reflected that: 'if MSB in 1988 had adopted 30 to 40 percent of the Malayan attitude in December 1955, it will be finished'.[106]

Whilst negotiations between the CPM and MSB were taking place, the MAF continued to exert military pressure on the CPM. In 1988, Chang Ling Yan, Acting Secretary-General, CPM indicated to Gen Kitti the intentions of the CPM 'to end armed hostilities and adopt peaceful means of fighting their cause'.[107] The door was now open for direct negotiations between Chin Peng and Malaysian government representatives. In the meeting between Akanit, Yau, Chin Peng and CPM representatives in China, Chin Peng agreed on the plan for negotiations and Madame Zainon (alias Ah Yan) was appointed as the CPM's chief negotiator.[108] The first round of Tripartite Peace Talks between the CPM and both the Malaysian and Thai governments began in February 1989, Phuket, Thailand. When the fifth round of Tripartite Talks was concluded in November 1989, unlike Baling in 1955, a peace agreement had been reached. With the signing of the peace treaty at Haadyai on 2 December 1989, the CPM's forty-one year armed struggle was finally at an end.

As part of the Haadyai Peace Agreement, about 700 CPM members were resettled in Thailand and about 400 were to return to Malaysia.[109] The CPM resettlement policy in Thailand was run along similar lines to that for the CPMa. Each family resettled in Thailand received fifteen rai of land, 26,000 Baht for construction materials and a daily expenses allowance of twenty-two Baht for three years.[110] The estimated cost of resettlement was 130 million Baht of which an estimated 50 million Baht came from the Malaysian government.[111] Mindful of the failure at Baling, the word 'surrender' was left out of the agreement between the Malaysian government and the CPM. Article 2 which laid down the terms for the disbandment and disarmament of the CPM armed units stipulated that: 'The Communist Party of Malaya shall disband all its armed units, destroy its arms, ammunition, explosives and booby-traps in Malaysia and Thailand'.[112] Such terms could be seen as generous particularly within MAF circles who 'made no bones about the fact that the CPM only took this step because they were beaten militarily'.[113] The Haadyai Peace Agreement allowed CPM members of Malaysian origin to return and receive assistance from the Malaysian authorities 'in order to help them to start their peaceful life afresh'.[114] Moreover, there were no harsh terms that required the formal dissolution of the CPM as a political party. The CPM was defeated as a political and military force, but the final Haadyai agreement between the CPM and the Malaysian government was generous in the spirit of national reconciliation. It was a 'peace with honour' that allowed the CPM to end the shooting war without losing its dignity.[115]

Conclusion

The CPM's armed struggle started off as a local insurgency in Malaya, but from 1952, it was gradually transformed into a cross-border conflict with regional links and implications. As the CPM insurgency took on a more transnational and internationalised character involving the Chinese diaspora and Thai-Malays in the Thai-Malaysian border region, Malaysians, Thais and the CCP, its impact was felt not only in Malaysia. The impact of CCP

influence was crucial in shaping the CPM's key decisions, including the push to the negotiating table at Baling in 1955 and the second attempt at armed struggle in the 1960s. Likewise, when Deng pulled the plug on all but moral support in the 1980s, the CPM lost a vital lifeline that crippled the movement. The CPM was weakened to the point of fighting for survival rather than advancing its armed struggle southward. By 1982, the CPM in Southern Thailand was a latent rather than actual threat to Malaysia. Defeat of the CPM however remained elusive so long as the movement continued to remain immovable from its safe havens in Southern Thailand.

Unlike the Malayan Emergency period, success in COIN during the Second Emergency was subject to the ebb and flow 'good neighbourly' relations to provide intelligence, maintain military pressure and, at the same time, open a channel of negotiation with the insurgents. The chill in Thai-Malaysian relations from 1972 to 76 prevented the Malaysian security forces from effectively pursuing the CPM in its jungle safe havens in Southern Thailand. The warming of Thai-Malaysian relations in 1976 facilitated an improvement in joint cross-border cooperation. The 1976-78 period witness the optimisation of Cross-border operations which ran on smaller, more efficient, and realistic lines. Joint operations ceased yet again in 1980 when Thai-Malaysian relations cooled. The crux of the matter was that any permanent or extended basing of MAF units in Thai territory remained politically unfeasible for the Thai government. As a result of these restrictions, joint Thai-Malaysian military ventures remained too tightly constrained to engage the CPM forces decisively in battle. The Thai-Malaysian security forces were never able to completely cut off all of the CPM's infiltration routes or uproot the most impenetrable CPM sanctuaries, but the joint pressure slowly but surely whittled down CPM strength. In the long term, the assistance that really mattered was not Thai boots on the ground, but the channel of communication facilitated by the Thais that allowed for a negotiated end to the shooting war. It was recognised

by all that for peace to endure on the Thai-Malaysian border, any agreement had to be reached between all three parties: the CPM, the Thais and the Malaysians.

Rather than a non-event, the Second Emergency is a noteworthy case study of how a cross-border safe haven allowed the CPM to survive, resurge and persist as a latent insurgent threat that could not be defeated by military means and ways alone. In the absence of Thai state authority, Southern Thailand developed into a border region where various transnational linkages formed, thrived and coalesced with the CPM insurgency that developed its own parallel socio-economic structures. The fact that the Thais no longer tolerated the CPM presence in its territory was a key determinant that turned the strategic tide in Malaysia's favour. It is difficult to conceive how Malaysia could have succeeded without Thai assistance and a more secure border. Had the Thais persisted with a 'live and let live' policy, the latent CPM threat and the Second Emergency might have persisted well beyond 1989. Finally, the negotiations that culminated in the signing of the Haadyai peace agreement suggests that by allowing the CPM to end the shooting war without losing its dignity, the failure of the Baling Peace Talks were translated into lessons learnt and ultimately into a 'peace with honour' that has endured.

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[102] Interview with Datuk Yau Kong Yew.
[103] Interview with Tan Sri Rahim Noor.
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[108] Interviews with Tan Sri Rahim Noor, DatukYau Kong Yew & General Akanit Muensawat, *The Last Role of Chin Peng*, 51-2.
[109] TNA, FCO 15/5701, *End of CPM Armed Struggle in Malaysia*.
[110] *Agreement Between Internal Security Operations Command Region 4, Kingdom of Thailand and The Communist Party of Malaya on CPM's Termination of Armed Activities in Thai Territory* in The Last Role of Chin Peng.
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[114] Agreement Between Internal Security Operations Command Region 4, Kingdom of Thailand and The Communist Party of Malaya on CPM's Termination of Armed Activities in Thai Territory.
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