

SECRET

OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD
Washington 25, D. C.

January 7, 1959

REPORT ON SOUTHEAST ASIA (NSC 5809)

(Approved by the President, April 2, 1958)

(Period Covered: From May 28, 1958 through January 7, 1959)

I. REGIONAL

A. SUMMARY EVALUATION

1. General

a. Progress was irregular in assisting the countries in Southeast Asia to develop toward stable, free representative governments with the will and ability to resist communism. The danger that any of them may pass into the communist orbit varies from country to country. Thailand, Viet-Nam and the Federation of Malaya maintained an anti-communist position. A drift toward political confusion in Burma was interrupted by General Ne Win's accession to the premiership and his immediate stand against communism. The Lao Government withstood neutralist and communist efforts to overthrow it, eliminated communists from cabinet positions and took initial steps toward countering communist political and subversive progress in the countryside. Its prospects of successfully warding off communist subversion and achieving stability have improved considerably since the low point reached in the May elections, but genuine non-communist unity has not yet been achieved. Cambodia, while maintaining its neutral position, made a swing to the left in recognizing Communist China and then Prince Sihanouk tried to balance this move to some extent with a visit to the United States. In Singapore the moderate governing Labor Front failed to improve its position. In the future it may be seriously threatened by the extreme leftist People's Action Party which has shown increased evidence of popular support.

b. Slight progress was made in a second objective of persuading the countries that their best interests lie in greater cooperation and stronger affiliations with the rest of the free world. Under SEATO satisfactory progress continued on both the military and civilian sides of the organization. The Military Planning Office in Bangkok developed a comprehensive plan for combined SEATO military exercises in FY 1959. Informal political consultation improved and was characterized by the active participation of all of the members. Particularly noteworthy was the improvement in the material produced by the Public Relations Office.