RG 59 GENERAL RECORDS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SUBJECT NUMERIC FILES, 1970-73
POLITICAL & DEFENSE

FROM: **POL 23-2 THAI**

TO: **POL 29 THAI**

BOX 2624

NWDPH-2 1997

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

POL 29

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND969044

SANITIZED COPY
SENSITIVE
INFORMATION DELETED

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

Original to be Filed in _____ Decentralized Files.

Pol 30 Thai

FILE DESIGNATION

DISTRIBUTION

S 26

AF	ARA
NEA	CU
P	IO
AID	
FRB	INT
TR	XMB
NAVY	OSD
CIA	

DISTRIBUTION

ROUTING

Info.	Initials

HANDLING INDICATOR ~~SECRET/NOFORN/EXDIS~~ A-523 NO.

TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

RECEIVED
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
SEP 8 8 24 AM 1970
OPR/IS
RS/AN
ANALYSIS BRANCH

INFO : PARIS

FROM : AmEmbassy BANGKOK

DATE: September 4, 1970

SUBJECT : The Problem of Pridi

REF : A. Bangkok 9735

B. Bangkok 9868

C. Bangkok 11182

SUMMARY Since former Prime Minister Pridi Phanomyong left China for Paris in May of this year, the question of his future residence and activities has concerned both his friends and enemies in Thailand. Pridi's friends include Governor of the Bank of Thailand Puey Ungphakorn (who was associated with Pridi when the latter from his position as Regent led the underground movement against the Japanese during World War II) and other former students of Pridi at Thammasat University. They would like to see Pridi remain in France or some other western country, rather than return to China. Some of them eventually hope to see him return to Thailand, with his reputation rehabilitated from the shadows cast by the circumstances of his flight from Thailand and long residence in Communist China. A few would foresee an active role for him in Thai politics at some point in the future. Pridi's opponents, who include most of the leaders of the present Government, the Royal family, and the leaders of the largest opposition party (Democrat), are suspicious of his motives and inclined to see in his latest moves evidence of his intention of returning to an active role in Thai politics. The Government is obviously not prepared to see him return to Thailand at this point, and some are sensitive to the possibility that he might settle in the United States.

Dispute over Identity Papers

[redacted] Pridi surfaced last May from his long exile in China, when he applied to the Thai Embassy in Paris for a Thai

1970 SEP 8 PM 12 32

COPYFLO-PBR

FORM 10-64 DS-323

~~SECRET/NOFORN/EXDIS~~

For Department Use Only
☐ In ☐ Out

Drafting Office:	Drafting Date:	Phone No.:	Contents and Classification Approved by:
EA:RAMcLendon:rs	9/2/70	411	POL:LGPickering

- Mr. Horgan

☆ U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1966 O - 202-219 (258)

Declassified
Authority: 28141
By: John Clagett
Date: 07-29-2014

141 DocId: 954933 FOIA(b)(1) STATE

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND969044

FOIA(b) (1) STATE

passport and identity papers proving that he is still alive. Pridi had travelled to France on a "Titre de Voyage pour les Etrangers" which was issued in Peking on April 22, 1970, valid for one year. He did not appear in person at the Thai Embassy, but apparently submitted his request for identity documents by letter.

Pridi needed proof of his identity to present in his long-standing libel suit against the Bangkok daily, Siam Rath (see A-423, July 30, 1969 [redacted]. Although he had won the suit in the lower courts, the case reportedly was appealed to the Supreme Court on the grounds that none knew whether Pridi was alive or not. Pridi also had filed claim for a pension from the Thai Government, for which he needed proof of his existence.

The response of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to Pridi's requests initially was unfavorable, for on July 8 the Bangkok Post reported that Pridi had filed suit for damages against Foreign Minister Thanat and Ambassador to France Phairoj Jayanama for refusing to certify that he was still alive. In the suit, Pridi reportedly claimed 100,000 baht for his expenses in traveling from China to France to establish his identity for the purpose of collecting his pension. Whether the suit influenced the RTG's position is not clear, [redacted] the RTG decided July 14 to issue identity papers to Pridi when he appeared in person to apply for them. "Normal legal procedures" would be followed in Pridi's request for a passport. (Under Thai law the Government has considerable discretionary authority in issuing or withholding a passport.) On August 27 Chao Thai daily reported that the Foreign Minister had filed written testimony in response to Pridi's suit, stating that Thanat had never refused to issue a certification that the plaintiff was alive, but that the plaintiff had not complied with the regulations of the Thai Embassy in Paris requiring that he appear in person to make his request. Chao Thai reported August 28 that the Court had set September 18 and October 9 for hearings on the case.

Along with other legal moves on Pridi's behalf, his attorney, Wichai Kantamara, wrote to the Embassy August 10 requesting return of jewelry stolen from Pridi's wife, Poonsook Phanomyong, during Pridi's official visit to the United States in 1946.

Birthday Observances

Shortly after Pridi appeared in Paris, his friends in Thailand celebrated his 70th birthday with ceremonies in Bangkok and Ayutthaya (Pridi's birthplace). [redacted] over 70 Buddhist monks, and about 200 friends and relatives attended the ceremonies in Bangkok. About 100 were present at Ayutthaya. At both occasions, letters from Pridi expressing gratitude for the ceremonies were read to the guests, and copies of an article by Pridi, "What is Philosophy", were distributed.

Press Flurry

No press reports appeared on Pridi's birthday celebrations, and only brief and circumspect accounts of the suit against Thanat. However, when a

W#:28141 DocId:954933
SANITIZED COPY
SENSITIVE
INFORMATION DELETED

DECLASSIFIED
Authority

HE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND969044

mentally unbalanced Member of Parliament from Ayutthaya, Atinart Kuanpot, suggested that Pridi be invited to return to Thailand to serve as an "elder statesman" in negotiating with Communist China, the press apparently considered that the lid was off. The press flurry reported in Bangkok 9735 continued over the space of two weeks, with most of the Bangkok newspapers featuring comments elicited from Thai leaders and citizens on the subject of Pridi.

The freedom of press coverage on the always sensitive subject of Pridi reached its apparent height in two articles in the Bangkok World's "roving reporter" series of interviews with the man in the street. On August 4 the roving reporter's question was "Should Pridi be permitted to return to Thailand?" (Most of the interviewees thought Pridi, as an old man and a Thai, should be allowed to spend his last years in Thailand -- but only if he stays out of politics.) On August 22 the roving reporter sounded out Thammasat University students on reported efforts by a group of students at Thammasat to establish a foundation to build a wat in Paris named for Pridi. (Most of the students queried had not heard of the proposed foundation, or seemed not to know anyone involved in the effort. The Embassy also has heard very little about the proposed foundation, and believes that what is referred to may be the efforts of Dr. Puey and other former students of Pridi's to collect money for the wat Pridi wants to build in Paris, as reported below.)

RTG Attitude

The attitude of RTG officials, as revealed in their statements to the press, was guarded but clearly hostile. Deputy Prime Minister Praphat Charusathiera, as reported in Bangkok 9735, commented that Pridi "ought to know his own situation, and should be fearful of returning." Prime Minister Thanom told the press August 5 that he had not prohibited Pridi from returning to Thailand. Thanom said Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, before his recent trip to Paris, had "asked for permission to see Nai Pridi Phanomyong in Paris and offered to convey any information to Nai Pridi." Thanom said he had replied that "he had nothing to say to Nai Pridi, but only wanted to warn the latter not to cause any trouble in this country." By way of underscoring, the Prime Minister's remarks on the message to Pridi were carried in the official Thailand News Bulletin August 6. In language more to the point, "reliable police authorities" were quoted by the Evening Post August 7 as saying that they would arrest Pridi as a "security threat" and detain him "for serious questioning" if he returned to Thailand.

Pridi's Friends

Comments by Pridi's friend, former student, and his follower in the wartime underground movement against Japan, Bank of Thailand Governor Puey Ungphakorn, were given full play in the English-language press of August 14 and in Thai-language newspapers the two days following. Puey was quoted

NW#:28141 DocId:954933

SANITIZED COPY
SENSITIVE
INFORMATION DELETED

DECLASSIFIED
Authority

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND969044

FOIA(b) (1) STATE

as saying that Pridi wants to return to Thailand "but he realizes there are obstacles." Puey said he discussed a number of subjects with Pridi in Paris, but he declined to discuss them until he had a chance to meet with the Prime Minister. Puey emphasized that Pridi is not a communist, and "did not do what the communists would like him to do," although he was grateful to the Chinese for allowing him to live in China. Puey also made a point of Pridi's attachment to Buddhism, saying that Pridi wants to build a Buddhist wat in Paris, and that he would like to enter the monkhood temporarily. He commented that Pridi knew many monks who would be willing to come to stay at his wat. Puey himself and other former students of Pridi would donate funds for the wat, he indicated. Pridi is healthy and "in full command of his faculties," Puey was quoted as saying, and "seems to know more about what is going on in Thailand than I myself."

In private conversations, Puey has spoken more frankly of Pridi's views on the current situation in Thailand and in Southeast Asia. From Puey's conversation with the Ambassador (see memcon dated August 6), [redacted] it appears clear that Pridi is apprehensive about what will happen to Thailand if or when the United States withdraws from Southeast Asia. Pridi believes that Thailand, by joining the United States in the Vietnam war, has exposed herself to the enmity of both the Chinese and the North Vietnamese. He believes that Thailand must begin shifting to a genuinely neutral position and seek an accommodation with the Chinese. He told Puey that he has always believed the only way to save Thailand from communist domination is to adopt a socialist system of government and abolish the monarchy. He thinks now it may be too late for that. In any case, he is convinced that accommodation with China would be impossible for the present Thai Government. Pridi appears to be well informed on the several emissaries the RTG has sent to talk to the Chinese, but believes no emissary from the present Thai Government would be acceptable to the Chinese. Puey had the impression that Pridi considered it possible that he (Pridi) might eventually be called upon to negotiate an accommodation with the Chinese.

What Pridi intends to do about the dire situation he perceives is not clear. [redacted] Puey, acting under Pridi's instructions, spoke to a group of former members of Pridi's World War II Free Thai movement on or about August 5. Puey reportedly told the group that Pridi feared Thailand could not remain independent much longer under present circumstances, and that he would not be able to help as he did during World War II. Pridi asked his old friends to study the situation and try to find solutions to the problems Thailand faces. Pridi may have intended no more than a personal message sharing with his friends his concern over the situation in Thailand, or he may have intended his message as a call to action. There have been in recent weeks scattered indications of some beginnings of a political movement related to Pridi, but there is as yet no hard information on these activities or on the individuals who may be involved.

m

NW#:28141 DocId:954933

SANITIZED COPY
SENSITIVE
INFORMATION DELETED

DECLASSIFIED
Authority

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND969044

FOIA(b)(1) STATE

Dr. Puey's role in relation to Pridi appears to be completely open and aboveboard. He was careful to inform Prime Minister Thanom of his intention of seeing Pridi before he left for Paris, and to report on his discussions with Pridi after he returned. [redacted] Puey, as an economist, a "technocrat" and respected public servant, has always stayed out of politics. It is not likely that he would become involved in a political movement, particularly covert political activities, at this stage. Puey appears anxious to prevent Pridi from returning to China, where his presence enables Chinese propaganda to portray him as hostile to the U.S. and a supporter of the Chinese Communist objective of overthrowing the present Government of Thailand. (See MemCon of August 6) Puey would like to arrange matters so that Pridi can stay in some western country, whether or not he can return to Thailand in the near future.

RTG and Court Views

Whatever Pridi's own intentions may be, his actions and those of his friends have aroused suspicions among RTG leaders that he may be preparing for a disruptive role in Thai politics. The ceremonies celebrating Pridi's 70th birthday were interpreted by RTG police officials as the first moves toward political organization. Pridi's plans for building a wat in Paris, and the efforts of his friends to collect funds for such a purpose, while unexceptionable traditional behavior for an aging Thai gentleman, may also be interpreted as moves to build a favorable public image for Pridi as a devout Buddhist and non-communist, if not actually a front for political activities.

On the question of Pridi's future residence, RTG leaders clearly are opposed to allowing Pridi to return to Thailand, and some are sensitive to the idea that Pridi might visit the United States. Minister of Economic Affairs Bunchana Atthakor stressed to the Ambassador July 31 the unwisdom of inviting Pridi to the United States and the serious disruption that would result if Pridi returned to Thailand. (See MemCon of July 31). Bunchana appeared to be relaying a message, probably from Prime Minister Thanom. [redacted] On the other hand, Judge Sanya Dhammasakdi, reflecting the views of conservative circles, and possibly of the King, told the Ambassador August 13 that a visit by Pridi to the United States might be worthwhile as a demonstration that Pridi had cut his ties with the communists. (See MemCon of August 13).

Conclusion

It is hard to conceive of a political movement by Pridi gaining much ground in Thailand, in view of RTG suspicions and, presumably, close surveillance. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that either the leadership or popular base for such a movement exists today. Pridi, after all, has been out of Thailand for more than twenty years. To most younger Thai, he is a figure in Thai history whose record as Prime Minister and behind the scenes leader of government was none too impressive. His former supporters are old men,

NW#:28141 DocId:954933

SANITIZED COPY
SENSITIVE
INFORMATION DELETED

DECLASSIFIED
Authority

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NN0969044

like himself. Many of his former students respect him and would like to see his reputation restored, but few of them would be willing or able to support effectively a political movement led by him.

Should events in this area develop so as to portend greatly increased Chinese Communist influence in the near future, more people would take an interest in Pridi as a possible "way out". But the King's attitude alone is enough to show how disruptive an adjustment of that sort would be.

In the meantime, the problem of Pridi's future residence remains a problem for his friends and possibly for the RTG. France, with its ambivalent policy toward China and Southeast Asia, appears the logical residence for Pridi, at least for the time being.

UNGER

NW#:28141 DocId:954933
SANITIZED COPY
SENSITIVE
INFORMATION DELETED

(1)

DECLASSIFIED
Authority

AL ARCHIVES