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PART III OF

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: January 29,

SUBJECT: Soviet and Chinese Aims in SEA and French Policy in the Area

PARTICIPANTS:

H.E. Anand Panyarachun, Thai Ambassador to the United States
Mr. Wichian Watanakun, Thai Embassy Counselor
Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Arthur W. Hummel, Jr., Deputy Assistant Secretary EA
Alf E. Bergesen, Acting Director for Thailand and Burma Affairs

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Ambassador Anand inquired about the Soviet aims in Southeast Asia in the event there was relative peace in the area. Mr. Green said that it was evident that the USSR for the past six or seven years at least had been uncertain about what it wished to do in and with Southeast Asia. Soviet policy in Indonesia and the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine both were evidence of this uncertainty. Mr. Green thought Soviet objectives were:

(1) to prevent an increase in PRC influence in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean area;

(2) to augment Soviet influence;

(3) to maintain or increase Soviet influence with Hanoi as compared with PRC influence there;

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(Drafting Office and Officer)

Approved: EA - Mr. Green

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(4) possibly, to increase trade.

However, the overall objective was not specific. The Soviets were uncertain where they were going but counteracting PRC influence remained basic. Mr. Hummel pointed out that the Soviets have fumbled many opportunities in the area. Mr. Green discussed some of the failures of the PKI and the Soviet aid efforts in Indonesia. Even today the Soviets continue to villify Suharto and the Indonesian armed forces.

Mr. Green considered that the basic dilemma for the Soviets was that they did not wish to help Peking-oriented Communist parties which predominate in the area. The Soviets could not penetrate these parties because the Soviets themselves were not Asians; but they could not oppose them for fear of criticism that they were sabotaging Communism.

Ambassador Anand then inquired about Peking's aim. Mr. Green replied that it was not a direct takeover of countries in the area but rather support, which could not be too overt, of Communist parties and forces in the area. Peking could be expected to continue propaganda and training support for Communist movements but it could not be too overt because such support would clash with the five principles. The Chinese, Green noted, were abandoning subversion in several parts of Africa and helping governments in the area; the Chinese objective apparently was to become the leader of the developing world and they were pursuing an anti-great power line.

Mr. Green emphasized that the PRC was worried about a number of internal problems of which the conflict between extremists and moderates was only the most obvious. He believed that China was far less stable than it appeared on the surface. He expressed the opinion that these problems might make China somewhat more tractible; although Chinese objectives had not changed, tactics had, and over a long enough period major changes might occur. More was done in China for internal reasons than we normally realized. The Chinese leadership felt it had to make a good record with its own people and it continued to fear the Soviet Union.

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With respect to the Pak Beng road in Laos, Mr. Green noted that there were a large number of theories about why the Chinese were building it. He doubted that it was solely or even largely for the purpose of supporting insurgents in Thailand (Ambassador Anand agreed). Mr. Green thought that a basic purpose of the considerable Chinese road building effort in border areas was to protect the security of China by facilitating control of forces friendly to the PRC. It was also probable that the road gave China leverage against Hanoi and Moscow.

Ambassador Anand inquired about the French role in Cambodia and in Indochina in general. Mr. Green characterized it as "troublesome". He felt that there was considerable resentment of US influence by the French and that they were anxious to regain their former leading cultural influence in the area. He suggested that there was a division within the French foreign affairs establishment. French Ambassadors in the field were generally helpful and understanding but the theoreticians and political leaders in Paris were much less so.

Reverting to the question of Sino-Soviet differences in Southeast Asia, Mr. Green considered it was evident that the Chinese would like to draw the Soviets into a major public relations defeat in Southeast Asia. It seemed that the Chinese, for example, had asked publicly what the Soviets, who had paraded their naval power in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, could do after Haiphbng was mined.