REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

DEPT. DISTRIBUTION

ORIGIN ACTION
EA-3

RS/R 1	REP	AF	ARA
EUR 5	FE	NEA	CU
INR 6	E	P	IO
L	FBO	AID	
AGR			INT
LAB	TAR	TR	XMB
AIR 5	ARMY 3	NAVY 7	OSD 34
USIA 10	NSA 3	CIA 16	NSC 6

RETURN TO MSG CENTER

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION

ACTION
EA
EAP
RA
UN
LABOR
POL/MIL
SENSO

ROUTING

TO	Info.	Initials
EA/PER		
EX/DIR		
ACA		
IND/D		
ANZ		
ECON		
MS		
IND		
PHIL		
JAPAN		
KOREA		
ROC		
SEA/D		
LAOS		
CAMBODIA		
FILE		
Action Taken:		
VN		
ESA		
Date:		
Initials:		

35

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

Original to be Filed in _____ Decentralized Files.

Ref 15 Thai

FILE DESIGNATION

SECRET — HANDLING INDICATOR — A-333 — NO.

TO : Department of State

RECEIVED
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
JAN 3 1 12 PM 1972

INFO : CINCPAC, DIA, CANBERRA, DJAKARTA, HONG KONG, ISLAMABAD, KUALA LUMPUR, LONDON, MANILA, PARIS, PHNOM PENH, RANGOON, SAIGON, SEOUL, SINGAPORE, TAIPEI, TOKYO, VIENTIANE, WELLINGTON

FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK

DATE: December 21, 1971

SUBJECT : First Month of NEC Rule

REF : Bangkok 16951

SUMMARY. In its first month in power, the military leaders who set up the National Executive Council have maintained the requisite degree of unity, although there has been some in-fighting among them. No significant opposition has appeared elsewhere. We expect the NEC will be given a fairly generous honeymoon period with longer term reaction dependent in large part on their performance. There is some tension in relations between the NEC leadership and the Monarchy which bears close watching. The NEC has stressed most heavily the theme of law and order. This and other themes telling of and promising reformed and more effective government have been played regularly and consistently in a quite impressive public information campaign. The policy-making and executive levels of government have had much of their attention absorbed by organizational activity. New "permanent" administrative and constitutional structures are being pondered at the same time as more temporary ones are being put together. Administrative disarray, especially at the policy-making level, inevitably accompanies this process. END SUMMARY.

1. So far, the military leadership which set up the NEC - Thanom, Praphat, Krit, Dawee and Prasert - has maintained unity, although there has been some in-fighting among them. Of the five, Prasert is probably least

SECRET

For Department Use Only
☐ In ☐ Out

FORM 10-64 DS-323

Drafted by:	Drafting Date:	Phone No.:	Contents and Classification Approved by:
POL:LGPickering:HFCole-baugh:HYMLee:sh	12/17/71		POL:LGPickering

Clearances: POL:KFBull POMIL:GFMuller ECON:NLSmith MACT:JJGibbons
USOM:FFSimmons DAO:FABarringer USIS:LPate DCM:EEMasters

* U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1966 O - 202-219 (233)

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

happy with the way things have worked out, but there have been no public manifestations of this from him and there is no indication at present that he will create any serious problems.

2. There is increasing evidence that Praphat and Krit took the initiative to convince Thanom of the need to carry out the take-over of power, and our earlier assessment (Bangkok 15587) that Praphat and Krit are the principal gainers of power remains valid.

3. Despite rumors of a possible counter coup to be led by dissident junior military officers, which is one of the constants of the Thai political scene, there is no hard evidence that such a group is actually forming. Support for the abolition of Parliament is virtually universal among the Army officer corps, and the fact that it was done no doubt eased some of the frustrations among that group. Sources of frustration remain, however, primarily because of the continued freeze on significant movement within the hierarchy resulting from the recent extension of Marshal Thanom's tenure as Supreme Commander. Pressures on Thanom to step down from this role are continuing. This would open the way for movement upward of Praphat to be Supreme Commander and Krit to be Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and a whole series of consequent promotions. The fact that the NEC has given office only to the aging leadership, to the exclusion of Army area and other troop commanders, is another source of frustration.

4. Among the technocrats, always a key group in Thai government and politics, little dissent has appeared concerning the abolition of Parliament. In the main they are engaged, through the device of numerous working groups or otherwise, in devising new programs and organizations for the NEC. It should be recognized, however, that although there is no consensus among this group, there is a considerable element of skepticism about the ability and the will of the military leadership to bring about significant change. There is also a growing frustration among them with the bureaucratic delays attendant on the extensive reorganization currently going on.

5. There are indications that the government may seek to bring Puey Ungpakorn in to be Chairman of the NEDB Executive Committee, a move which would greatly contribute to re-engaging the enthusiasm

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

of this group, especially those engaged in economic work, but there will be resistance to this from some quarters. Failure to produce new leadership and to resolve organizational problems could lead to disillusionment and possible demoralization among the technocrat group with adverse consequences for the quality of future government and administration.

6. University students and faculty have with few exceptions remained outwardly passive. If the NEC sticks to its timetable for establishing a constitutional drafting group, and if the latter moves with reasonable speed, no significant political pressures are likely from this group. Some of the more activist students will become restless at unreasonable delay, however, and they and some young faculty members, having had a taste of political activity, may not remain as docile as their counterparts of a decade ago were satisfied to do.

7. One of the points where manifestations of objection to the suppression of Parliament and more particularly of political discussion is likely to appear first is among elements of the press. Having been warned of the dangers of criticism, and no longer being able to serve as sounding board for members of Parliament, political parties, seminars among university and government people, etc., these elements must inevitably be feeling somewhat frustrated.

8. Kukrit Pramoj, owner of the most influential Thai language daily (Siam Rath) and a leading opinion maker, has already begun the game of testing the government's patience which he has played with such skill under similar restrictions in the past. Others are sure to follow his example and the boundaries of government patience will be tested in various fields before many weeks pass.

9. Kukrit's principal test of the boundaries so far took the typical form for him of a response to a letter from a reader, this time a reader proposing the restoration of the absolute monarchy. Kukrit's reply contained a modification of this proposal calling for a sharing of power between the monarchy and the people through democratic institutions. This is an old ideal in Thai politics, particularly within the Democrat Party, but its resurfacing at this moment has caused considerable comment.

10. This is true in large part because it is widely known that the King was unhappy over the precedent set by the military leadership

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

in making their move without giving him specific prior indication of their intentions. Although he has subsequently confirmed their claims of having his blessing by means of a letter to Field Marshal Thanom (Bangkok 16291), the cool although correct tone of the letter added to the conviction of some that he remains unhappy with the recent events, even though he had himself been persuaded that something was needed to make for more effective government.

11. This situation poses some dangers for continued political stability for the longer term. What is known and assumed about the King's attitude, including his reluctance to see General Praphat move into the top leadership position, could give an aura of legitimacy to opposition maneuvering. Should serious dissidence appear among the military, they could of course seize upon this as a pretext for their action. It is not inconceivable that the King himself might be tempted to take a greater role in the political arena, a move which most observers feel would be dangerous both for the institution of the Monarchy and for continued political stability in Thailand.

12. All of this again focuses attention on the importance of the King during the next few years, when the aging military leadership will inevitably be passing power to other hands. How the King uses his very great influence will be of great importance in determining how smooth the transition will be. The King is venerated by almost all of the Thai people, many of whose attitudes toward the Monarchy are virtually religious in nature. This, plus the fact that it is above all the Monarchy more than any other single factor which has the ability to legitimize government in Thailand, gives the King great political influence. However, it is a form of influence which can be effectively applied in the arena of politics and administration only with great subtlety and which cannot without extreme risks be thrown into the political balance against the kind of political power and influence wielded by the Army leadership. The King's oft-demonstrated skill in handling delicate situations and his otherwise very great promise, at a point in history when he is some ten years younger than the youngest of the current military leadership, is one of the hopeful aspects of the Thai political scene.

13. In presenting its case to the public, the NEC has placed the greatest emphasis on the theme of law and order. They took

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

immediate action against criminal and so-called "hooligan" elements. Two summary, public executions of murderers have been the most dramatic manifestations of this. The reinstitution of martial law, the placing of virtually all felonies under the jurisdiction of the military courts (ref 15494), and the extensive public relations effort to publicize statistics indicating reduced crime rates have contributed to convincing the population that the government has acted firmly and successfully on this issue.

14. The NEC has established a generally good public information program under the leadership of Lt. Gen. Chalermchai Charuvatr. Although it has been restrained and low key in making promises, the increased dissemination of information - and the fact that the government is now speaking with one voice - appears to have achieved some success in portraying a sense of movement and action in government affairs. In addition to law and order, releases have dealt with traffic and pollution control, road and transportation conditions, and other matters which daily affect the population at large.

15. The NEC has also brought about almost a moratorium on public criticism of the government. The press - duly warned, to be sure - has been basically favorable to the stated aims of the NEC. The result has been to give the NEC a period of time to put its plans into effect without the constant harassment of the press or political groups. This turning off of the high noise level has also added to the sense of restoration of order and stability.

16. Concrete legislative achievement has been relatively sparse. One of the first acts of the NEC was to pass the fiscal year 1972 national budget, which was some two months late already and faced further delays in the Parliament. This permits the government to initiate programs which otherwise could not have started until the budget was passed (ref 15685), with attendant beneficial economic effects.

17. In addition to the above actions the NEC has also announced its intentions to move in a number of other fields. Among these are announcements concerning the status of drafting an interim constitution, decision not to increase bus fares, intention to set up regional labor offices to deal with unemployment, intention to promulgate an Alien Occupations Act, launching a foreign investment campaign, plan to institute an austerity program in government, plan to use Buddhist monks as teachers in public

DECLASSIFIED
Authority

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

schools to alleviate teacher shortage, establishment of National Farmer's Association for rice policy control, intention of raising salaries of civil servants and doctors, plans to unite Bangkok and Thon buri under one city administration with accompanying improvement in city management, anti-corruption instructions to ministries, intention to suppress illegal tree cutting, and intention to cut luxury imports.

18. The policy and executive levels of government have been almost completely absorbed in organizational activity. The present arrangement of ministries into four directorates or "super ministries" went into effect on December 9 (Bangkok 16048), and will presumably serve until an interim constitution is promulgated. In fact the process of setting it up is still going on, and policy making as well as inter-ministry coordination are in many cases moving at a snail's pace. One of the greatest challenges the NEC faces is to effectively complete this reorganization process without completely losing the sense of momentum they have created up to this point. In addition to organizing itself for the present, the leadership is investing considerable time in longer term plans for reorganization of the Ministry of National Development and probably other areas as well.

19. With respect to constitutional organization, indications are that the interim constitution will closely resemble that put in force following the October 1958 coup. The Chairman of the NEC has foreshadowed (Bangkok 15661) that one departure from the 1959 constitution would be to separate the interim legislative body from the constituent assembly. In a Nation interview December 8, Dr. Somphob Hotrakit of the NEC's legal advisory board said that there is overwhelming support from NEC legal experts to assign powers to the new legislative assembly only to draft laws. Work on the permanent constitution would be reserved for a separate committee comprised of "qualified legal experts and top NEC officials."

20. Likely to be included in the new interim constitution are the wide-reaching powers granted the Prime Minister in article 17 of the 1959 constitution, which gives him the right to order any action to suppress internal and external threats to the national security.

21. Foreign policy has apparently remained frozen in patterns existing on November 17. Statements about Thai foreign policy, which were

DECLASSIFIED
Authority

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

emanating from every direction, have utterly ceased. Our estimate continues to be that the present "two track diplomacy" described in Bangkok 15363 will continue to be pursued, and that matters of deepest interest to the U.S. will be handled as before.

22. Popular reaction to the changes wrought on November 17 continues to be favorable or passive. In the Bangkok metropolitan area, despite the overwhelming support given to the Democrat Party, there has been little evidence of opposition to the takeover by the NEC. The public has reacted very favorably to the law and order theme. Business and commercial classes seem to approve in the belief that business will somehow be easier to conduct and that some red tape will be cut. Furthermore what is known so far of the NEC policies seems generally to be in line with what the business community wants (airgram concerning more specific economic aspects follows).

23. Despite the extensive attention given to the Chinese community in the first days after the change (Bangkok 15585, para 22), there has been no action taken against the Chinese and the reaction of the latter is similar to that of the Thai. (A fuller report on the community is in preparation).

24. The passive to favorable provincial reaction reported in Bangkok A-522 continues to prevail. While the NEC in its later orders has concentrated on urban problems, the rural communities have not been neglected. Provincial crime rates have also dwindled.

25. The NEC has said that it intends to cope energetically and urgently with the problems of economic and political development in rural areas, particularly in insurgent-ridden provinces in North and Northeast Thailand. The most pressing are land title problems, elimination of corruption and inefficiency among local officials, and more equitable distribution of economic benefits among the peasantry who comprise the bulk of Thailand's population. To the extent that the central government is unable to deal effectively with these problems, the communist insurgent may be expected to exploit the situation. Now that a channel of communication has been cut with the abolition of Parliament, disgruntled villagers have lost what in some areas was a popular alternative course to express their grievances. This is likely to be particularly serious in the Northeast, traditionally the source of anti-government movements and the home of the more radical former opposition MPs.

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

26. As noted in Bangkok 16258, the structure of the Thai counter-insurgency effort has been virtually unaffected by the November 17 change in government. NEC Chairman Thanom and others have made public statements that speedy and drastic action will be taken against communist terrorists. However, no real change has as yet been discernible. It is a hopeful indicator that the FY 72 budget passed by the NEC contains a considerable increase in funds for counter-insurgency related activities.

CONCLUSION: The NEC has managed to create an impression of good performance during their first month although this is perhaps more because of improved public information than by concrete action. Their action of November 17 puts in store certain future problems, some of which may prove more serious and difficult in the longer term than the ones allegedly solved by the action. For example, if frustrations among lower echelons in the Army continue, military malcontents may be more ready to resort to coups as a method of changing the leadership than if constitutional government had not been abrogated on 17 November. Popular reaction may seem inexplicably calm, until one recalls that very few of the Thai people outside the very limited intellectual circles feel that their own personal freedom -- admittedly limited, but nonetheless considerable -- have been significantly affected, and that many of them probably regard November 17 as marking the end of a deviation from the political norm rather than the beginning of one.

UNGER

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____