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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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TO : DEPARTMENT OF STATE

INFO : SAIGON, VIENTIANE

FROM : AmEmbassy BANGKOK

DATE: JULY 29, 1971

SUBJECT : Continuing Thai Reaction to Pentagon Papers Disclosures

REF : A. Bangkok 9492

B. Bangkok 8894

SUMMARY: RTG leaders remain deeply concerned over the future course of Thai-US relations and the future of the U.S. as a responsible world power in the wake of the Pentagon Papers disclosures which they find appalling. RTG leaders have made known their feelings publicly and have put on the record by diplomatic note their warning to the United States against future disclosure of government-to-government confidences. Local editorial and columnist comment has been heavy and has stressed the following themes: a) anxiety over future US-Thai relations in view of US inability to guard secrets; b) support for the right of US newspapers to publish Pentagon Papers once disclosed; c) worry over the future course of the US as a nation. END SUMMARY

RTG leaders continue to voice privately and publicly their deep concern over the possible adverse effects of the Pentagon Papers on future Thai-US relations and on the functioning of the United States Government and American society in general. During the recent visit of Dr. Kissinger, Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn expressed his concern that the Supreme Court decision permitting the newspapers to continue publishing the Pentagon study would make "things" difficult. In his conversation with Dr. Kissinger, Deputy Prime Minister Praphat stated that the American people seem to be subverting their own country and were exhibiting weak morale. RTG military leaders are clearly worried that the full ramifications of Thai military assistance to the Royal Lao Government may be bared to the public eye. In a recent discussion with an Embassy officer,

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General Surakij Mayalarp, Royal Thai Army Chief of Staff, pointedly asked "Can the United States Government protect our military secrets?"

The RTG has officially indicated its concern over the publication of the Pentagon Papers in a July 6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Note handed to Charge Newman on July 12 (see reftel A). The RTG publicly announced the passage of this Note to Charge Newman and referred in general terms to the Note's criticism of the Pentagon Papers disclosures but did not reveal that the Note also contained criticism of the Lowenstein/Moose revelations to the U.S. Senate regarding classified aspects of RTG assistance to Laos. Local press commentary on the Note observed that the US Government had done all that it could to prevent further publication of the Pentagon Papers disclosures. According to the July 15 Bangkok Post Deputy Foreign Minister Sanga Kittikachorn pointed out that the Note was a "representation" rather than a "protest" in which "we are giving a warning to the US against further disclosure of confidences." Sanga reportedly characterized the publication of the Pentagon Papers as "an act of irresponsibility...done without any thought of the probable repercussions for Thailand and other friends of the US."

Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman has also publicly expressed his views on this subject. Speaking to a group of Chulalongkorn University students on July 9, Foreign Minister Thanat indicated that the RTG would be protesting to the United States the disclosure of the Pentagon Papers on the basis that these disclosures were damaging to the stability of Thailand and violated diplomatic and political etiquette. Thanat stated that the disclosures had made Thailand a target for increased communist attack by revealing some (unspecified) government to government secrets. The Foreign Minister commented that the United States Government itself was most damaged by the disclosures which revealed to the world that it was not able to safeguard its secrets. He suggested that if secret documents are disclosed, they should be disclosed in full and not exerpted for publication. Thanat further revealed that he was at present considering a request received from the editor of the New York Times that he write an article giving his views as to whether the disclosures would or would not have repercussions for Thailand.

The Pentagon Papers disclosures triggered an outpouring of local editorial and columnist comment which has tapered off in the past week. Most editorial comment has revolved around two main themes: a) concern over future Thai-US relations given the apparent inability of the US to guard its state secrets and (b) support for the right of US newspapers to publish the Pentagon Papers once disclosed. The Bangkok Post in a July 5 editorial combined these two themes in declaring it was the duty of the US newspapers to publish the Pentagon Papers for public information, but then went on to call for the punishment of Ellsberg, stating the view that if he were not punished, the allies of the United States could no longer confide in American leaders since their secrets would not be safe from

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newspaper disclosure.

Some columnists have viewed the Pentagon Papers disclosures as revealing the present "sick condition" of US society. A Siam Rath columnist viewed the disclosures as indicating the deterioration of democracy in American society which was at present "extremist" and "disunited". A few columnists have played up allegations that the Pentagon papers "proved that the United States Government was lying to its people" regarding the situation in Vietnam in order to question the validity of US defense commitments to Thailand.

The clandestine communist radio Voice of the People of Thailand has drawn on the description in the Pentagon Papers of Air America planes being flown by Thai pilots over Laos in 1964 to bolster its continuing allegations of "Thai aggression" in Laos.

COMMENT: Thai reaction to the Pentagon Papers thus far has reflected more sorrow than anger perhaps largely because the papers released thus far have contained no passages seriously embarrassing to the RTG. The lasting impact upon the Thai of the Pentagon Papers disclosures will be determined by their estimate of their effect upon the United States as a society, and upon United States policy in Asia. In that regard, the episode has added significantly to growing doubts within the RTG and Thai intellectuals about the reliability of the United States as an ally and the viability of US policy in Asia.

NEWMAN