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SECRET

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THAILAND

Thanat Khoman

Pronunciation: TAH-NAHT KOH-MAHN

Should be addressed as: Your Excellency; or Mr. Minister

Should be referred to as: His Excellency Thanat Khoman;
or Foreign Minister Thanat

Thanat Khoman, Minister of Foreign Affairs since February 1959, is recognized as one of the most outstanding Asian statesmen. A strong supporter of U.S. policy in Vietnam, he has been a leader in promoting the new spirit of regional economic, cultural, and political cooperation. He played a skillful behind-the-scenes part in helping to mend relations between Malaysia and Indonesia, and has also taken the lead in numerous regional efforts to bring Asian states together for mutual economic advancement and political exchange, such as the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Association of Pacific States (ASPAC), and other less formal groupings.

Thanat has frequently displayed sensitivity and resentment toward what he considered unjustified and harmful criticism of Thailand by American Congressmen, journalists and intellectuals. He has occasionally expressed his displeasure strongly in meetings with U.S. officials. This has in no way detracted from his record of working closely with the United States Government on common goals mutually recognized as essential.

He is noted for his volatile temper and independent mind, having clashed on many occasions with military leaders who dominate the Thai cabinet and offered his resignation several times, perhaps partly as a tactic to confirm his indispensability and secure the support of the Prime Minister. In 1966, he expressed a strong interest in being elected to a judgeship on the International Court of Justice, and he would probably still aspire to such a nomination as evidence of international recognition. An important motivation in his makeup is believed to be a hunger for prestige and respect, and he has demonstrated this trait by displaying great sensitivity regarding the protection of Thailand's sovereignty in its relations with the United States.

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Thanat Khoman was born on May 9, 1914, the son of a former Chief Justice of Thailand, and thus comes of an aristocratic background. He attended Assumption College preparatory school in Thailand and continued his studies in France at the Lycee de Bordeaux and the Faculty of Law of the University of Paris, where he received a docteur en droit degree in 1939. He entered the Thai Foreign Service the same year, first serving in Tokyo. During the early years of World War II he left for Ceylon, contacted the Southeast Asian Command, and joined the resistance movement against the Japanese. Before becoming Ambassador to Washington, Thanat served in India, in Bangkok with the Foreign Ministry, and at the United Nations in New York.

He married Molee Khoman in the mid-1940's. They have two daughters, Thavida and Monthira, who are now students at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts, and one son, Thiravudh, now a student at the Hotchkiss School, Lakeville, Connecticut.

Thanat speaks fluent English and French.

EA/TB:CJNelson

April 1968

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