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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

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Date: September 26, 1973
10 a.m.
Place: USUN

9/26/73

Subject: Secretary's Conversation with Thai Deputy Foreign Minister

Participants: Thailand: H.E. Chatchai Chunawan
Deputy Foreign Minister

H.E. Anand Panyarachun
Thai Ambassador to the UN

Mr. Phan Wanamatee
Director General Political Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Asa Sarasin
Private Secretary to the Minister

United States: The Secretary

Ambassador Leonard Unger

Acting Assistant Secretary
Arthur W. Hummel, Jr. - EA

Ambassador Robert McCloskey

L. Nicholas Ruwe
Assistant Chief of Protocol

Alf E. Bergesen
Deputy Director, EA/TB

Minister Chatchai opened the conversation by extending greetings to the Secretary from Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn, which the Secretary reciprocated. He gave the Secretary a wrapped gift.

Cambodia

The Secretary (in reply to Chatchai's question): In Cambodia everything depends on the military situation there. If the government holds, we believe negotiations will start. We are giving all the help now that we can. This is the key; they should be given all possible support. There is no negotiation now going on and we will tell you if negotiations start.

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We are not interested in Sihanouk now. He keeps announcing he won't see me. I have news for him: I won't see him. Either there is a stalemate that leads to negotiations, or one side wins. There are no contacts between us and Sihanouk. If, when I am in Peking, the Chinese offer a solution preserving the basic interests of the Phnom Penh government along the lines of the Laotian solution, I might consider seeing him. We are not now talking to the Chinese (about Cambodia) either, and you should not look for any dramatic developments.

Deputy Foreign Minister Chatchai: I might explain why, in the Thai government's opinion, the insurgents have not yet taken Phnom Penh. After the bombing ended, they were disorganized; it will take them six months to get back in shape. They (the insurgents) lack the food to feed two million people. Most of the area is now flooded and it is hard to move troops. We believe they could seize Phnom Penh if they wanted to.

The Secretary: In the Thai view, can the Phnom Penh Government get strong enough so that the insurgents could not seize Phnom Penh?

Chatchai: Yes, if the US continues to help.

The Secretary: The Chinese are practical and realistic. They dealt with me when the US was bombing Hanoi. The reason the Chinese deal with you (the Thai) is that they are afraid of Thai participation in the Soviet collective security system. Under present circumstances you can't really offend them. The Soviets want a collective security system partly to encircle China. We do not favor this. Europe is a different situation. In Europe there are two groupings, more or less equal in strength. In Asia there is a variety of governments, but not a balance of power. I am not sure what the Soviet collective security proposal means in Asia.

Chatchai: (Cambodian Foreign Minister) Long Boret has told us that among the insurgents roughly 40% are pro-Moscow, 20% pro-Hanoi, and 40% pro-Sihanouk. We are concerned about the extension of Soviet influence in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.

The Secretary: We are not very concerned about the Soviets in Southeast Asia. Frankly, in the long run, we can jointly handle the Soviets there. The Chinese could be a problem if they become aggressive, but they are not now, because they are weak.

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U.S. Forces in Thailand

Chatchai inquired about the withdrawal of US forces from Thailand.

The Secretary: Tell me, who is it that wants the troops out? Both Thailand and the US keep psychoanalyzing the other, and guessing what the other side might want. Our position is that if it would help the Thai domestic situation, we are willing to reduce our forces. If it would help the Thai internationally, we will keep them there. Please tell us what you really want. Don't decide on the basis of trying to guess what we want.

Chatchai: We are not asking for withdrawals while the situation is uncertain. If there is no North Vietnamese withdrawal from Laos, then the US should not withdraw from Thailand. The Thai people wonder whether it is the US that wants to stay on, or is the Thai Government asking the US to stay (i.e. in the latter case there would not be a problem.)

The Secretary: The US is willing to make adjustments. There will be Congressional pressure for reductions but we can handle that.

Ambassador Anand: We would like to see a modest withdrawal, down to 32,000.

The Secretary: Where do we stand now?

Ambassador Unger: There are about 38,500 US forces now in Thailand.

The Secretary: Do you want us to reduce our forces to 32,000 and do you also want us to pull out some strategic forces?

Chatchai: Yes, we wish for you to return to the pre-NVN offensive (1972) level, and to pull out some of the strategic forces.

Relations with Hanoi

Chatchai: What are US contacts with Hanoi?

The Secretary: There is some dialogue, but it is mostly about prisoners and occasionally about economic aid. We won't give them aid as long as there are Vietnamese troops in Laos and Cambodia and there is no cease-fire in Cambodia. We have exchanges with them about the ICCS. But there are and will be no secret

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negotiations with Hanoi that affect you (the Thai). We will keep you informed. We trust you will do the same. There are also lots of exchanges on Laos.

Chatchai: What about the SGU's?

The Secretary: We have an almost unmanageable Congressional problem.

Ambassador Unger: We are OK on this issue through June 1974. (It was noted that there may be a problem about these forces after that.)

Chatchai: What should be done if North Vietnam does not withdraw from Laos? Should the Thai withdraw (the SGU's) completely?

The Secretary: Speaking frankly, I would prefer that you did not. I need to talk to Senator Stennis about this, however.

U.S. Bilateral Assistance to Thailand

Chatchai: What about US aid to Thailand; both military and economic assistance?

The Secretary: Be assured that we will do the maximum Congress will permit. Deputy Secretary (of Defense) Clements is looking into the question of what equipment can be left behind (by US forces withdrawing from Thailand) and he will have full State and White House backing on this.

We will do the absolute maximum Congress permits. We have no problem (between Thailand and the US) of substance; we fully understand Thai needs, but we face a difficult Congressional situation.

Further Meetings

The Secretary: I am sorry to have to leave to hear Chancellor Brandt's address. Later I am giving a dinner for all delegations; I hope to see you (Chatchai) there.

Chatchai: I look forward to it. I would like to see Gen. Haig in Washington.

The Secretary: Yes, I would like for you to see Gen. Haig.

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