REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

7319512

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S October 16, 1973

EA/TB 10/26

10/16/73

CONFIDENTIAL

TO: The Secretary

FROM: EA - Arthur W. Hummel, Jr.

Thailand Situation and Outlook

The situation in Thailand is calm again and there are no auguries of renewed disturbances in the near future. Prime Minister Sanya has named a new cabinet that appears likely to enjoy general popular respect and government operations should soon be back to normal. A preliminary assessment of the new cabinet is attached.

The new cabinet is largely composed of civilian technocrats and will probably function in a non-spectacular caretaker fashion pending promulgation of a new constitution, promised in about six months, and subsequent parliamentary elections. The public, including students as well as civilian bureaucracy seem happy with the new order but many may wonder how long it can fend off another return to military rule.

These recent events have revealed that Thanom and Praphat and the military system they represent were unpopular to a degree not previously appreciated. Their forced departure from Thailand appears to have been a necessary precondition to restoration of law and order.

Praphat and Narong are now in Taipei and Thanom is coming to the US. The RTG has no objection to our admitting Thanom and his family. The departure of these unpopular leaders has greatly reduced the

POL 15-1 THAI

CONFIDENTIAL
GDS

EA/TB: JB Dekker: amw

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

possibility of a military coup against the Sanya government in the near future. Army Commander-in-Chief Krit, who has been designated "Director for Maintenance of Public Peace and Order", is now the most powerful military leader left in Thailand and is apparently cooperating with the government. The strategic power positions of Supreme Commander and Deputy Supreme Commander vacated by Thanom and Praphat are likely to be abolished in favor of a US-type staff system more amenable to civilian control. Reduced military influence in the government is also reflected by the fact that only five military or police officers on active duty are represented in Sanya's 28-member cabinet.

The new regime will probably not want to make major changes in Thai foreign relations, including relations with the US. Sanya and his colleagues are all members of the establishment and are not known to be critics of Thanom/Praphat foreign policies or of the existing pattern of US/Thai relations.

On the other hand, the conditions that produced the overthrow of the old regime make it likely that the new one will be more sensitive to public opinion, especially that of the students and intellectuals. Given the critical attitudes many of them have demonstrated toward the Thanom/Praphat relationship with the US and of our military presence in Thailand we can expect them to exert effective pressure on the government to accelerate the schedule of US force reductions and to display a more independent position vis-a-vis the US.

In general, recent developments have probably given impetus to sentiments in Thailand pushing the country toward a more independent and neutral international role. However, because of the temporary character of the new government and the types of individuals in the cabinet, it is likely to behave cautiously and to avoid rocking the boat. Dramatic new foreign policy initiatives are therefore not to be expected unless severe public pressure develops.

In internal affairs, the Sanya government will probably also avoid dramatic change of policies. After it gets used to running things, however, it may prove

DECLASSIFIED
Authority _____

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969044

somewhat more efficient and effective in government administration. It may also be more honest. We would expect it to give more emphasis than the previous regime to economic and social development relative to the military.

The survivability of this caretaker government is by no means certain. However, we would bet on its lasting for at least several months and probably until a new constitutional system has been instituted. It is the product of a potent alliance between the King and the students, who have probably emerged as permanent new power factors on the Thai political scene. A premature military effort to overthrow this government would be a direct challenge to the King and would run the risk of drawing militant students once again to Bangkok for another bloody confrontation.

We also consider it unlikely that extremist elements in the student population or in the public at large will try to unseat the new government, even though they might find it, from a substantive policy point of view, only slightly better than the previous regime. Barring a major new issue and inept handling by the government, extremists would have difficulty gaining support from the main body of students, who are probably satisfied with the substantial victory they have already won. Common sense should also dictate that the best way to bring military rule back would be to provoke new disorders.

Attachment:

Assessment of the New Thai Cabinet

EA/TB:JBDexter:avw
10/16/73 21741

DECLASSIFIED
Authority