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TO : Department of State

FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK

DATE: February 27, 1970

SUBJECT : Thanat: Southeast Asia After Vietnam

REF :

In a February 4 speech to Chulalongkorn University faculty, Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman discussed problems and uncertainties which beset the nations of Southeast Asia in their dealings with the large powers, and his somber view of the way these relationships will probably develop in the future. He devoted a major portion of his speech to the thesis that, as the United States can no longer be counted on to render decisive assistance to threatened nations, those nations must look to their own defenses.

Thanat cited the lesson learned in Vietnam that superior military force does not in itself guarantee victory over a guerrilla force, and said that because it has learned this lesson, the United States will in the future provide only technical and material assistance to assist Asian countries combat insurgencies. He gave his approval to this approach, and went on to say that if Vietnamization had been carried out from the beginning -- especially with respect to the bombing raids over North Vietnam -- American and world public opinion would not have turned decisively against the United States involvement in the Vietnam war. The "nuclear umbrella" concept of defense was dismissed by Thanat with the argument that the U.S. would only use nuclear weapons in

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response to a nuclear attack, the enemy would not use nuclear weapons to attack the free nations of Asia, and therefore nuclear power can have no effect in any political/military situation in Asia.

Thanat said, "though the American administration has asserted many times that it will not pull out of Asia and the Pacific, it is impossible to know what action the U.S. would take in case (overt) aggression is committed in this region." Citing the Church Amendment, he said "though the leaders of world powers, such as the United States, still assert they will honor and carry out commitments under treaties still in force, the final decision on any action taken depends on Congress, especially the Senate, which might or might not allow action to be taken under treaty commitments."

Thus, according to Thanat, when the Vietnam war is concluded, a power vacuum will develop in Asia, which might be filled by any of the following:

a) by the countries of the region, joining forces,
b) by the Chinese Communists, either by themselves or in league with North Korea and North Vietnam, or
c) by the Soviet Union, which would like to prevent Communist China from expanding her influence in the area.

Thanat stressed the importance of the Asian nations filling the vacuum themselves, to keep outside countries from dominating the area.

Thanat told his audience that Asia in the post-war period will be faced with serious economic and social problems, as well as the political problems already mentioned. The economic problems stem from what he calls "economic colonialism". He predicted that, "in the end, less developed countries will be only consumer countries, exporting their raw materials to the industrial countries, which will then re-export the manufactured goods to us, adding the cost of labor, transport, insurance and profit...." As proof of his contention that wealthy countries use their economic power to put pressure on poor countries, Thanat cited the recent aborted rice sale to South Vietnam. "Fortunately," he said, "the gods did not side with the country that was in the wrong and they still felt pity for Thailand, resulting in the cargo ship which had been ordered to change its route and deliver its cargo of rice to South Vietnam meeting with an accident at sea. This caused an acute shortage of rice in South Vietnam, enabling Thailand to sell its rice to that country." (This refers to a sale of Thai rice to South Vietnam, which was made possible because a ship loaded with American rice destined for Saigon went aground.)

Turning to the effect on Thailand of (1) having American troops stationed here, and (2) having them leave, Thanat alleged that

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