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STANDARD FORM NO. 64

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Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

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TO : FE - Mr. Robertson

DATE: June 23, 1958

FROM : SEA - Eric Kocher

SUBJECT: Conversation with Field Marshal Sarit, Monday, June 23, 10:00 a.m.

Field Marshal Sarit will pay a farewell call on you Monday, June 23, at 10:30 a.m., accompanied only by his aide Colonel Chalermchai. It is hoped this call will provide an opportunity to conclude Sarit's Washington visit on a pleasant note. The Thai Ambassador is not believed to be aware of Sarit's departure plans, and it would probably be tactful not to refer to him during the conversation. (All except a very few Thai are being told Sarit is visiting California to inspect oil installations.) It is suggested that you speak slowly and with frequent pauses for translation, since Colonel Chalermchai, who has not translated for us before, will interpret on this occasion.

Health

You may wish to open the conversation with the remark that the President and all Field Marshal Sarit's American friends are gratified at his excellent recovery following his serious operation.

Written Reply to Sarit Memoranda

We suggest that you state that, if the Field Marshal desires a written reply to his memoranda, as we have been told, we shall be glad to provide one. We believe that such a reply can be handed directly to him, shortly after his return to Bangkok, by Ambassador Johnson. We have in mind a short letter transmitting a brief memorandum (Tab A). This memorandum would summarize the discussions which have taken place in Washington along the following lines:

Political

U.S. Government representatives have studied the memoranda carefully and appreciate the opportunity to exchange views on the subjects covered therein. They are much impressed by his concern for the welfare of his people, his realization of the value of the Communist threat to Thailand, and his recognition of the value of Thailand's SEATO membership. They hope that discussions of his proposals for countering Communist subversion may continue in Bangkok in order to strengthen existing problems designed to achieve this purpose.

Military

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24 August 1958

Memorandum of Conversation

Date: 21 August 1958

Participants: General Phao Sriyanond, Former Director General of Police and Minister of Interior, Thailand.
John R. Burke, Third Secretary, Embassy Bangkok

At approximately 1100 hours on the 21st of August I was waiting at Ciampino Airport, Rome to board Alitalia flight 420 for Geneva. While I waited I suddenly noticed that one of my fellow passengers was to be General Phao Sriyanond, former Director General of the Police and Minister of Interior of Thailand. I had met the General on two or three occasions in Bangkok before the September Coup, and so, as the flight was called away and I found myself walking beside him toward the aircraft, I reintroduced myself and asked him how he'd been. He was most cordial; he shook my hand warmly and asked me to sit with him when we had boarded the plane. During the two-and-a-half hour flight, the General talked freely on a variety of topics.

When he discovered that I'd left Bangkok as recently as 19 August, General Phao asked me about the city and how it had changed. I volunteered certain information about how buildings had gone up or been modified since September and how, generally, the city and the country had appeared to me on my departure. Then, with little or no prompting from me, the General took over the conversation and began to expound on several subjects.

First he explained that he had been in Rome for the last ten days (approximately 11 through 21 August) to visit with an old friend of his from Bangkok who had come there to meet with him. This man the General described as a prominent Democrat, but he did not give his name. They had had some pleasant talks and this individual, whom Phao implied had been sent by Khuang Aphaiwongse, the leader of the Democrat Party, had brought him up to date on the political situation in Bangkok.

Next General Phao mentioned Field Marshal Sarit. He was aware that Sarit had left Bangkok for London and word had reached him (through Colonel Chalermchai) that the Field Marshal wanted to arrange a meeting with Phao in London. Phao said he was luke-warm to this idea and he told Chalermchai that if Sarit was serious about a meeting he should set it up through the Thai Ambassador in Bern. (Phao said that he had frequent contact with the Thai Ambassador to Switzerland, traveling to Bern as often as once a week.)

Phao explained his reluctance to meet with Sarit in this way: "I am now a political bachelor and I want to remain so just now. When the situation

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clears a little in my homeland, then I will decide with whom to ally". He said that Pibul, too, had sent word from Tokyo that he wanted to meet him, but Phao had declined this invitation, telling Pibul essentially what has been quoted above.

At this point I asked him when he intended to return home, mentioning for his amusement the various reports carried in the vernacular press which had placed him all over the world, even in Vientiane. He smiled at this last and said that such a report sprang from the fact that he had a good friend in Laos in the person of Prince Petsarath. But he said that he hadn't left the European continent since September. He has made side trips out of Geneva to Italy, France and Germany but he has not stirred further. As to future traveling, he said that he had in mind a trip to the United States late this year and that he had high hopes of returning to Bangkok early in the new year. At that time he will decide where his political fortunes lie and will give his support to that faction he considers most deserving, "perhaps to Sarit, or to Pibul, or to Khuang -- or to the King".

In response to my observation that it had always seemed that the King was above politics, the General said that the King and the Royalists had been interfering more and more in recent years. "Three years ago", he said, "they approached me seeking my aid in an attempt to overthrow Pibul." He said that it appeared that they had become bolder since September. From junior officers of the Coup Group who had contacted him in Geneva he learned that resentment between the two groups -- Royalist and Military -- was growing. He said it was not at all beyond the realm of possibility that the monarch would be deposed by the Military if the Royalists persisted in their efforts to become a force in politics. He said the recent arrest of Kukrit Pramote was a symptom of this growing bitterness, and then he went on to say (as if the name Kukrit had brought it to mind) "that Seni is the key to the Royalist movement. I had spies in his house and often I had reports of the King coming in the night to visit him secretly." Then he stated that apparently the King was not unprepared should he lose in his contest with the military. When the Princess Mother came to Geneva on her recent trip she had fourteen heavy cases in her luggage which Phao thought were either gold or jewels exported against the day when the King might be forced into exile.

When I commented that he seemed well informed about events in Bangkok, he acknowledged the fact and said that he had many correspondents. For example "when I return now to Geneva, forty or more letters will have piled up in the ten days I've been gone." When I asked him if he also received newspapers, he admitted that he received many of them, too. I asked him what he thought of the Field Marshal's recent troubles with ISSARA and he smiled. "I've received every issue of that paper since it first appeared. It is very good and very popular." He was vastly amused by the charges that USIS was sponsoring it, but he did not admit that he was ISSARA's "angel".

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During our talk the General made several random comments about various political figures in Thailand. Those that I remember are quoted below:

General Thanom: "The Prime Minister doesn't have it in the head."

Pote Sarasin: "He is my friend, and he speaks English very well, but he is a fancy fellow without much substance."

Police General Chamras: "He is a good man and he was loyal to me, but because he likes the British he tells them everything."

General Praphas: "Sarit is afraid of him."

General Phao was very animated throughout our conversation and he seemed willing to talk on any subject without reticence. He looked extremely well, being nattily attired in a tan tropical worsted suit which, he proudly showed me, had come from S. and W. Rice in Washington. When I remarked how fit he looked, he said that his doctor had ordered him to hold his weight at 80 kilograms and that he was successfully doing that. Lunch was served on our flight but the General didn't eat his, explaining that he had called Madame Phao from Rome and had promised to have lunch with her. He did, however, manage to drink four bottles of Italian beer on the flight. He looked prosperous, too. At one point in our conversation I mentioned the advantages of living in Geneva and enjoying a free money market similar to the one which exists in Bangkok. He agreed and producing his billfold, he said, "These are the best things to have there. They are better than gold." And he showed me a sheaf of at least ten $1,000 bills.

When we arrived in Geneva the General was met by a young Thai whom he didn't bother to introduce. He offered me a ride to my hotel in his car, but I declined, being unwilling to take him out of his way. Failing this, he invited me to have dinner with him and Madame Phao the following evening, but unfortunately because of my travel arrangements it was impossible. On parting he promised to call on me in Paris when I was settled there.