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Bangkok Tel. 126

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S E C R E T SECTION ONE OF TWO BANGKOK 126

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PARIS FOR SECDEF

SUBJ: OVERALL APPRECIATION OF SITUATION IN THAILAND

REF: BANGKOK 125

1. THERE ARE FOUR MAIN ELEMENTS AFFECTING THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THAILAND: (A) THE INSURGENCY; (B) MILITARY MOVES BY THE COMMUNISTS IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA; (C) THAILAND'S INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION, AND (D) U.S. ACTIONS AND POLICIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

2. INSURGENCY: THE INSURGENCY IN THAILAND, WHILE STILL LIMITED GEOGRAPHICALLY TO A FEW SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS, HAS SPREAD SOMEWHAT AND INTENSIFIED DESPITE RTG EFFORTS TO COPE WITH THE PROBLEM. THE INSURGENTS ARE RECEIVING GENERAL DIRECTION, EXTENSIVE PROPAGANDA SUPPORT AND LIMITED FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT FROM COMMUNIST CHINA AND NORTH VIETMAN. WHILE NOT A CRISIS SITUATION IN THE SHORT TERM, THE PROJECTION IS DISTURBING AND THE SITUATION SHOULD BE RECEIVING MORE PRIORITY ATTENTION FROM THE THAIS IN ORDER TO REVERSE RECENT ADVERSE TRENDS. PART OF THE PROBLEM IS THE FOCUS OF BOTH CIVIL AND MILITARY ATTENTION ON THE MANY OTHER PROBLEMS BRIEFLY DESCRIBED IN THIS MESSAGE, AND THE FAILURE OF BOTH TO PERCEIVE THE INSURGENCY AS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ATTENTION AND REMEDIAL ACTION, AND GENERAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS.

3. CAMBODIA AND LAOS: RTG LEADERS CONSIDER THAT ADVERSE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN CAMBODIA AND LAOS HAVE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR THAILAND'S SECRUTIY. DIFFERING CONDITIONS IN THE TWO CONTRUIES, HOWEVER, DICTATE DIFFERENT MEANS BY WHICH THE THAIS SEEK TO MEET THIS PROBLEM.

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A. LAOS: IN SPITE OF RECURRING COMMUNIST MILITARY PRESSURES IN LAOS THE THAIS HAVE NOT BECOME DIRECTLY AND OPENLY INVOLVED WITH THEIR FORCES BECAUSE OF THE NEUTRAL STATUS OF LAOS PRESCRIBED BY THE GENEVA ACCORDS OF 1962. THE THAIS HAVE, HOWEVER, COVERTLY PROVIDED SOME REGULAR FORCES ON AN AD HOC BASIS TO REINFORCE THE DEFENSE OF NORTHERN LAOS AND HAVE RECENTLY WORKED OUT WITH US AND THE LAO GOVERNMENT A NEW ARRANGEMENT INVOLVING THAI BATTALION COMMANDOS (FORMERLY REFERRED TO AS SGUS) WHICH ARE EXPECTED TO REPLACE THE REGULAR THAI FORCES IN THE NORTH AND ASSIST IN THE INTERDICTION OF THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL IN THE SOUTH. THAI PARTICIPATION IN THIS ARRANGEMENT DEPENDS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, ON OUR CONTINUED PROVISION OF AIR AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT. IF A MORE SERIOUS COMMUNIST THREAT THOUGH LAOS SHOULD DEVELOP, THE THAIS WOULD FEEL OBLIGED TO CONSIDER OPEN INTERVENTION WITH REGULAR FORCES, BUT THIS WOULD POSE FOR THEM THE SAME DILEMMAS AS ARE DISCUSSED BELOW IN CONNECTION WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF OPEN INTERVENTION OF THAI FORCES IN CAMBODIA.

B. CAMBODIA: THE THAIS FEAR THAT OVERT COMMITMENT OF REGULAR THAI GROUND FORCES AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS IN CAMBODIA, IF NOT FOLLOWED BY A DECISIVE COMMUNIST DEFEAT, MIGHT LEAD TO HOSTILITIES EXTENDING INTO THAILAND ITSELF. FURTHER, THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT SUCH ACTION WOULD ENTAIL COSTS FAR BEYOND WHAT THE THAI BUDGET COULD CONCEIVABLY ABSORB WITHOUT EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE. MOREOVER, THAILAND HAS NEITHER A LOGISTIC SYSTEM NOR AN AIR CAPABILITY ADEQUATE TO SUPPORT SUCH ACTION. THUS A DECISION TO COMMIT GROUND FORCES IN CAMBODIA WOULD DEPEND ON THE THAI ESTIMATE OF OUR WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO BACK THEM UP IF THE NEED SHOULD ARISE, TO PROVIDE SOME LOGISTIC AND AIR SUPPORT AND TO SUPPLY MATERIAL ASSISTANCE TO SUPPLEMENT THE CONSIDERABLY EXPANDED OUTLAY THEY WOULD BE REQUIRED TO MAKE THEMSELVES. THUS WE ARE LESS SANGUINE IN OUR ESTIMATE OF THE ALACRITY AND CERTAINTY WITH WHICH THE THAIS WOULD RESPOND TO A CALL FROM CAMBODIA FOR OVERT INVOLVEMENT OF GROUND FORCES. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE WOULD BE LESS QUESTION ABOUT THE THAIS' RESPONDING FAVORABLY TO A CALL FOR GROUND FORCES IN CAMBODIA ALONG SOMETHING LIKE BATTALION COMMANDO LINES (AS IN LAOS) OR FOR AIR SUPPORT OPERATIONS, ASSUMING WE WERE PREPARED TO PROVIDE SOME OF THE REQUISITE SUPPORT.

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4. INTERNAL POLICIES: THE INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION AS IT AFFECTS TOP LEADERSHIP COULD HAVE SIGNIFICANCE FOR THAI NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY AND EVEN MORE FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THAT POLICY. THANOM'S INDECISIVENESS IS INCREASINGLY CRITICIZED AS THAILAND'S PROBLEMS BECOME MORE SERIOUS, AND THE CHANCES SEEM GOOD THAT HE WILL STEP DOWN BEFORE THE END OF 1971. IT IS GENERALLY ASSUMED THAT GENERAL PRAPHAT WILL BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER. THEN THE CHANGE COMES, IT WILL BE APPARENT IN THE STYLE OF GOVERNING RATHER THAT IN POLICY, WITH PRAPHAT EXPECTED TO BE A FIRMER AND MORE DECISIVE LEADER, ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT LESS POPULAR THAN THANOM. IF PRAPHAT COMES IN WE BELIEVE THAT SUCH CHANGES AS MAY COME ABOUT IN THAI POLICY WILL BE A FUNCTION OF THE CHANGES IN THE SITUATION IN THE REGION AND OF U.S. ACTIONS RATHER THAN OF CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP.

5. U.S. POLICIES IN ASIA: ONE ASPECT OF THAILAND'S SITUATION WHICH COULD DICTATE IMPORTANT CHANGES IN THAI POLICY IS THEIR VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED STATES ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THEIR FIRST PREFERENCE WOULD BE TO CONTINUE THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. THAT THEY HAVE HAD NOW FOR 20 YEARS. HOWEVER, THE THAIS FEEL THAT THE STRONG TREND OF THE U.S. CONGRESS FOR RAPID DISENGAGEMENT FROM OVERSEAS INVOLVEMENTS, ESPECIALLY IN S.E.A., AND THE IMPACT OF THIS ON THE MANING OF TREATY COMMITMENTS AND ON APPROPRIATIONS FOR MILITARY PROGRAMS CREATES DOUBT ABOUT PRACTICALITY OF MAINTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP. ALONG WITH THE DRAWDOWN OF U.S. FORCES AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A MORE DRAMATIC SHIFT IN U.S. POLICY, THIS IS LEADING THE THAIS TO A REEXAMINATION OF THEIR FOREIGN POLICIES. WE MAY SEE THAILAND FOLLOWING A GENERALLY MORE "INDEPENDENT" FOREIGN POLICY, ACCOMPANIED BY SOME DELIBERATE EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE INTENSITY OF U.S.- THAI COOPERATION AND TO PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE U.S., AT LEAST UNTIL THEY FEEL REASONABLY SURE OF THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF U.S. POLICY. IT IS IN THI LIGHT THAT WE INTERPRET RECENT THAI STATEMENTS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER COMMUNIST POWERS.

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6. THAI ATTITUDES TO ASIAN COMMUNIST POWERS: THE THAIS WILL PROBABLY INTENSITY THEIR SEARCH FOR OTHER COUNTERWEIGHTS TO COMMUNIST CHINA AND NORTH VIET-NAM AND WILL BECOME LESS RIGID IN THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD HANOI AND PEKING WHILE LOOKING FOR A LIM MODUS VIVENDI WITH THESE FORCES. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE CLOSE GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY OF CHINA AND ITS ENORMOUS SIZE AND OVERALL STRENGTH, PLUS THE FACT THAT THERE IS A LARGE UNASSIMILATED CHINES COMMUNITY IN THAILAND, THAILAND WOULD FIND IT MOST DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT A CHINESE COMMUNIST DIPLOMATIC MISSION, AND ALL THAT GOES WITH IT, HAVING IN MIND HOW GRAVELY THIS COULD UNDERMINE THAILAND' CONTROL OF ITS OWN TERRITORY AND POPULATION.

7. THAI ATTITUDES TOWARD U.S. MILITARY OPERATIONS: THE THAI REALIZE THAT THEIR OWN SECURITY IS INITIMATELY TIED UP AT PRESENT CONTINUATION OF U.S. SUPPORT OF FRIENDLY FORCES IN LAOS, VIET-NAM, CAMBODIA, AND THAT OUR ABILITY TO PROVIDE THIS SUPPORT, PARTICULAI IN THE AIR, IS GREATLY INHANCED BY ACCESS TO THAI BASES. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE THAI WILL ATTEMPT TO MAKE ANY DEALS INVOLVING WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. ACCESS TO THAI BASES UNLESS THEY SHOULD COME T CONCLUDE THAT A TOTAL AND IRREVERSIBLE U.S. WITHDRAWAL IS UNDER W THEN THEY WOULD BE TEMPTED TO TRADE THIS WASTING ASSET FOR WHATEV COULD BE OBTAINED. AT THAT SAME TIME THEY WOULD BEGIN TO TERMINAT A WHOLE COMPLEX OF ARRANGEMENTS AND PRIVILEGES WE HAVE ENJOYED IN THE INTELLIGENCE AND COMMUNICATIONS FIELDS.

8. ECONOMIC SITUATION: COMPLICATING THE SITUATION ARE THE ECONOMI PRESSURES WHICH ARE GROWING IN SEVERITY. THESE ARISE PRIMARILY OU OF THE DEPRESSED MARKET FOR THAILAND'S RICE AND RUBBER, BUT THEY EXACERBATED BY THE REDUCTIONS IN U.S. MILITARY SPENDING WHICH ARE OCCURRING COINCIDENTALLY. THE SERIOUS TRADE IMBALANCE HEIGHTENS THAI INTEREST IN OPENDING TRADE CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNIST COUNTI CONNECTIONS WHICH ALSO HAVE IMPORTANT POLITICAL CONNOTATIONS. THI ECONOMIC PRESSURES WILL HEIGHTEN THAI SENSITIVITIES TO OUR ECONO AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE LEVELS AND HAVE ALREADY LED TO SHARP CRITICISM OF U.S. DISPOSALS OF SURPLUS RICE UNDER THE PL-480 PROGRAM TO OTHER ASIAN NATIONS WHICH HAVE CUSTOMARILY BEEN THAI MARKETS.

9. CONCLUSION: THE THAIS ARE IN THE PROCESS OF ADJUSTING TO A NEW SITUATION LARGELY NOT OF THEIR OWN MAKING AND OVER WHICH THE CAN EXERCISE BUT MARGINAL INFLUENCE. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VARIAB IN DETERMINING THE NATURE OF THE ADJUSTMENTS THEY WILL ULTIMATEL MAKE ARE THE VARIOUS FACETS OF U.S. POLICY IN ASIA AND ITS FUTUR DEVELOPMENT. GP-3

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