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DATE NOV 16, 1973

FROM : American Embassy BANGKOK

SUBJECT : General Prachuab's Plans to Improve the Thai National Police

Date of Action

REF : Bangkok 17058

Action Office

Info Office

1. In the wake of mid-October's events in Bangkok, the Thai National Police have emerged somewhat demoralized. Public and press criticism of police tactics allegedly used during the "Bloody Sunday" (October 14) period has caused some loss of public confidence, resulting in generally low police morale. While public censure has abated, municipal elements have only gradually and hesitantly resumed full duties as reflected in recent higher crime figures. General Prachuab Suntrangkoon, Director General of the TNPD and Deputy Minister of Communications in the interim Sanya Government (reftel) recognized these problems in an interview published in the Bangkok Post November 4. Prachuab openly discussed shortcomings in the police and pledged to correct deficiencies. He said that he was determined to remove the police from the political arena and to turn the department into a force for genuine public service. Citing the need to restore discipline within police ranks and to eliminate certain entrenched (corrupt) practices and attitudes within the department, General Prachuab frankly aired substantive police problems and plans for corrective measures and his hopes for the future.

2. On restoring public confidence in the police Prachuab cited several aspects of police-public relations needing improvement. Police must carry out their duties in accordance with the law, he said, and must not extort or take money from anyone. He acknowledged the difficulty in putting this into practice and suggested such reforms must start at command levels. To gain public respect police must be fair and just, showing no special consideration to those in positions of influence. Noting the recent political shifts Prachuab remarked that "in a democracy the system of influence and special privilege has no place."

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3. Regarding the role of police in society, General Prachuab noted that proper police discipline had long been neglected. General department (dress, carriage, behavior) and proper habits (no drinking, gambling while on duty) should be emphasized from the moment police cadets enter training. Once again, individual commanders were called upon to set the example.

4. On the subject of police corruption and ways to uproot it, the Director-General said he had ordered investigations of officers against whom such allegations have been made and promised prompt, heavy punishment for wrong-doers. He suggested policemen were inclined to corrupt practices because of low salaries and incomes but realistically noted the substantial financial burden if the RTG were to grant across-the-board raises. Improved welfare services for police (better housing, health and family educational benefits), he opined were alternative measures for reducing corruption. Prachuab agreed that policemen visibly living beyond their incomes were likely receiving "protection money" but that such practices were deeply imbedded in police attitudes and behavior from the time they entered training at Samphan Police Academy. He typified the attitude of Academy graduates, "during my first year I must get a car, during my second year I must get something more and so on". This is wrong he averred. Introduction of curriculum changes at Samphan stressing the primary importance of being a good policeman and developing proper attitudes is in the discussion stage.

COMMENT: General Prachuab appears determined to improve the police image. He has accurately identified many of the endemic problems which have limited more effective police performance, and given public notice that future malfeasance will be harshly dealt with. He is also realistic in girding for the long haul since such patterns are ubiquitous within the department. Given the key security role assigned to the police in villages, and their close contacts with the people, any enduring improvement in police performance and reputation is a basic condition for a successful RTG counter-insurgency program.

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