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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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TO : Department of State

INFO : SAIGON, VIENTIANE, CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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FROM : Amembassy BANGKOK DATE: October 1, 1968

SUBJECT : The "US Presence" and the Thai Elections

REF : State Tel 236621 Pol 18-1 Thai Pol 14 Thai

SUMMARY

The period of return to constitutional government in Thailand and, now, of preparation for national elections has increased the tempo and broadened the scope of political discussion, on domestic matters and to a lesser degree on Thai foreign relations. The US figures prominently in Thai assessments of the prospects for their security and progress, not only because of the variety and magnitude of our programs in the country but because of rather widespread recognition of the essential role played by the U.S. in Vietnam and through the Southeast Asia region generally.

Social and economic stresses associated with the substantial "US presence" continue to disturb the Thai. The "fever chart" appears fairly stable at present but is subject to sudden fluctuations in response to dramatic and essentially unpredictable incidents. The Thai continue to evaluate our presence in the light of the purposes for which we are here. We believe our support of Thai security and rural development efforts is widely appreciated but there is awareness (perhaps greater than in the US) that most of the military forces are here for conduct of the Vietnam war. As long as the Thai believe that US policy towards Vietnam and the future stability of the region remains constant and therefore also serves Thai goals, we believe the inevitable frictions associated with our lengthening stay will not become serious to the point of undercutting essential relationships.

The present governing group, which will "go to the country" on the record of having tied Thai and US interests so closely together, will not wish

GROUP 4
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