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SUBJECT: ASEAN NEUTRALIZATION PROPOSAL

LIMDIS

REF: (a) Bangkok 15268; (b) Bangkok 15273; (c) Manila 10563 (d) Moscow 8472; (e) Djakarta 9922; (f) Singapore 2772 (g) Manila 10637

1. SUMMARY: Thai draft of proposed ASEAN declaration proclaiming SEA a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality could cause difficulties both for some SEA nations and for US. Likelihood that ASEAN Foreign Ministers conference will issue such a declaration is rapidly diminishing. Essential problem

DRAFTED BY:	DRAFTING DATE	TEL. EXT.	APPROVED BY:
EA/RA:RWethercut:chg:bc	11/17/71	22420	EA - Mr. Green

EXCISE
D-Roderic O'Connor (draft)
R/REA-Mrs. Barnett
J-Mr. Ericson (draft)
/PHIL-Mr. Usher
/VN-Mr. Bennett (draft)
D/ISA-ADM Flanagan
Mr. Irwin (sub.)
/S - Mr. Curran

S/PC-Mr. Grant (draft)
EA/ACA-Mr. Jenkins (draft)
EA/LC-Mr. Pratt (draft)
EA/TB-Mr. Dexter
L/EA-Mr. Starr (draft)
NSC-Mr. Holdridge

EUR/SOV/Mr. Perry
EA/P-Mr. Magruder
EA/MS-Mr. Grant
EA/TB-Mr. Masters
PM/Mr. Barger Brown
EA/RA-Mr. Moore
EA/Mr. Barger
WH-Mr. Kissinger

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is to avoid exposing nations of SEA to takeover by Communists or fuelling pressures within US for premature removal of US shield. END SUMMARY

2. Following is Dept view of proposed ASEAN neutralization declaration based on text of Thai draft resolution (reftel B). Helpful reporting from posts in ASEAN countries (reftels) has highlighted differing views of SEA "neutralization" and degree of confusion generated by [redacted] neutralization proposals among members themselves, raising doubts in our mind that ASEAN Foreign Ministers at Nov. 25-7 conference in Kuala Lumpur will accept the Thai draft or even issue a "neutrality" declaration in any form. Reftel G indicates Romulo plans to propose at meeting that subject be tabled and, if necessary, studied by ad hoc committee.

EMBASSY BANGKOK: Please advise soonest your impression of impact governmental changes on RTG sponsorship of draft resolution, and participation at Kuala Lumper meeting.

3. ASEAN Declaration. Malaysia has been prime mover

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and proponent of neutralization. Razak has been working hard to mobilize support for his concept, and we have had reports that he has claimed the President's support for his proposal. (Dept's 201449 contains abstract of recent INR analysis Malaysian proposal.) ASEAN foreign ministers agreed in early October to include neutralization on agenda Kuala Lumpur meeting; Thailand assigned task of drafting declaration. Unclear whether other drafts on neutralization will be submitted at conference but becoming obvious that several other members have problems with Thai draft.

4. Thai draft notably vague on specifics. It "invites" major powers "to ensure their observance of and extend their support for" [redacted] declaration. It fails to define "neutrality", and merely asserts that SEA should be "neutralized" from outside interference in internal affairs of region. We are in doubt as to its effect, if any,

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on existing security treaties, commitments, and assistance involving nations outside area (e.g. SEATO, FPDA, US-Phil bilateral, US bases) not to mention U.S. aid to South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand itself. /Possible that Thai draft may work against these.

5. The Thai draft, as it now stands, fails to put neutrality in time frame or set preconditions. It contains vague sweeping language which could have adverse effect within US, bolstering position of those who argue US military presence and assistance is unwelcome in SEA. Such interpretation of ASEAN declaration would not only add to difficulties we already face but would be most disturbing to governments of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. Department believes intent of ASEAN members is the opposite: namely, that these countries are taking long view and attempting to accommodate major trends and developments (multipolarity, Nixon Doctrine, revived PRC diplomatic activity); these countries want to maintain a US presence in SEA, do not see

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SEA "neutrality" as contradictory to this desire, and above all seek to keep Chinese influence in SEA to a minimum. However, while Thai draft clearly manifests ASEAN members' awareness of security threat posed by communist insurgency, it fails to take into account the possibility that this threat will not be reduced by declaration of neutrality, which actually may make it more difficult for US and others to render assistance.

6. With respect to Indochina, ASEAN view of North Vietnamese relationship to SEA neutralization obviously critical. Earlier Malaysian pronouncements contemplated end of Vietnam war as precondition to neutralization and, in that context, included DRV within neutralized area. Thai draft makes no mention Indochina hostilities, sets no preconditions to "neutrality", and in fact fails to define SEA in geographical terms.

7. Proposed U.S. position and response. We believe that while it will be undesirable to place ourselves

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In outright opposition to Malaysia/Thai proposals, we consider that proposed ASEAN declaration on neutralized SEA would be detrimental to region's security and would pose problems for US, other friendly nations outside the region, and SEA countries themselves, as noted above. GOP and GOI Embassies here have requested Department's views on ASEAN proposal, as have several ASEAN countries through posts.

In responding to GOP and GOI queries, Department proposes along foregoing lines, to limit our remarks to general observations, noting that comments on text of resolution impossible at this stage. (IMPORTANT: no reference should be made to US possession of Thai draft.) Additionally, Department proposes to draw on following specific talking points; Embassies at ASEAN posts are authorized to communicate these views to host governments.

--- We commend Asian initiatives seeking enhanced security for the region -- indeed this is what President has in mind under Nixon Doctrine.

--- However, USG believes that in considering SEA neutralization declaration, close consideration should be given basic question of whether

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region's security is more likely to be helped or hindered by declaration on/neutralization at this time. How, for example, would proposal deal with states that might subscribe to declaration but continue to carry out subversion which they would categorically deny? Could they not then use declaration as a cloak to attack security assistance extended by other states to help defend Southeast Asia?

-- Particular attention should be given to impact of declaration, as it might be exploited by Peking, Hanoi, and other Communist states, on: US security assistance in region, U.S. military presence in Indochina, U.S. security guarantees under SEATO to Indochina and Thailand, U.S. security treaty with Philippines, U.S./military assistance and third country programs in Southeast Asia, and U.S. basing in region.

-- Specifically, we believe ASEAN members should ascertain views of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia before issuing any SEA declaration.

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-- If any reference is made by the ASEAN nations to the President's alleged support of the neutralization concept in his conversation with Prime Minister Razak on October 5, you should note that the President accepted neutrality as a valid policy for Malaysia if this is what Malaysia wanted, but by no means intended this as a blanket approval for the neutralization of all of Southeast Asia.

END.

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