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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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EO 12958, 25X 6
FPC/HDR by IPH Date: 6/12/96
Re-review 2006
Withdrawal No.

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10/14/73

TO: The Secretary

FROM: EA - Arthur W. Hummel, Jr.

Overthrow of Thanom Government in Thailand

PL 15-1 THAI XR POL 15 THAI

Present Situation

The King of Thailand, at 7 a.m. this morning, announced the resignation of Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn and his Cabinet and named Sanya Thammasak, the highly respected Rector of Thammasat University, to form a new government. This development followed a confrontation between Thai students and the RTG which began with student protests against the October 7 arrest of 13 students and others charged with inciting public unrest. Student demonstrations grew to unprecedented proportions, culminating in bloody clashes on October 13 and 14 between students and other demonstrators and RTG forces in Bangkok resulting in at least 100 deaths. Most demonstrators have dispersed following the King's announcement but several thousand are still in sharp confrontation with the police with some police stations being hit with grenades, automatic weapons and Molotov cocktails.

A telegram received from Bangkok at 4 p.m. is attached.

No Change in Thai Military

This is the first time that student demonstrations have been on such a large scale and have resulted in the fall of a Thai government. Thus far, however, Thanom has retained his position as Supreme Commander and there has been no change in the Thai military leadership, which has governed Thailand for 16 years. We have no indication

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Authority: 28158
By: Alan Lipton Date: 07-25-2008

EA/TB:J Knowles

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of any impending or likely change in the Thai military power structure, but the possibility of an attempted coup by Thai military elements cannot be completely excluded in the still uncertain situation. It is too early to tell whether the military will accept instructions Sanya may give in the days ahead and how the military will react to their lessened role in the new government.

Short-Term Outlook

While the King and PM Sanya have appealed to all Thai to work together to restore the situation to normal, the continuing violence makes the situation still quite uncertain. The King's personal appeals and PM Sanya's promise of a new Constitution within six months should be powerful inducements to end the violence and disorders.

Our Embassy presently foresees no significant change in Thai foreign policy, including the RTG position on the US military presence. The US military presence and Thailand's association with the United States were very much a secondary issue in the student demonstrations, which focused throughout on the release of the detainees and the demand for a Constitution.

US Presence

Thai preoccupation with restoring calm and normality is likely to provide us with some "breathing space" in Thai pressures for further reduction in US forces. Nonetheless, the new Thai government is expected to maintain the RTG's position of asking for a reduction to the pre-1972 level of 32,000 men and the withdrawal of TDY B-52's and other strategic aircraft. Moreover, the new government will probably be more sensitive than the Thanom regime to domestic pressures for US reductions.

Thai Rice for Cambodia

The shipment of 12,500 MT of Thai rice, scheduled to begin loading in Bangkok on October 14, could well be delayed, exacerbating the already critical rice shortage in Phnom Penh.

The new government is not likely to change the RTG's strong support for the Khmer Republic in the UN. RTG preoccupation with the domestic scene might, however,

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impede the Thai delegation's heretofore active efforts to preserve the GKR's credentials in the UN General Assembly.

SGU's

At our suggestion, [redacted] taken steps to ensure that the Thai Special Guerrilla Units (SGU's) in Laos do not leave Laos prematurely.

Our Press Position

In response to press queries, we are saying that our information generally accords with wire service reporting and that we have no comment to make. We will note, however, that we have no reports of any American citizens being wounded or killed, or even involved in the situation.

Attachment:

Bangkok's 16037

EA/TB:JKnowles/VLTomseth:avw
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ACTION EA-14

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SCS-03 SCA-01 OPR-02 PER-05 SY-10 OC-06 DRC-01 /163 W
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~~C O N F I D E N T I A L~~ BANGKOK 16037

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, TH
SUBJECT: SITREP AS OF 2330 LOCAL TIME; THANOM ANNOUNCES SUPPORT FOR NEW PRIME MINISTER

REF: A. FBIS BANGKOK D1412512 OCT 73
B. FBIS BANGKOK D141333 OCT 73
C. BANGKOK 16035
D. BANGKOK 16033

1. THE KING SPOKE OVER NATIONAL TELEVISION AT 1930, AND LATER OVER THE RADIO, TO ANNOUNCE THE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT (TEXT CARRIED REF A). A RESIGNATION STATEMENT FROM FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM WAS READ OVER TELEVISION AND RADIO ABOUT 2000 (TEXT CARRIED REF B). JUDGE SANYA, THE NEW PRIME MINISTER, SPOKE OVER TELEVISION AT 2315. HE URGED ALL THAI--POLICE, MILITARY, AND STUDENTS--TO RESORT TO PEACE. HE PROMISED A NEW CONSTITUTION WITHIN SIX MONTHS, THE ELECTION OF REPRESEN-

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TATIVES, AND THE ARLY FORMATION OF A CABINET.

2. VIOLENCE NEVERTHELESS CONTINUES. SEVERAL THOUSAND STUDENTS WERE CROSSING THE MEMORIAL BRIDGE FROM THONBURI AS OF 2300, AND WERE IN SHARP CONFRONTATION WITH THE POLICE. BANDS ARE STILL ROAMING THE AREA NEAR THE DEMOCRACY MONUMENT, AND SETTING FIRE TO CARS. THERE IS SPORADIC FIRING, AND SOME POLICE STATIONS HAVE REPORTED THAT THEY ARE "UNDER ATTACK." METROPOLITAN POLICE HEADQUARTERS WAS BEING HIT WITH GRENADES, AUTOMATIC WEAPONS, AND MOLOTOV COCKTAILS AS OF 2230.

3. ESTIMATES OF DEAD AND WOUNDED HAVE VARIED CONSIDERABLY AND ARE NOT YET VERIFIABLE. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO CONTRADICT THE KING'S STATEMENT THAT SOME 100 THAI HAVE BEEN KILLED. EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEES HAVE SEEN SOME 55 WOUNDED STUDENTS IN THREE CITY HOSPITALS. WE HAVE NO REPORTS OF ANY AMERICAN CITIZENS BEING EITHER WOUNDED OR KILLED, OR EVEN INVOLVED IN THE SITUATION. THE SCHOOLS THAT AMERICANS ATTEND HAVE BEEN CLOSED FOR MONDAY, OCTOBER 15, AND WE HAVE REPEATEDLY DISSEMMINATED THE WORD FOR ALL AMERICANS TO STAY INSIDE TO THE MAXIMUM EXTENT POSSIBLE.

4. ASIDE FROM THE SO FAR UNYIELDING BUT OTHERWISE PACIFIC STUDENT OCCUPATION OF THE GOVERNOR'S HEADUQARTERS IN CHIENGMAI, STUDENTS ARE POSING NO PROBLEMS UPCOUNTRY THIS EVENING. THERE IS NO INTERRUPTION OF ROUTINE AT U.S. TENANTED BASES IN THAILAND.

5. THE AMBASSADOR HAS SENT A PERSONAL NOTE TO JUDGE SANYA. THE NOTE OFFERS, AS A FRIEND, TO BE OF ANY ASSISTANCE SHOULD THE NEW PRIME MINISTER CALL. (TEXT FOLLOWS SEPTEL).

6. COMMENT: AS OF NOW WE HAVE NO CONCRETE EVIDENCE AS TO WHAT THE MILITARY POSTURE WILL BE OTHER THAN THANOM'S STATEMENT IN RESIGNING FROM THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP IN WHICH HE URGED CO-OPERATION WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. HE REPEATED THIS TIME THEME WHEN SPEAKING AS SUPREME COMMANDER SHORTLY BEFORE MIDNIGHT. THANOM HAS YET TO RENDER HIS RESIGNATION AS SUPREME COMMANDER, AND IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL WHETHER THE MILITARY WILL ACCEPT AS LAWFUL THE INSTRUCTIONS THAT SANYA MAY GIVE.

7. EVEN THE STUDENTS WHO WERE SO ARDENTLY CAMPAINGNING FOR THE PROMULGATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION, AND ULTIMATELY FOR A

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GOVERNMENT THAT IN THEIR EYES WOULD BE MORE DEMOCRATIC AND RESPONSIVE THAN THANOM'S, COULD NOT HAVE FORSEEN WITHIN A WEEK OF PROTEST THE RESIGNATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER, SANYA, WHOM THE KING HAS APPOINTED IN HIS PLACE, IS AN HONORABLE AND DISTINGUISHED SEXAGENERIAN WHOM THE STUDENTS AND THE KING RESPECT. LIKE THE POPE, HE HAS NO DIVISONS, HOWEVER. THE NEXT FEW DAYS AND WEEKS SHOULD ENTAIL CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL JOCKEYING AND POSSIBLE INTERNAL INSTABILITY AS THE NEW GOVERNMENT TAKES SHAPE. OF PRIME INTEREST WILL BE HOW THE MILITARY ACCEPTS THEIR LESSENED ROLE. S/S-(

8. SANYA IS CLEARLY FUNCTIONING FOR THE KING WHO HAS TAKEN AN ACTIVE AND UNUSUALLY EXPOSED ROLE IN THE CURRENT CRISIS. S/S-(

[redacted] WE WOULD EXPECT SANYA TO SUPPORT A CONTINUATION OF THE BASIC THAI FOREIGN POLICY OF THE PAST TWO DECADES. HIS APPOINTMENT SHOULD SPELL NO ADVERSE AFFECT ON OUR INTERESTS IN THAILAND.

9. A FACTOR OF CONSIDERABLE SIGNIFIGANCE IS THE UNCHARACTERISTIC INTRODUCTION OF VIOLENCE INTO THE THAI POLITICAL SCENE. THE PEOPLE OF BANGKOK ARE REVOLTED BY THE SIGHT AND STORIES OF THE SLAUGHTER OF THE NOT ENTIRELY INNOCENT BUT LARGELY DEFENSELESS STUDENTS. FOR MANY, THE DISLIKE OF PRAPHAT HAS SHIFTED OUT OF THE ABSTRACT INTO THE PERSONAL. THE ENMITY THAT THE THAI MILITARY HAVE CREATED IN A SINGLE DAY, WHATEVER THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THEIR ACTION, IS LIKELY TO HAUNT THEM FOR SOME TIME.
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