RG 59 GENERAL RECORDS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SUBJECT NUMERIC FILES, 1970-73
POLITICAL & DEFENSE

FROM: **POL TANZAN-A**

TO: **POL 6 THAI**

BOX 2619

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Bangkok 8034
5-23-73

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 PM-07 NSC-10 SS-15 RSC-01 CIAE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 PRS-01 AID-20 PA-03 USIA-12 OMB-01 RSR-01 L-03
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R 230604Z MAY 73
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3383
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
NMJIR/AMEMBASSY SAIGON 1803
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC
DIA

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EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, PFOR, TH, XC
SUBJECT: THAILAND POLITICAL OUTLOOK

SUMMARY: EVOLUTION TOWARD SUCCESSION TO TOP LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO UNFOLD SLOWLY. THANOM IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE AS PRIME MINISTER AT LEAST UNTIL OCTOBER 1974. HE MAY ALSO CONTINUE AS SUPREME COMMANDER OF ARMED FORCES, ALTHOUGH FORMULA WHICH ENVISAGES PRAPHAT TAKING OVER AS SUPREME COMMANDER AND KRIT AS COMMANDER IN CHIEF OA THE ARMY CONTINUES

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TO RECEIVE ACTIVE CONSIDERATION. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES ARE LARGELY QUIESCENT NOW AND OUTLOOK IS FOR STATUS QUO GOVERNMENT FOR AT LEAST A YEAR AND PROBABLY LONGER. GENERALLY SPEAKING, POPULATION CAN BE EXPECTED TO ACQUIESCE IN THIS.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO BE CHARACTERIZED BY AD HOC APPROACH TO BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PROBLEMS, WITH WEAKNESSES EVIDENT IN PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF LONGER-TERM POLICIES AND INADEQUATE ATTENTION TO SOME FUNDAMENTAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. HOW WELL OR BADLY THESE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE MET, AND PARTICULARLY PROBLEMS AFFECTING RURAL AREAS, WILL IMPACT IN A MAJOR WAY ON THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF THE INSURGENCY. DECISIVE FACTOR MAY WELL BE WHETHER PRESENT OR NEXT SUCCESSOR LEADERSHIP REVIVES PRACTICE OF GIVING CONSIDERABLE POWER OVER THE ECONOMY TO ABLE AND HONEST CIVILIAN TECHNICIANS AND IMPROVES MUCH-NEEDED ECONOMIC PLANNING EFFORTS. END SUMMARY.

1. INDICATIONS ARE GROWING THAT A FORMULA HAS BEEN WORKED OUT WHICH SHOULD ASSURE THE REQUISITE DEGREE OF STABILITY AMONG THE TOP LEADERS OF THAILAND, AT LEAST UNTIL OCTOBER 1974.

2. [redacted] DEFENSE COUNCIL AND CABINET HAVE APPROVED ONE-YEAR EXTENSION OF ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE OF BOTH FIELD MARSHAL THANOM AND GENERAL PRAPHAT. THIS WOULD GIVE THEM THE OPTION OF CONTINUING THE PRESENT SITUATION, BOTH WITH RESPECT TO CABINET POSITIONS AND TOP MILITARY COMMAND. ALSO REGARDED AS STILL ACTIVELY UNDER CONSIDERATION (AND PREFERRED BY SEVERAL KEY FIGURES, NOTABLY GENERAL KRIT SIVARA) IS A FORMULA WHICH WOULD INVOVE THANOM STEPPING DOWN AS SUPREME COMMANDER, BUT RETAINING PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND PROBABLY DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIOS AS WELL; AND GENERAL PRAPHAT BECOMING SUPREME COMMANDER (AND FIELD MARSHAL), GIVING UP COMMAND OF ARMY (TO PRESENT DEPUTY COMMANDER GENERAL KRIT SIVARA) AND DIRECTOR GENERALSHIP OF POLICE (TO PRACHUAB SUNTRANGKOON) AND RETAINING INTERIOR PORTFOLIO. THIS WOULD INVOTIE MORE CHANGES THAN THE FORMULA OUTLINED EARLIER IN WHICH EVERYONE STAYS PUT, BUT NONE AFFECTING FUNDAMENTAL PATTERN OF POWER.

3. A KEY ELEMENT IN ANY FORMULA AFFECTING THE SUCCESSION IS

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PRAPHAT'S WILLINGNESS TO GIVE KRIT COMMAND OF ARMY. IF HE PRO-
VES UNWILLING TO DO THIS, PERSONAL CRISIS FOR KRIT WILL ENSUR--
KRIT IS DUE FOR RETIREMENT HIMSELF IN OCTOBER 1974. DEPENDING
ON HOW KRIT HANDLES IT, HE COULD ELEVATE IT INTO A SERIOUS POLITICAL
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MANDERS THROUGHOUT THE ARMY AND AN ATTEMPT
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IN THIS CONNECTION THAT KRIT COULD ALSO BE THE BENEFICIARY OF THE
PRECEDENT OF EXTENDING PERIODS OF ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE IF HE
CAN IN THE MEANTIME GENERATE AND DEMONSTRATE SUFFICIENT SUPPORT
FOR THIS IN THE ARMY OFFICER CORPS.

4. IT IS ALSO INCREASINGLY LIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER
CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THAILAND FOR AT LEAST THREE TO FOUR YEARS.
IN A RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE, PRAPHAT OBSERVED THAT THE CONSTI-
UTION DRAFTING COMMITTEE HAS NOT
S YET BEGUN ITS WORK, ADDING THAT WHILE HE COULD NOT PRE-
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AS ALMOST IDENTICAL TO THE PRESENT ONE) WAS IN FORCE FROM
958-68 AND THAT THE PRESENT POLITICAL SITUATION IS RE-
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OVERNMENT TEMPORARILY DEVIATED WHEN IT PROMULGATED THE CONSTITUTION
1968, AFTER WHICH IS SWUNG BACK
YOND CENTER IN THE NEC PERIOD.

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5. WITH ALL INDICATORS THUS POINTING TO A GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO CONTINUATION OF THE STATUS QUO FOR THE NEXT YEAR OR MORE, IT IS WORTH TAKING A LOOK AT SOME OF THE MAJOR IMPLICATIONS.

INTERNAL POLITICAL STABILITY

6. THE VAST PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION OF THAILAND IS RURAL, BUDDHIST, DEEPLY REVERENT TOWARD THE KING, ETHNICALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY THAI, WITH EXTREMELY LOW INCOMES BUT WITH NO FOOD SHORTAGES. THIS MAJORITY GROUP, STILL STRONGLY HELD BY TRADITION, WILL ACCEPT A CONTINUATION OF THE STATUS QUO PASSIVELY, EXCEPT AT THE FRINGES--I.E., WHERE ETHNIC, LINGUISTIC, OR RELIGIOUS SEPARATENESS IS FOUND (E.G., HILL TRIBES IN THE FAR NORTH, MUSLIMS IN THE FAR SOUTH) OR WHERE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL GRIEVANCES ARE PARTICULARLY STRONG (AS IN CERTAIN AREAS OF THE NORTHEAST AND SOUTH).

7. IN THE URBAN AREAS, TRADITION HAS BEEN ERODED BY URBANIZATION AND INTENSIVE WESTERN INFLUENCES (PRESS, TV, RADIO, AND EDUCATION ABROAD) TO AN EXTEND THAT IS ONLY BEGINNING TO APPEAR UP-COUNTRY. EVEN IN BANGKOK (THE ONE TRUE CITY), HOWEVER, TRADITION REMAINS STRONG AND THE PEOPLE TEND TO ACCEPT PASSIVELY THE ACTS OF THE LEADERSHIP. THIS WAS MOST RECENTLY DEMONSTRATED BY THE LACK OF SERIOUS ADVERSE REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S APPOINTMENT

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R 230824Z MAY 73
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OF CHAMNAN YUVABUN (BELIEVED BY MOST THAIS TO BE CORRUPT AS LORD MAYOR OF BANGKOK, AND MOST DRAMATICALLY DEMONSTRATED BY THE APATHETIC REACTION TO THE NEC TAKEOVER OF NOVEMBER 1971 WHICH ABOLISHED THE REPRESENTATIVE INSTITUTIONS TO WHICH THE PEOPLE OF BANGKOK HAD CONSISTENTLY ELECTED OPPOSITION CANDIDATES. THUS THE OUTLOOK IN BANGKOK IS ALSO FOR ACQUIESCENCE IN CONTINUATION OF THE STATUS QUO. SOME THAI BELIEVE THAT THE CHINESE MINORITY IN BANGKOK CONSTITUTES A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF INSTABILITY, BUT OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT ASSIMILATION OF THIS GROUP HAS ATTAINED A MOMENTUM OF ITS OWN AND THAT, BARRING SOME TRAUMATIC

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CHANGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT, IT WILL NOT MUCH LONGER BE OUTSIDE THE MAIN TRADITION. ANOTHER POTENTIAL BUT LONGER-TERM PROBLEM MAY EMERGE AMONG THE URBAN SLUM DWELLERS WHERE AGAIN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL GRIEVANCES OUTWEIGH THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE MAINSTREAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRADITION.

8. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL EQUATION BETWEEN THIS PERIOD OF "CONSTITUTIONAL RULE" AND THE PREVIOUS ONE APPEARS IN CONNECTION WITH THE UNIVERSITIES. STUDENTS AND YOUNG FACULTY LEADERS SEEM DESTINED TO RETAIN AN IMPORTANT PLACE IN THE POLITICAL EQUATION OF THAILAND FROM NOW ON. WHILE THAT MAY SOUND OMINOUS FOR POLITICAL STABILITY, IT MAY NOT BE SO. HIS MAJESTY THE KING REMAINS WITHOUT RAL COMPETITION THE MORT IMPORTANT SINGLE SHAPER OF STUDENT OPINION AND INFLUENCE OVER STUDENTS IN GENRAL. HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO REGARD RADICAL STUDENT GROUPS ON BANGKOK CAMPUSES AND IN CHIANG MAI AS A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF OPEN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT POLICIES. IF ONLY FOR THIS REASON, STUDENTS AND YOUNGER FACULTY LEADERS WILL RETAIN AN IMPORTANT POTENTIAL FOR INFLUENCE. RADICAL STUDENTS REMAIN FEW IN OVERALL NUMBERS, AND VERY LITTLE EFFECTIVE COORDINATION EXISTS BETWEEN THE MANY SMALL GROUPS AND PUBLICATIONS WHICH HAVE PROLIFERATED ON THE CAMPUSES. ONOY A FIGURE SUCH AS DR. PUEY UNGPHAKORN COULD REALLY UNIFY RADICAL STUDENT ATTITTUDES OR GROUPS, AND HE HAS RECENTLY MADE CLEAR TO HIS SUPPORTERS THAT HE DOES NOT WISH TO SERVE IN THIS ROLE IF AND WHEN HE RETURNS FROM CAMBRIDGE. WHILE SPONTANEOUS STUDENT ACTIONS HAVE ON OCCASTION ERUPTED INTO VIOLENCE, THERE IS NO PRECENDENT FOR VIOLENT STUDENT ACTIONS ON POLITICAL ISSUES. THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE STUDENT BODY IS NOT UNCRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT BUT DOES NOT RESPOND TO POLITICAL AGITATION, AND WOULD TEND IN ANY SITUATION OF POLITICAL CRISIS TO LOOK TO THE KING FOR GUIDANCE.

9. THE MONARCHY SEEMS DESTINED TO CONTINUE FOR THE INDEFINITE FUTURE TO PLAY ITS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT ROLE AS THE SYMBOL OF THAI NATIONALISM AND LEGITIMIZER OF THAI GOVERNMENTS. THIS GIVES THE KING GREAT INFLUENCE IF NOW POWER.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

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10. IT IS IN THIS FIELD THAT THE GREATEST LONGER-TERM WEAKNESS OF THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP GROUP EMERGES. WITH MINISTER OF COMMERCE PRASIT KANCHANAWATAS THE STRONGEST CIVILIAN MINISTER, THE GOVERNMENT IS PROVIDING REASONABLY GOOD DAY-TO-DAY PERFORMANCE IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD. PRASIT HAS GOOD PRACTICAL TRAINING IN BUSINESS AND BANKING AND SHREWD POLITICAL SENSE, BUT LITTLE DEMONSTRATED INTEREST OF ABILITY IN OVERALL ECONOMIC, FISCAL AND MONETARY AF-FAIRS. THE GOVERNMENT HAS NO ECONOMIC FIGURE OF THE CAPA-BILITY OR STATURE OF DR. PUEY UNGPHAKORN OR POTE SARASIN.

11. THIS LACK OF STRONG IMAGINATIVE ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP IS UNLIKELY TO PRODUCE ANY DIRE CONSEQUENCES IN THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO IF THE GENERAL ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT REMAINS REAS-ONABLY GOOD. HOWEVER, IN A SLIGHTLY LONGER TIME FRAME-- SAY FIVE TO TEN YEARS--SOME OF THE PROBLEMS DISCUSSED BELOW MAY WELL REACH THE STAGE WHERE THEY IMPINGE HEAVILY ON THE POLITICAL SPHERE. THEY SHOULD BE ATTACKED IMMEDIATELY. THE LOSS OF ANOTHER YEAR OR TWO WILL MAKE THEM MUCH MORE DIFFICULT OF FINAL SOLU-TION.

12. THE EXTEND TO WHICH THAILAND'S ECONOMY IS DEVELOPED SUCCESSFULLY OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS WILL BE LARGELY A RESULT OF THE VIRTUES OF A RELATIVELY FREE ECONOMY. SIGNIFICNATLY LACKING WILL BE THE GUIDING HAND WHICH SUCH ECONOMIES NORMALLY REQUIRE, INCLUDING THAT WHICH COULD BE PROVIDED BY CAREFULLY-PLANNED CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE GOVERNMENT SECTOR BOTH IN THE WAY OF POLICIES AND EXPENDITURES.

13. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE GOVERNMENT SECTOR WILL INEVITABLY BE LIMITED UNLSS SOMETHING IS DONE ABOUT IMPROVING THE TAX SYSTEM BOTH TO INCREASE REVENUE COLLECTION AND TO ACHIEVE GREATER EQUITY. THE LATTER IS INCREASINGLY A SOCIAL PROBLEM IN THE BRADDER SENSE IN THAT SMALL GROUPS IN THE SOCIETY BENEFIT INORDINATELY FROM THE CURRENT TAX LAWS AND TAX COLLECTION. SOME NOT ONLY SMART UNDER THIS BUT, IN THE CASE OF THE LARGE AND POLITICALLY-IMPORTANT CIVIL SERVICE AND MILITARY, THEY ARE DEPRIVED OF THE KIND OF SALARY INCREASES WHICH SHOULD HAVE ACCOMPANIED THE RISE IN COST OF LIVING OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS. THIS IS ALREADY A SERIOUS PROBLEM AND ONE OF THE CONTRIBUT-ING FACTORS PRESSURING GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES TOWARD CORRUPTION. EVEN MORE SERIOUS FROM A POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW IS THAT IT

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COULD IN TIME RESULT IN THE ALIENATION OF THE CIVIL AND MILITARY BUREAUCRATS, WHICH WOULD DISRPUT THE POLITICAL SYSTEM COMPLETELY.

14. DISCUSSION OF INCOME DISTRIBUTION ALSO BRINGS ATTENTION TO ANOTHER MAJOR PROBLEM WHICH IS NOT BEING ADEQUATELY FACED UP TO BY THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP, I.E., THE DISTRIBTUION OF INCOME BETWEEN URBAN AREAS AND THE MASS OF THE RURAL POPULATION. IT IS DANGEROUS TO MAKE
HASTY JUDMENTS ABOUT THIS MATTER, BECAUSE IT IS OBVIOUS THAT AN UNSOPHISTICATED "SHARE THE WEALTH" APPROACH WOULD IN FACT RESULT ONLY IN SHARED POVERTY. THE WORRI-SOME ASPECT OF IT IS THE LACK OF EVIDENCE OF SERIOUS ATTENTION TO THIS QUESTION ON THE PART OF THE EXISTING LEADERSHIP, PROBABLY REFLECTIVE OF THEIR LONGSTANDING ASSUMPTION THAT THE COUNTRYSIDE WILL REMAIN AS PLACID AND APATHETIC AS IT ALWASY HAS. IT IS TRUE THAT THE CURRENT FIVE YEAR PLAN CONTAINS DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM OF INCOME DISTRIBUTION, BUT THE LEADERS HAVE NOT REALLY DEMONSTRATED ANY MARKED CONCERN WITH THE PROBLEM OR INITIATED ANY EFFECTIVE ACTION TO STUDY OR MEET IT.

THE INSURGENCY

15. THOUGH POTENTIALLY SERIOUS, SO FAR THE INSURGENCY REMAINS A MANAGEABLE PROBLEM. HOWEVER, SHOULD THE BASIC THAI TRADITION BE ERODED AMONG THE MASSES OF THE RURAL AREAS BY INATTENTION TO THEIR MOST FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS, THE PICTURE COULD CHANGE DRAFATICALLY WITHIN THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS. ATTENTION IS URGENTLY REQUIRED NOT ONLY TO THE PROBLEM OF RURAL INCOME LEVELS, BUT ALSO TO PRO-BLEMS OF INADEQUATE RURAL CREDIT, AND IN MANY CASES, UNCERTAINTY OF LAND TENURE. IN OUR JUDGEMENT, AN OVER-ALL INTEGRATED NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN WHICH TAKES ACCOUNT OF THESE PROBLEMS IS MUCH MORE URGENTLY NEEDED

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THAN ADDITIONAL PROJECTS OR PROGRAMS AIMED AT THE SENSITIVE AREAS ALREADY HEAVILY AFFECTED BY THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY.

16. THE FUNDAMENTAL STRATEGY OF THE PI PROGRAM REPRESENTS A CONSIDERABLE CHANGE OF EMPHASIS FROM THE HEAVY RELIANCE UPON SPORADIC MILITARY CAMPAIGNS OF PREVIOUS YEARS WHICH WERE CLEARLY UNSUCCESSFUL TOWARD ADDITIONAL MEASURES STRENGTHENING CIVIL ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL SECURITY IN THE VILLAGES AND DISTRICT CENTERS AROUND THE INSURGENT MOUNTAIN AND JUNGLE STRONGHOLDS. MILITARY OFFENSIVE

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ACTIONS AGAINST THE LATTER WILL RELY MORE ON SMALL UNIT TACTICS, AIR AND ARTILLERY HARASSMENT, AND RESOURCE CONTROL MEASURES. MEANWHILE, THE MILITARY ARE ENDEAVORING TO IMPROVE THEIR ABILITY TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY IN DIFFICULT TERRAIN, ESPECIALLY THROUGH IMPROVEMENT OF SMALL UNIT LEADERSHIP AND USE OF SPECIAL VOLUNTEER TEAMS. THE THAI PERCEIVE THE INSURGENCY CORRECTLY AS DANGEROUS NOT SO MUCH FOR ITS MILITARY MENACE AS FOR SUCH SUCCESS AS IT MAY HAVE IN ORGANIZING A SUBVERSIVE POLITICAL MOVEMENT. HENCE EMPHASIS IN THE RTG PROGRAM ON PREVENTING FURTHER GROWTH OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE. IN THIS THEY HAVE HAD CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS IN THE NORTH AND SOUTH, AND WHILE LAGGING BEHING THE PROGRESS IN OTHER AREAS, ARE CONFRONTING THE INSURGENCY IN THE NORTH-EAST SOMEWHAT MORE SYSTEMATICALLY THAN BEFORE.

17. IF THE RTG CAN SUCCESSFULLY MEET THE PROBLEMS OF THE RURAL AREAS, IDENTIFIED IN PARA 15, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE INSURGENCY WILL SPREAD WIDELY IN THE ETHNIC THAI AREAS, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE VERY WEK APPEAL OF THE COLLECTIVIST SOCIAL MEASURES AND STRICT CONTROLS ENFORCED IN THE SO-CALLED LIBERATED AREAS. THE KEY IS WHETHER THE STATUS QUO GOVERNMENT WILL BITE THIS BULLET.

FOREIGN POLICY

18. IN TERMS OF FOREIGN POLICY, THE ANTICIPATED CONTINUATION OF A STATUS QUO GOVERNMENT FOR THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO MEANS ALSO A CONTINUATION OF THE CLOSE COOPERATION THE THAI LEADERSHIP HAS EXTENDED TO THE U.S. THIS APPLIES ESPECIALLY TO CONTINUED USE OF THAI BASES, AT LEAST SO LONG AS THE U.S. CONTINUES ITS PRESENT POLICY OF USING AIR POWER AS LEVERAGE IN THE DIRECTION OF ENFORCING THE AGREEMENTS ENTERED INTO IN PARIS. THE THAI LEADERSHIP SHARES WITH US THE OBJECTIVE OF STABILIZING THE SITUATION IN THIS AREA, AN OBJECTIVE WHICH IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE WILL EVIDENTLY REQUIRE THE CONTINUED APPLICATION OF PRESSURES ON NORTH VIETNAM AND ITS SATELLITES. WHILE BASICALLY SKEPTICAL, THE THAIS WILL NEVERTHELESS BE ALERT AND HOPING FOR SIGNS OF NORTH VIETNAMESE ACCEPTANCE OF A NON-MULITARY SOLUTION.

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19. US ASSISTANCE LEVELS CONTINUE TO BE REGARDED AS AN INDEX OF US CONCERN FOR THAILAND'S PROBLEMS AS WELL AS OF OUR INTENTION TO STAND BEHIND OUR SECURITY COMMITMENT. WHILE THE DECLINE IN ASSISTANCE LEVELS SO FAR HAS NOT CHANGED THE RTG'S FUNDAMENTAL OUTLOOK, THE WEANING PROCESS WILL REQUIRE DIFFICULT READJUSTMENTS ON THE PART OF THAILAND'S LEADERS WHO HAVE COME TO RELY LARGELY ON US FOR THE EXTERNAL RESOURCES THEY REQUIRE.

20. WITH RESPECT TO CHINA, WE EXPECT THE CONTINUATION OF THE RTG POLICY OF INCHING TOWARD A MORE FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRC--LIMITED, HOWEVER, TO OFFICIAL AND CONTROLLED CONTACTS, AND PROBABLY NOT EXTENDING TO DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. THIS IS AN APPROACH WHICH PEKING THUS FAR APPEARS WILLING TO ACCEPT. THE THAI CONTINUE TO REGARD CHINESE SUPPORT OF THE INSURGENCY IN NORTH THAILAND AND BURMA, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROAD NETWORK IN NORTHERN LAOS, AS ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL THREATS TO THAI SECURITY. THEY NENETHELESS HAVE MADE THE DECISION THAT IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS WITH THE PRC ON A GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT BASIS IS IN THAILAND'S LONG TERM INTERESTS. THERE IS GROWING ACCEPTANCE HERE OF THE THESIS THAT THE PRC DOES NOT CONSIDER THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND TO BE A THREAT TO CHINA; THUS THE THAI DO NOT SEE IT AS AN IMPEDIMENT TO IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS WITH PEKING.

DEVELOPMENTS WHICH COULD UPSET THE SCENARIO

21. POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS WHICH MIGHT UPSET THE FORMULA DESCRIBED IN PARA TWO ABOVE INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

(A) THANOM REMOVED FROM THE EQUATION--THIS DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY. THANOM'S HEALTH APPEARS TO BE BETTER THAN THAT OF PRAPHAT. PRAPHAT IS BELIEVED TO BE SATISFMD TO HOLD MOST OF THE LEVERS OFHREAL POWER WHILE THANOM AS PM SHIELDS HIM TO A LARGE EXTENT FROM WHAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE CONSIDERABLE POPULAR REACTION AGAINST HIS IMAGE OF A TOUGH AND EFFECTIVE BUT CORRUPT AND

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AUTHORITARIAN LEADER. SHOULD THANOM LEAVE THE SCENE, PRAPHAT WOULD HEAD THE SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD PERHAPS BE MORE RESISIVE AND EFFECTIVE BUT CERTAINLY WOULD BE LESS POPULAR AND PROBABLY LESS STADYE.

(B) PRAPHAT'S HEALTH FAILS--PRAPHAT HAS HAD PROBLEMS WITH HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND CONTINUES TO BE SERIOUSLY OVERWEIGHT. THUS WHILE THERE IS NO IMMEDIATE PROBLEM, HE APPEARS TO BE SOMEWHAT MORE VULNERABLE IN THIS RESPECT THAN THANOM. HIS REMOVAL FROM THE SCENE WOULD SLIP THE ANCHOR IN A MAJOR WAY BY OPENING UP MANY OF THE KEY POSITIONS ENTAILING REAL POWER HOLDING IN THAILAND. WHILE IN THIS CASE THANOM WOULD CONTINUE AS NO. 1, AN INTENSE PERIOD OF MANEUVERING WOULD ENSUE AS THE WHOLE SUCCESSION PROCESS WAS IN EFFECT TELESCOPED.

(C) POSSIBLE COUP--MOST LIKELY PRECIPITANT OF THIS WOULD BE NARONG KITTIKACHORN, SON OF MARSHAL THANOM AND SON-IN-LAW OF GENERAL PRAPHAT. WHILE WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE A COUP ATTEMPT BY NARONG HIMSELF, A POSSIBLE VARIANT ON THE ABOVE SCENARIO COUD BE AN ATTEMPT BY THANOM AND PRAPHAT TO PASS POWER DIRECTLY TO NARONG, LEADING TO A COUP ATTEMPT LED BY KRIT AND/OR OTHER ARMY OFFICERS TO BLOCK THIS PROSPECT. THERE ARE VIRTUALLY NO RUMORS OR REPORTS OF COUP ACTIVITY AT PRESENT, AND, WHILE A COUP ATTEMPT CAN NEVER BE TOTALLY RULED OUT, IT SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY AT PRESENT.

(D) INTERNATIONAL SHOCKS--SHOULD THE U.S. MAKE A DRASTIC TURN IN ITS POLICIES TOWARD SOUTHEAST ASIA, SUCH AS SUDDEN REMOVAL OF ITS SUPPORT TO NEIGHBORING CAMBODIA AND LAOS AND/OR TERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND AND OTHER AREA COUNTRIS, THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP WOULD FACE A SERIOUS CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE BOTH AMONG THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE AND AMONG THEIR OWN MILITARY FOLLERS. THE PROSPECT WOULD BE FOR A DRASTIC TIGHTENING OF CONTROL BY THE PRESENT MILITARY LEADERS AS THEY BATTENED DOWN FOR THE INEVITABLE ADJUSTMENTS AHEAD, AND AN INCREASE IN THE LIKELIHOOD OF A COUP AGAINST THEM BY PRESENTLY UNIDENTIFIABLE ARMY LEADERS.

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CONCLUSION:

[redacted] THE OVERWHELMINGLY LIKELY PROSPECT FOR THAILAND OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS IS FOR A CONTINUATION OF THE STATUS QUO. WHILE WE BELIEVE THIS WILL BE GENERALLY ACCEPTED BY THE POPULATION AND IS NOT LIKELY TO CAUSE ANY MAJOR ILL EFFECTS, THE QUESTION ARISES WHETHER THAILAND CAN AFFORD POST-PONEMENT OF EFFECTIVE WORK ON LONGER-TERM FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS, PARTICULARLY ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, WHICH IS UNLIKELY TO BEGIN DURING THIS PERIOD. IT MAY LATER HAVE TO PAY A HIGH PRICE FOR CONTINUING STAGNATION IN IMPORTANT AREAS. THE MOST CRITICAL QUESTION FOR THE FUTURE WILL BE WHETHER THE CURRENT GROUP OF THAI LEADERS--AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THEIR SUCCESSORS--WILL REVIVE THE PRACTICE OF GIVING GREAT AUTHORITY IN THE ECONOMIC SPHERE TO HIGHLY QUALIFIED AND DEDICATED CIVILIANS. IF THEY DO, THERE IS NO EVIDENT REASON WHY THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS CANNOT BE MET. THIS IN TURN WOULD GO FAR TOWARD CON-TROLLING SPREAD OF THE INSURGENCY.
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