

~~SECRET~~

No Foreign Dissem

May 21, 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Response to Follow-On Questions on Inter-
agency Memorandum, "Thai Foreign Policy
in the Post-Vietnam Period," 25 April 1975

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~



I. What is the impact of the Mayaguez incident on Thai-US relations?

1. The Mayaguez incident is unlikely to cause serious damage to the US-Thai relationship. The Khukrit government is attempting to minimize the impact by ignoring highly emotional demands from the Thai press and various pressure groups for drastic reprisals against the US, such as expelling US forces from Thai air bases or expelling some senior US official from Thailand. Indeed, the remarks of Prime Minister Khukrit, as well as those of his outspoken foreign minister, suggest that the government would like to sweep the entire matter under the rug as quickly as possible in order to preserve its relationship with the US.

2. The Thai are clearly worried, however, that the US, by its actions in recovering the Mayaguez and in recent speeches by President Ford, has written off Thailand as an important ally. The Thai foreign ministry has recommended that Khukrit travel to the US as soon as possible to clarify US intentions.

3. The domestic implications of the Mayaguez incident are less apparent, but the episode is sure to harden the lines drawn between the political left and student radicals, on the one hand, and the conservative politicians and military officers on the other. While it will strengthen the argument of those in the foreign ministry and the cabinet who favor a faster withdrawal of US forces, Khukrit made it clear in his May 16 press conference that the government would not be stampeded into taking precipitate action. He did say, however, that in reviewing US-Thai agreements, officials would have to give consideration to strengthening Thai government control over US activities at Thai air bases.

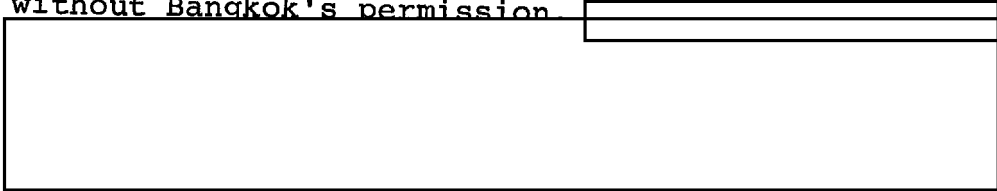
~~SECRET~~

SECRET

25X1



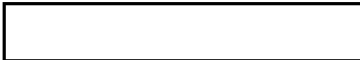
4. The Thai military are not likely to create problems for Khukrit over the affair. The military have publicly supported the government protest over the Mayaguez operation, since from the Thai point of view the US violated Thailand's sovereignty by introducing marines into the Thai bases without Bangkok's permission



25X1
25X1

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

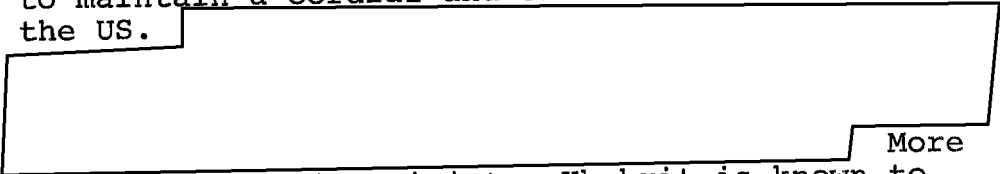


25X1

II. What does neutralism mean in the Thai context?

1. The Thai are moving toward a neutral foreign policy by dissociating themselves from US policies and accelerating efforts toward a rapprochement with Asian communist regimes. This is a clear trend, but events are still moving too fast for the Thai to have determined just how "neutral" they expect their foreign policy to become. The impetus for this new direction is not an emotional hostility toward the US, but a belief that the balance of power in Southeast Asia has shifted in favor of the communists and that the US is no longer prepared to play an active role in the area.

2. Although moving away from open identification with US policy in Asia, the Thai would like to maintain a cordial and close relationship with the US.



25X1

More importantly, Prime Minister Khukrit is known to have expressed his interest in traveling to the US to confirm to President Ford Thailand's "close and lasting" friendship, and to seek better US understanding of Thailand's current difficulties. Khukrit believes that US support to Thailand has become increasingly important in the wake of communist victories in Indochina.

3. In sum, Thai foreign policy is in a state of flux. The course of its future evolution is not clear. There appears to be little prospect that Thailand will move into the ranks of those whose brand of neutralism equates with total opposition and distrust of the US. Instead, Thai foreign policy will probably mirror the pattern established by Indonesia and Malaysia -- countries that are generally accepted as neutral in their foreign policy, but who also maintain and cultivate good relations with the US.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

25X1

III. What are the differing perceptions of the threat to Thailand?

1. There are at least four differing perceptions within Thailand of the threat posed by North Vietnamese and Chinese support to the insurgency.

- (a) Important elements in the Foreign Ministry and the military believe that the insurgency is principally a diplomatic problem created by Thailand's close cooperation with US policies in Indochina; consequently, these individuals tend to downplay the threat. This viewpoint, almost certainly shared by Foreign Minister Chatchai Chunhawan, holds that Hanoi and Peking have supported the insurgency largely in retaliation for Bangkok's allowing US aircraft to be based in Thailand.
- (b) Another view, held by many well-educated Thai both in and out of the government, recognizes a problem but maintains that the insurgent ranks are composed predominantly of "misguided" persons temporarily estranged from Thai society because of official corruption. Holders of this view argue that the solution to the problem is political rather than military.
- (c) A third viewpoint is common among influential persons outside the government who are openly skeptical of the insurgent threat, believing it was deliberately overblown by the former military regime to justify martial law and large military budgets.

~~SECRET~~

SECRET



25X1

(d) A small number of government officials who are actively involved in the counter-insurgency programs are convinced that the insurgency is a major security threat. Their views, however, have not carried significant weight in the decision-making process in Bangkok.

2. These notions, of course, could change if the insurgents were to become more "visible" by stepping up attacks against government outposts closer to population centers. Thus far, however, Thai communist strategists, turning Bangkok's parochialism to their advantage, have avoided spectacular acts that would force the government to resort to harsher policies and possibly awaken the general populace to the threat. A change in the insurgents' approach seems unlikely for the near future.

SECRET

~~SECRET~~



25X1

IV. How do the foreign ministry and the senior military leadership view the North Vietnamese threat over the next 1-3 years?

1. Thai officials generally assume that Hanoi will step up the level of its support to Thai insurgents in the form of increased advisors, armaments and training programs. Most, however, discount the possibility of an overt North Vietnamese attack in the next few years. There are differences between the military leadership and the diplomats over how best to deal with the problem of increased North Vietnamese subversion. The generals want a larger share of the budget to strengthen the armed forces. The foreign ministry believes that the problem can best be solved by improved relations with the North Vietnamese. Specifically, ministry officials believe that the removal of US military forces from Thailand would eliminate a serious irritant to better relations with the North Vietnamese, thereby undercutting Hanoi's rationale for aiding the Thai insurgents. In short, the foreign ministry believes that Thailand's security can be best assured by accommodating Hanoi.

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

V. To what extent do the military and the foreign ministry want to retain the alliance with the US?

1. Most officials want to maintain good relations with the US, but they believe that the current situation dictates that these relations be less close than in the past. At the moment there is general disappointment over what the Thai believe to be a lack of staying power on the part of the US in honoring commitments to Phnom Penh and Saigon. The generals appear to have been particularly upset that US aircraft based in Thailand were not sent into action over Indochina to stem communist advances. Army commander Krit Sivara's reported statement to the effect that Thailand will have to move closer to the Soviet Union was largely an emotional reaction to communist victories in Indochina and will probably pass. The foreign ministry, however, is convinced that it is no longer in Thailand's interest to be closely tied to the US or to any other foreign power. Ministry officials believe that Thailand's sovereignty can best be maintained by striking a better balance in its foreign relations -- by abandoning Thailand's open identification and cooperation with US policy in the interest of gaining better relations with its communist neighbors.

2. The Thai will seek to shift the emphasis of their relationship with the US toward economic and trade matters and away from overt military cooperation. Those in the foreign ministry who once felt that there were more advantages than disadvantages in close alignment with the major anti-communist power now believe this to be a diplomatic liability. They now believe that Thailand must seek a rapprochement with the communist governments in Indochina and that the US security commitment is no longer of value.

3. Senior military officers would like to maintain a close relationship with the US. Although many military officers have also begun to question the value of the US security commitment to Thailand, most continue to see the US as an important counterbalance to communist influence in the region. Moreover, the Thai military continue to look to the US as the primary supplier of military supplies and equipment and are reluctant to jeopardize access to US-manufactured spare parts.

SECRET

~~SECRET~~



25X1

VI. What Thai interest does each see in a continued US force presence now that Indochina is essentially gone?

1. The military have long looked upon the presence of US aircraft in Thailand as an implicit guarantee of a US security commitment. They also have viewed these aircraft as the best assurance of a continued US military assistance program. Most senior military leaders would prefer a limited US presence at one or more bases such as Utapao, but realize that the political climate in Thailand probably rules out such an option. The military probably would be willing to grant re-entry rights for US aircraft on an advance basis, but the foreign ministry would consider any arrangement allowing the US advance re-entry rights as a serious impediment to the normalization of relations with Hanoi. As noted earlier, the foreign ministry generally believes that the usefulness of a US military presence has long since past.

~~SECRET~~

25X1

VII. How could US actions on military assistance and the US military presence in Thailand influence each of the principal actors?

1. An increase in US military assistance would be regarded by the Thai military as a clear indication of US willingness to stand by Thailand. The military have long measured the depth of the US commitment to Thailand by the dollar value of the US military assistance program. Since the Thai armed forces are almost totally dependent on US equipment, assurances of a continued or increased assistance program would strengthen the military's argument within the government that it is in Thailand's interest to maintain a relatively high degree of cooperation with the US. While the military probably would not accept a continuation of the free-wheeling cooperation that existed between the US and Thailand during the 1960s, the generals would probably continue to give strong support to US interests in Thailand as long as they believed this would contribute to the strengthening of the Thai armed forces.

2. Unlike the military, the foreign ministry would not be easily persuaded that the US commitment to Thailand was being strengthened by an increase in US military assistance. Indeed, many would probably see such a gesture as an attempt by the US to "compromise" their efforts to accommodate to the increased political and military influence of Asian communist regimes.

3. Most Thai expect all US forces to be withdrawn within one year. Any delay in this timetable could seriously weaken the government. Most military and some in the foreign ministry probably could accept an indefinite presence of a limited number of US forces -- a number well under 10,000 -- but it seems highly unlikely that the political climate would permit such a presence.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~



VIII. How far will senior military leaders allow the Foreign Ministry to go in pursuing a more purely diplomatic solution to the North Vietnamese threat before they assert themselves more forcefully?

1. The generals, at least for the present, are willing to allow the foreign ministry to try to deflect the North Vietnamese threat by means of diplomacy. The military are clearly aware of their inability to cope with, much less stop, a North Vietnamese attack, either overt or indirect. The generals believe that talking with the North Vietnamese will buy them time to strengthen their own forces for what they believe will be an increased threat over the long term.

2. At the same time it is also clear that there are distinct limits to the military's forbearance with the foreign ministry's approach. The military have strongly objected to Foreign Minister Chatchai's recommendation that all South Vietnamese military equipment brought into Thailand be returned to the Vietnamese communists. Their reaction was conditioned in part by the knowledge that much of that equipment was earmarked for their own use and in part by the concern that such equipment could some day be used against Thailand. The military can be expected to block any foreign ministry effort that would directly strengthen North Vietnam's hand vis-a-vis Thailand. They will also press the foreign ministry on the issue of repatriation of the sizable number of former Vietnamese refugees who live in northeast Thailand and whose presence the military believes to be a security threat.

~~SECRET~~

25X1

Approved For Release 2006/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R01142A000500040001-9

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2006/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R01142A000500040001-9

~~SECRET~~

25X1



X. Will Hanoi likely insist on Thai severance of the alliance with the US as a condition for normalization of relations with Bangkok?

1. It seems highly unlikely that the Thai would go so far as to sever their good relationship with the US -- which they do not perceive of in terms of a formal "alliance" -- in return for diplomatic relations with Hanoi. It also seems unlikely that Hanoi would insist on the severance of the US-Thai relationship.

~~SECRET~~

Approved For Release 2006/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R01142A000500040001-9

DISTRIBUTION COMPLETED BY NIO/SSEA.

Approved For Release 2006/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R01142A000500040001-9

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
Approved For Release 2006/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R01142A00050001-9

DATE: 21 May 1975

TO: Mr. John A. Froebe, Jr.

FROM:

SUBJECT: Response to Follow-On Questions on
Interagency Memorandum, "Thai Foreign
Policy in the Post Vietnam Period"

REMARKS:

1. The attached, drafted by the
Office of Current Intelligence and
coordinated within the Agency, is in
response to your follow-on questions
concerning Thai foreign policy.

2. If you have any further ques-
tions, etc, please give us a call.

[Redacted]
NIO/SSEA

Attachment

- cc: DCI
- DDCI
- ER
- DDI
- D/DCI/NIO
- D/OCI
- C/OCI/[Redacted]
- C/OCI/[Redacted]
- C/DDO/EA
- C/EA/TBL
- C/OER/D/S

Approved For Release 2006/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R01142A00050001-9

NIO/RI
NIO/SSEA

CONFIDENTIAL

25X1

25X1