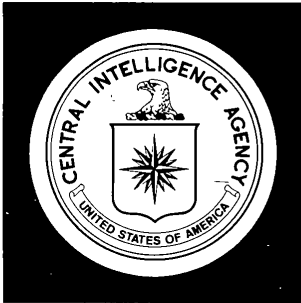


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The President's Daily Brief

October 7, 1976

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

October 7, 1976

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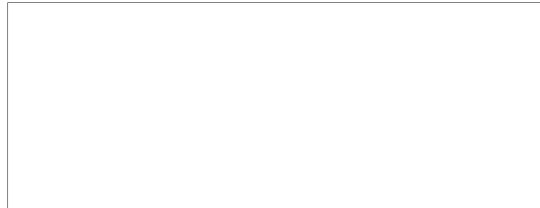
At Annex we take a closer look at Thailand's shaky political system.

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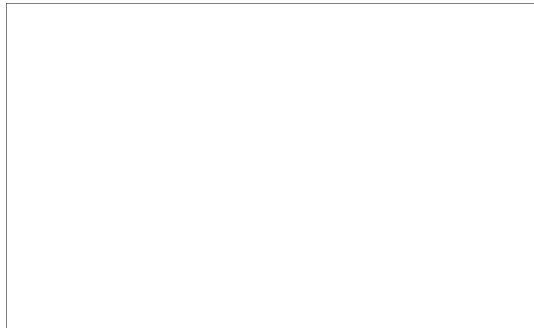
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THAILAND: *It is not yet clear whether the Thai military's assumption of power on October 6 was an outright coup or a move invited by a frustrated and weary prime minister.*



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The military leaders are taking pains to convey an impression of an orderly change in the government.

They reportedly have agreed that the Supreme Commander of the armed forces, Air Chief Marshal Kamon, will head an internal security force that will administer the country under the guidance of a military council led by Sa-ngat for a month or so until a "reform civilian government" can be established. This reform government will administer the nation's affairs until a new constitution is drafted.

By the evening of October 6, Bangkok was quiet and Seni reportedly was cooperating with Sa-ngat in selecting members of the new military council.

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The military administrators already have announced that all treaty commitments will be respected and that good relations with all countries will be a prime goal.

Both Sa-ngat and Kamon had favored close Thai-US military relations and were troubled by the recent US withdrawals. The military leaders may play down, if not reverse, the Seni government's desire to work out an accommodation with Vietnam.

Both Sa-ngat and Kamon have been regarded as nonpolitical, highly professional military officers with standards for personal honesty [redacted]

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[redacted] Their reputations will lend credence to Sa-ngat's public statement that he and his colleagues are not ambitious to hold power for an extended period.

* * *

LEBANON: Syrian military activity over the past several days strongly suggests that Christian and Syrian forces are planning to use Jazzin in southern Lebanon as the staging area for their next assault on the Palestinians.

Syrian MIG-21 reconnaissance aircraft have been scouring the area and Syrian forces have been adjusting, and possibly reinforcing, their positions there. [redacted]

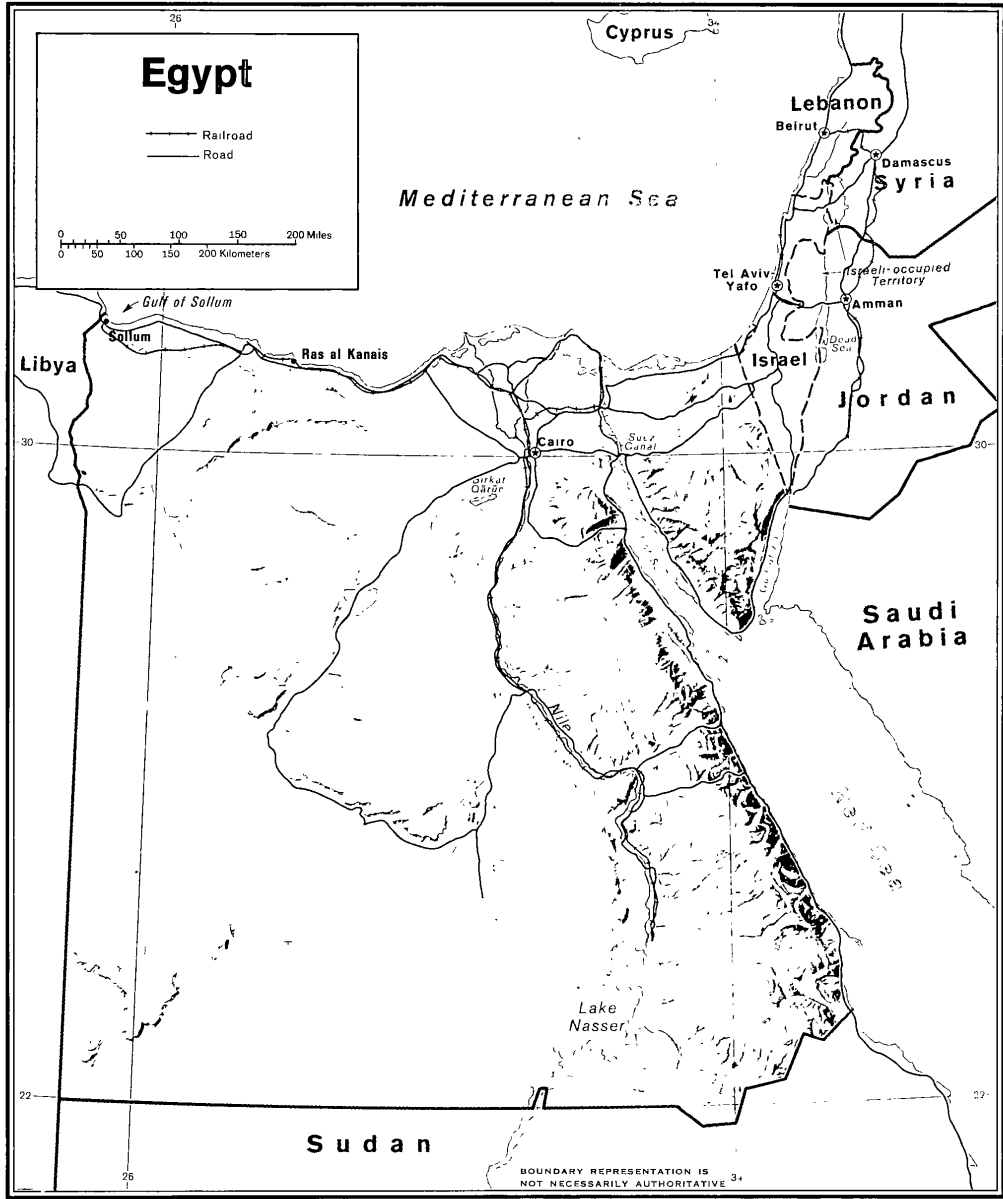
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[redacted]

[redacted]

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Leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt announced yesterday that leftist-held territory surrounding Alayh has been declared a military zone.

No one is to be allowed to enter or leave the area. Jumblatt, who apparently fears that the Christians and Syrians may yet decide to attack his Druze stronghold at Alayh, probably has the forces to execute the order. This action will sever one of the few remaining access routes to Beirut.

Druze leaders reportedly have been discussing with Christian Phalangist and Palestinian representatives a proposal to bar all combatants from Alayh. Other Druze leaders traveled to Damascus earlier this week to appeal for restraint from Syrian and Christian leaders.

Many Druze chieftains and their conservative followers have long opposed Jumblatt's militancy, but have continued their allegiance to him because he was able to limit their direct involvement in the fighting. Now that the war is at their doorstep, some may be won over by Jumblatt's rivals, who have created the impression that they want to save the Druze community.

* * *

EGYPT: The equivalent of some four to five Egyptian combat brigades are not at their normal locations along the Suez Canal.

We have learned this from preliminary analysis of U-2 photography [redacted] Many of these units were already missing [redacted]

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[redacted] One entire brigade is missing, but in all other cases only elements of brigades have departed. This suggests that the missing Egyptian units were selected to participate

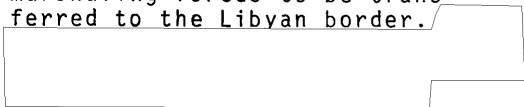
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in the parade yesterday commemo-
rating the start of the 1973 war,
and that after the parade they
will return to their normal loca-
tions.

Egyptian armed forces were on alert
yesterday, presumably because of
the holiday.

The movement of ground units from
the canal area to Cairo for the
parade could provide cover for
marshaling forces to be trans-
ferred to the Libyan border.



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*Egyptian President
Sadat, in a speech yes-
terday commemorating
the anniversary of the
1973 war, denied that
Egypt has plans to in-
vade Libya.*

On the other hand, Sadat and War
Minister Gamasy in a separate
speech put considerable stress
on the danger from Qadhafi's
subversive activities and on
Egypt's right to protect itself.
By stating such concerns Sadat
could be laying the groundwork
that would enable him to label
an attack against Libya as one of
self-defense.

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NOTES

Iraq

Egypt

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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France

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South Africa

Faced with mounting criticism of its failure to honor the arms embargo against South Africa,

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[Redacted]

However, France is likely to continue its lucrative arms relationship with South Africa, its third largest arms customer. Paris will probably eliminate direct sales of weapons that could be used against insurgents, but will go ahead with the recent sale of two submarines and two destroyer escorts and with negotiations for the sale of naval missile systems.

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South Africa probably will go forward with its plans to produce nearly 100 Mirage F-1s under license with some French technical assistance.

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Yugoslav President Tito's recuperation from his reported "acute liver disease" may extend well into December.



Since his illness was first announced on September 10, official estimates of the duration of Tito's recuperation have gradually increased. Should Tito remain out of circulation through December, a rumored visit by Brezhnev this fall might have to be postponed.

* * *

Soviet media are interpreting the outcome of the West German election as not simply a Social Democratic - Free Democratic victory, but as a victory for the policy of European detente.

Yet, the Soviets have reason to be unhappy with the narrowness of the coalition's victory. Before the election Soviet diplomats expressed concern that a shift to the right resulting in a razor-thin majority for the coalition would increase the leverage of the Free Democrats and their leader, Foreign Minister Genscher, whom Moscow does not like. They are also worried about the durability of the coalition and are well aware of the Free Democrats' long history of cooperation with the Christian Democrats.

To appeal to the business interests that traditionally back the Free Democrats, the Soviets have stressed the "mutually beneficial" business cooperation that has marked the

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coalition's tenure. The Soviets have returned to their theme that they will do "everything" to deepen detente and implement co-operation with the West Germans.

* * *

South Korea's export-led recovery is surpassing all earlier forecasts. GNP is now projected to grow by 14 percent in 1976.

South Korean exporters have taken advantage of the economic recovery in the US and have successfully penetrated the lucrative Middle East market. Import growth has been more moderate, which should permit South Korea's current-account deficit this year to be reduced to \$0.5 billion compared with \$2 billion in 1975.

* * *

Havana is likely to blame militant Cuban exiles, and possibly the US, for the crash yesterday of a Cuban airliner shortly after takeoff from Barbados.

Cuban exile terrorists have been linked to several bombings of Cuban facilities abroad in the past several months, including unsuccessful attempts to blow up aircraft in flight.

Cuban Prime Minister Castro last June warned that Havana might respond in kind to anti-Cuban terrorist activity. Unless there is convincing evidence that the crash was indeed an accident, Castro is likely to interpret the pilot's message that the plane had experienced an on-board explosion as proof that the crash was caused by an exile bomb.

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THAILAND

The return to martial law in Thailand-- whether it proves to be temporary or drawn out--is yet another indication of basic weaknesses in the nation's three-year-old system of parliamentary democracy. These weaknesses are reinforced by cultural patterns and are not susceptible to easy elimination. The instability and vacillation that have marked government performance can only reduce the already tenuous commitment to democratic rule in Thailand.

The multitude of parties competing for power--19 of the 41 that ran in the last election were represented in the parliament--so spread the vote as to make coalition government unavoidable. Yet the coalitions that have attempted to govern since the promulgation of the constitution in 1974 did not represent common political purposes so much as associations of convenience among party leaders who saw cabinet membership as the best way to protect and advance their personal interests.

Divided as these coalitions were by conflicting personal ambitions and interests, the development of coherent government policies has been virtually impossible until a near-crisis compelled some temporary consensus.

Party Politics

Political parties--now suspended at least temporarily--are basically alien to the Thai culture. Only the Democrat Party has a semblance of permanence (it has existed since 1946), while other parties have made fleeting appearances. The civilian elite tended to shy away from the risks and futility of party politics, preferring the real power and influence of the bureaucracy.

The Democrat Party comes closest to being a political party in the Western sense. Once regarded as the best organized and least corrupt of the Thai parties, it has become deeply divided along regional and generational lines, divisions that have clearly weakened the position of former prime minister Seni and dissipated the strength that should have accrued from the party's large plurality in the just-dissolved Assembly.

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The Thai Nation Party, the second largest, is more typical of Thai political bodies; it is a coalition of conservative businessmen, many of them retired military officers, and civilian bureaucrats held together by a web of personal and business relations. The party is descended from a powerful military clique of the 1950s that was ousted from power by Field Marshal Sarit in 1957. The overthrow of Sarit's heirs, Thanom and Praphat, gave the old clique new life.

Political Cliques

Most of the political parties are composites of such cliques, or, in the case of many of the small ones, temporary vehicles to further one person's ambition. The Thai clique system is a reflection of the patron-client phenomenon that pervades Thai society--a natural falling into place of a superior-inferior relationship with attendant obligations on each side.

These patron-client relations are transitory--clients are constantly reassessing the advantages of existing arrangements and seeking more beneficial patrons. In the parliamentary context, parties were unstable, continually shifting in relative strength as individual members offered their allegiance to the highest bidder.

The 1974 constitution corrected some of the more glaring deficiencies that contributed to the failure of earlier experiments in representative government. Members of the legislature could no longer change parties without losing their seats, a provision that contributed to some stability in the most recent Assembly. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Protest and Polarization

Fractious and vacillating government clearly endangered the long-range prospects for democracy in Thailand. The Thai are a conservative people, comfortable with forms of paternalistic authoritarianism and uncertain that free-wheeling Western democracy is really compatible with their society and their needs.

The growth of protest politics and its attendant violence contributed to public skepticism and reduced the tolerance level of right-wing civilian and military groups. In the past few years,

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students, workers, and farmers, traditionally passive elements of society, were increasingly drawn into active politics--but their impact was sporadic.

The students remain the cutting edge of protest politics. They have lost much of the glamor they once enjoyed for their role in bringing down the military regime in 1973. Since then, the more visible activists have grown increasingly leftist and now form the core of a nascent radical movement.

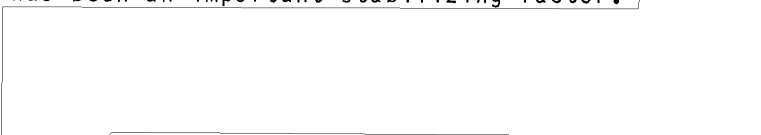
The radicalism of a few student leaders and the public's impatience with their activities encouraged repressive measures by right-wing forces. The extremism of both rightists and leftists has contributed to a growing polarization in Thai politics, which has been reflected in the increasing violence of recent months.

This growing tendency to violence may abate somewhat under martial law, at least initially, since leftist activists are likely to go into hiding to avoid arrest--and worse--at the hands of the military.

The King

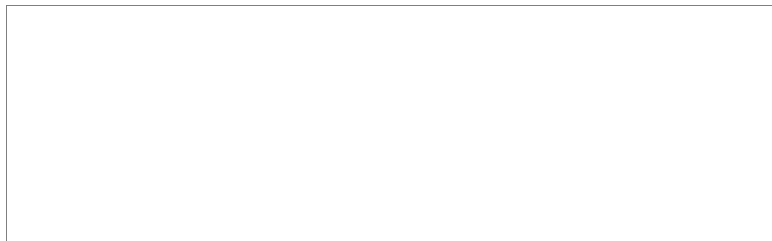
The King has little formal political authority, but he commands considerable moral influence and has been an important stabilizing factor.

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In moving on October 6 to take charge, the military was doubtless convinced that the King supported the declaration of martial law.

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The Army

The key factor in Thailand's political future is, as always, the army. With strong leadership, the army could be the most disciplined and effective

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political force in the country--ready to be used as a voting bloc to influence a parliamentary election or as the muscle for a coup.

The First Division of the First Army--the Bangkok garrison--is the traditional coup force, and the political proclivities of the First Army commander are of utmost importance to the government. The minister of defense holds another crucial post; he can place his allies in key military assignments when the annual retirements and rotations take place. The supreme military commander, as head of all the armed forces, is also in an influential position, as indicated by his selection on October 6 to run the new interim military council.

Until called upon to take over in the wake of the new student violence this week, most senior army officers seemed disinclined to think in terms of a return to military rule. There was growing dissatisfaction within the military with the government's weak and ineffectual performance, but most [redacted] apparently felt that the army should not be directly responsible for the collapse of Thailand's fragile democracy.

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Their basic interests were not seriously threatened by the conservative civilians in power, and the military's links to the political parties enabled them to manipulate the political system. The outbreak of serious violence together with Seni's manifestly weak leadership, however, set the stage for the declaration of martial law.

Disunity and Indecision

Thailand's parliamentary government has always been sustained more by negative factors than by positive ones. The parliamentary government's underpinnings have been weak, and the commitment to its conceptual foundation fragile. The majority of the Thai people had become increasingly disenchanted with the weak performance of their government under former prime ministers Seni and Khukrit, and, while not pleased at the prospect, are probably resigned to living for a period under the martial law regime established on October 6.

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