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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

October 20, 1975

MEMO FOR: GENERAL SCOWCROFT
FROM: THOMAS BARNES

I recommend that we cable this memo and the CIA study it covers to the Secretary in Peking October 20. Request your clearance. The cable should also be slugged for Phil Habib's attention.

MORI/CDF Pages 3-6
per C03213559

- Granger's shop
concerns you

Sent to HAK
10/20 pm
OS

MEMORANDUM

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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INFORMATION
October 20, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM: THOMAS J. BARNES

SUBJECT: Probable Thai Reaction to U. S. Request to Retain Combat Presence Beyond Next March

At the SRG meeting on October 17, you indicated that the Thai might be willing to accept a U. S. combat presence beyond March 1976. CIA, at your request, prepared an intelligence memorandum (Tab A) addressing this subject.

[redacted] 25X1
[redacted] give the following reasons for holding

-- The Thai no longer regard the U. S. as a reliable guarantor of their security, and therefore believe the withdrawal of U. S. combat forces is within their own best interests.

-- Prime Minister Khukrit's pledge that all U. S. combat forces would be withdrawn by March 1976 remains official policy.

-- The Khukrit government would be reluctant to run the political risk of going back on this time table.

25X1 -- Public pressure for a total withdrawal would quickly build once it became apparent the government was not prepared to fulfill its earlier commitment.

25X1 [redacted] that a serious deterioration in security along Thailand's border with Laos or Cambodia could perhaps prompt a shift in the Thai position. Short of such a turn of events, however, the Thai would view unfavorably any U. S. request to retain a combat force. Moreover, [redacted] U. S. request at this time might well backfire on U. S. interests as the Thai might move to delete some of the non-combat elements which we hope to retain.

Request that this information be passed on to Phil Habib.

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Probable Thai Reaction to a US Request to Retain a Small US Combat
Presence in Thailand Beyond Next March 25X1
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1. It is the judgment of [] the Central Intelligence Agency []

[] that a direct US request to retain any
US combat force in Thailand beyond March 1976 would be rejected.

-- The Thai government no longer regards the US as a reliable
guarantor of Thai security and believes that the withdrawal of
US combat forces is therefore in Thailand's best interests. Many
Thai -- military and civilian -- believe that even if there were
a US combat presence, the US would be unwilling to use it to
defend Thai security.

-- Prime Minister Khukrit's public pledge last April that all US
combat troops and aircraft would be withdrawn from Thailand by
March 1976 remains official Thai policy.

-- The government would be reluctant to run the political risk
of going back on its original timetable for the withdrawal of
US combat forces.

-- Public pressure to complete the withdrawal of combat forces on
schedule would quickly build if it became apparent that the
government were not prepared to fulfill its earlier commitment.

2. A request to retain US combat aircraft in Thailand, coming at the
very time the Thai are expecting the US to present a comprehensive withdrawal

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schedule, would shock many Thai officials. The Thai believe that the issue was settled long ago, and the shock effect alone would probably increase the odds of a negative response. The strongest opposition would come from within the foreign ministry, which would argue that a continued US combat presence would not only derail Thai efforts to improve relations with Hanoi but would provide a provocation for Hanoi stepping up its support to the Thai insurgents. Although the Thai military would be more sympathetic to the US position in private, they would not be prepared to take a public stand to this effect.

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3. As things now stand the Thai are prepared to accept a limited non-combat US military presence.

- A "modest" US support and advisory presence that would be associated with continuing US military aid would be permissible.
- The US would be permitted to retain an option to use U-Tapao air base for combat elements on an emergency basis, provided prior permission had been obtained from the Thai government. Such use would last only for the period the Thai believed Thailand's national security required a US combat presence.

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Although Khukrit is favorably disposed toward the US, we do not believe that his policy will deviate significantly from these positions.

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4. A direct US request at this time might well backfire on US interests. Even if the proposal were made initially to certain Thai officials who received it sympathetically, the foreign ministry would almost certainly leak the request to embarrass the prime minister and limit his options. Opposition could be hardened against retaining any non-combat presence. The Thai also could up the ante on the non-combat elements which the US hopes to retain.

5. Khukrit's political rivals, such as Deputy Prime Minister Praman and his ally Foreign Minister Chatchai, would be quick to take political advantage of any slippage in the withdrawal. Praman, perhaps sensing that the US military presence is an issue that could help propel him into the prime ministership, has already come out publicly against any US military presence beyond March. Such statements could reduce Khukrit's flexibility in negotiating any kind of agreement on a future US military presence in Thailand.

Possible Changes in Thai Views

6. Circumstances could alter Thai willingness to accept a US combat presence. A serious deterioration in the security situation along Thailand's border with Laos or Cambodia, for example, could prompt a shift in Thai opinion. The Thai could come to see a deterrent value in having a US combat element regularly stationed in Thailand.

7. Short of such a turn of events, the Thai leaders would look askance at a US request to retain a combat presence in Thailand, viewing it as unnecessarily complicating Thailand's position and not affording anything of consequence in return. There is a chance, however, that the Thai might take

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a less negative stance if a US demarche were not in the form of a request
but were couched in terms of a willingness to retain a combat presence in
response to a Thai desire for it.

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