

CONFIDENTIAL

076722  
MDLIAN 4478

CONFIDENTIAL  
FM BANGKOK  
TO PRIORITY FCO  
TELNO 490  
OF 220345Z JULY 88  
INFO SAVING MOSCOW, HANOI

BRIEFING FOR PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT.

THAI/SOVIET RELATIONS.

SUMMARY.

1. GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT IN THAI/SOVIET RELATIONS AS THE SOVIET UNION HAS BUILT ON GORBACHEV'S VLADIVOSTOK SPEECH OF JULY 1986. RELATIONSHIP IMPROVES SIGNIFICANTLY FOLLOWING PRIME MINISTER PREM'S VISIT TO MOSCOW IN MAY, AND IN LIGHT OF THAI PERCEPTIONS THAT THE SOVIET UNION IS EXERTING ITS INFLUENCE ON VIETNAM TO WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM CAMBODIA. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SOVIETS TO COMPETE WITH THE CHINESE, BUT THAIS STILL FUNDAMENTALLY LINKED TO THE WEST.

DETAIL.

2. WHILE GENERALLY WELCOMING GORBACHEV'S POLICIES TOWARDS SOUTH EAST ASIA, ADVANCED IN HIS KEYNOTE SPEECH IN VLADIVOSTOK IN JULY 1986, THE THAIS REMAIN CAUTIOUS AND SCEPTICAL. ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL CHAVALIT HAS ONLY THIS MONTH REPEATED THAT COMMUNISM REMAINS THE GREATEST INTERNAL THREAT TO THAILAND'S SECURITY. HOWEVER, THE SOVIET UNION HAS BEEN WORKING HARD TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THAILAND AND THE REGION. THE SOVIET UNION CONTINUES, FOR INSTANCE, TO PRESS FOR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, ACCEPTANCE AS AN ASEAN DIALOGUE PARTNER AND ADMISSION TO THE PACIFIC ECONOMIC COOPERATION COUNCIL.

3. THE KEY TO ANY IMPROVEMENT HAS REMAINED A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE CAMBODIAN PROBLEM. UP UNTIL EARLIER THIS YEAR, LACK OF PROGRESS ON THIS ISSUE INHIBITED ANY SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS HAVE INDUCED THE THAIS TO REASSESS THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS MOSCOW.

4. IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING VLADIVOSTOK, THE SOVIET UNION

CONFIDENTIAL

076722  
MDLIAN 4478

WAS PRESENTED WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE THEIR IMAGE IN THAILAND. THE THAI/US ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP WENT THROUGH AN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT PERIOD AND THE SOVIET UNION SOUGHT TO PORTRAY ITSELF, THOUGH WITHOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT SUCCESS, AS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TRADING PARTNER. THE THAIS ARE WELL AWARE THAT THE SOVIET UNION CANNOT COMPETE ECONOMICALLY WITH THE WEST AND JAPAN, BUT THEY ARE READY TO LOOK AT THE PROSPECTS FOR EXPANDING TRADE AND RELATIONS GENERALLY.

5. AT THE SAME TIME, THE SOVIET UNION HAS MADE A MAJOR EFFORT TO IMPROVE THEIR IMAGE IN THAILAND. THIS HAS INCLUDED VISITS BY SOVIET PARLIAMENTARIANS, SENIOR OFFICIALS, SCIENTISTS, MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY, THE MINSK BOLSHOI BALLETT AND OTHER ARTISTES, AS WELL AS ENDEAVOURS TO SECURE LAND FOR A LARGE NEW EMBASSY AND TO INITIATE A JOINT TRADING VENTURE (ASPC). THE NEW SOVIET AMBASSADOR, VALKOV, HAS SUCCESSFULLY CULTIVATED THE LOCAL MEDIA. THE POSITION OF THAI STUDENTS STUDYING IN THE SOVIET UNION HAS BEEN FORMALISED.

6. IN PARALLEL WITH PROGRESS ON CAMBODIA OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS, THE THAI/SOVIET POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP HAS IMPROVED. THE VISIT TO MOSCOW IN MAY THIS YEAR OF PRIME MINISTER PREM WAS SEEN AS A SUCCESS BY THE THAIS, WHO FELT THAT, PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, MOSCOW WAS REALLY TRYING. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A SUBSTANTIAL VIETNAMESE TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM CAMBODIA SHORTLY AFTER PREM'S VISIT (AFFORDING HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTRIBUTE THIS TO HIS EFFORTS IN MOSCOW), AND THE INFLUENCE EXERTED BY THE SOVIET UNION IN ARRANGING A MEETING BETWEEN THE VIETNAMESE AND THAI FOREIGN MINISTERS WERE SEEN IN BANGKOK AS CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF CONSTRUCTIVE SOVIET DIPLOMACY.

7. THE THAIS ARE BECOMING MORE COMFORTABLE IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIET UNION AS CHANGES BEGIN TO EMERGE IN SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY UNDER GORBACHEV'S LEADERSHIP. THAI FOREIGN MINISTER SIDDHI SAVETSILA COMMENTED IN A SPEECH ON 20 JULY: 'WE HAVE NOTICED THAT MOSCOW IS CHANGING. THE SOVIET UNION HAS NO DIRECT CONFLICT OF INTERESTS WITH THAILAND. IT IS A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON VIETNAME AND IS ALREADY CONTRIBUTING TO PEACE AND STABILITY HERE....'.

8. THE DOMESTIC COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THAILAND, AT ITS PEAK BETWEEN 1975 AND 1980, WAS PRIMARILY PEKING-ORIENTATED AND IS NOW DORMANT. THE SOVIET PRESENCE AT CAM RANH BAY HAS COME TO BE TACITLY ACCEPTED AND TENDS NOWADAYS TO BE TOLDERATED IN

CONFIDENTIAL

076722  
MDLIAN 4478

SOME QUARTERS AS A REFLECTION OF SUPER-POWER RIVALRY.

9. IF THE SOVIET UNION CAN CONVEY THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE LEANING ON VIETNAME, THEY WILL BE WELL PLACED TO COMPETE WITH THE CHINESE, WHO HAVE ESTABLISHED THEMSELVES VERY STRONGLY IN THAILAND IN RECENT YEARS. MANY THAIS FEEL A LATEN UNEASINESS AND RESENTMENT ABOUT THE EXTENT OF CHINESE INFLUENCE, WHICH THE SOVIET UNION COULD EXPLOIT, ESPECIALLY IF CHINESE BACKING FOR THE KHMER ROUGE WERE TO APPEAR TO BE THE MAJOR OBSTACLE TO A SETTLEMENT IN CAMBODIA.

10. THAILAND WILL CONTINUE TO REMAIN FUNDAMENTALLY PRO-WESTERN IN OUTLOOK AND ORIENTATION. NONETHELESS, WITH ITS RAPIDLY DEVELOPING ECONOMY AND OPEN SOCIETY, THAILAND COULD BE A USEFUL PARTNER FOR THE SOVIET UNION, AS LONG AS THEY ARE CAREFUL TO AVOID ANY SUSPICION THAT THEY ARE SEEKING TO SUBVERT THE ESTABLISHED ORDER. A BALANCE OF INFLUENCE BETWEEN CHINA AND THE SOVIET UNION IN THAILAND WOULD ALSO SEEM TO BE IN THE WESTERN INTEREST.

TONKIN

YYYY

DISTRIBUTION

54

MAIN 50

LIMITED  
SEAD  
SPD  
NEWS  
PROTOCOL  
SOVIET DEPT

PS  
PS/MRS CHALKER  
PS/LORD GLENARTHUR  
PS/PUS  
MR GILLMORE  
MR MCLAREN

ADDITIONAL 3

PS/NO 10

SAVING 1

MOSCOW  
NNNN