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Thais Accept 'Regrets' as Apology

By Bruce Palling

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BANGKOK, May 15—The Thai government today accepted a U.S. embassy letter of regret as a formal apology for the recent unauthorized use of Thai territory to launch part of the rescue operation for the American freighter Mayaguez.

The two-page letter, which was handed to Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan by U.S. Charge of Affaires Edward Masters, expressed regret for the problems

caused to the Thai government by the U.S. military actions against Cambodia and said such events would not happen again.

Later, Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj expressed satisfaction with this "sort of apology" and said he hoped Thai-U.S. relations could return to normal. "We shouldn't have any more trouble," he said.

The three-day demonstration outside the gates of the U.S. embassy, which had drawn crowds of up to 8,000,

was also called off by its organizers.

"We did as well as we could expect by getting this letter—you can't expect much more from a demonstration," a leading student activist, Seksan Prasertkul, said this evening.

The text of the letter actually fell short of being an apology and was in fact no stronger than U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger's statement Friday that the United States regretted any embarrassment caused

to the Thai government by the American actions, which, according to some reports here, included attacks on Cambodian gunboats and land targets by U.S. fighter bombers based at Korat air base in Thailand.

Last Saturday Chatichai rejected Kissinger's expression of regret and said that only a written apology would be acceptable. Today the foreign minister said, "The case is closed. We con-

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sider the note ... as a formal apology."

When Thai anger was at its height last week, the Cabinet formally notified the United States that all U.S. troops in the country, numbering about 25,000, would have to be withdrawn within 10 months.

More than one thousand Marines used in the rescue operation were transhipped through Utapao air base to waiting aircraft carriers despite an earlier pledge by the U.S. charge, Masters, to Prime Minister Kukrit, that Thai territory would not be used in the operation.

Despite today's attempt by the government to defuse the tension in U.S.-Thai relations, Foreign Minister Chatichai said the Thai ambassador to the United States, was still being recalled for consultations and that the review of all agreements and commitments between Thailand and the United States would go ahead.

Meanwhile, the three-man delegation of the new South Vietnamese government left Bangkok unhappy about the Thai attitude toward the return of aircraft brought to Utapao by fleeing South Vietnamese pilots on the eve of the collapse of their government.

Despite a statement by a Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman last week that Thailand was willing to return these aircraft to the new South Vietnamese gov-

ernment in Saigon, Chatichai said this evening that the aircraft would only be returned after it was decided who was the rightful owner.

The South Vietnamese had come to Bangkok demanding not only the return of the 50 or so aircraft remaining at Utapao, but also the more than 100 helicopters, jet fighter-bombers and C-130 transports which the United States took out of Thailand two weeks ago without consulting with the Thai government.

The South Vietnamese statement said, "Much to the regret of the Republic of South Vietnam, the Thai government

has not yet responded to such legitimate demands of the South Vietnamese people. This fact has not created favorable conditions for the establishment of new relations."

Chatichai said the statement constituted "interference in our internal affairs. We have not been friends with these people for 30 years. If it is delayed a little more because of this it will be all right with us."

He said the South Vietnamese government should go directly to the United States for the return of the aircraft already in their hands as this was no longer a Thai problem.

The South Vietnamese statement did, however, welcome last week's recognition by Bangkok and said that the new Saigon government had taken over possession of the

country's embassy in Bangkok, without actually saying when diplomats would be exchanged between the two countries.

At this stage, it is not known what has caused the unexpected holdup in the return of the 50 or so aircraft still remaining at Utapao, although both the United States and the Thai military are thought to oppose the return of any military equipment to a

country they consider a potential if not actual enemy of Thailand.

Many of the military—and some civilian officials—were also sympathetic with the U.S. moves in the Mayaguez case.