

U.S. Gives Thais Proposal on Bases

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—The United States today approached the two-week-old Government of Thailand with a new proposal that would allow at least one American military facility to continue operation in the country, and more than a token force of advisers to remain as well.

A 90-minute meeting between United States Ambassador Charles S. Whitehouse and the new Thai Foreign Minister, Phichai Rattakul, dealt largely with the continued status of the United States electronic espionage base known as Ramasun in northeastern Thailand—the one installation that the United States is particularly anxious to retain in the country, its functioning being virtually impossible to duplicate elsewhere.

After the session, Mr. Phichai told reporters that the Ambassador “has made a new proposal that is of interest.” He said he had asked the Ambassador to present the proposal in a written memorandum next week.

The Ramasun facility was one of a number of bases—including the seismic facility at Ko Kha that is also used to monitor Chinese and Soviet nuclear tests, and the sprawling Utapao air base on the Gulf of Thailand



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A base at Ramasun is considered important to U.S.

—that were to be closed within three months after former Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj said on March 20 that all but 270 American advisers must leave the country.

Since then some force reductions have been made, until now there are fewer than 3,000 American military personnel in Thailand. Nevertheless, although the Ramasun facility supposedly ceased all its espionage functions by midnight March 20, in fact several hundred Americans still remain.

“And although some of the black-box equipment is gone from there, they still have about two more weeks before they reach the point of no return on being able to resume operations should the Thais change their minds,” one Western military official, not an American, said today.

If a new agreement is reached with the United States, however, it seems likely that it will cover more than simply Ramasun. In a briefing late today for some Thai reporters, Mr. Phichai said that Ko Kha Utapao were also discussed at today’s meeting with the United States Ambassador—a meeting that was, officially, simply a courtesy call to congratulate the Government on its first vote of confidence in the new Parliament.

On March 20, after receiving the news from Mr. Kukrit, who last month was defeated for reelection and was succeeded as Prime Minister by his brother Seni Phamoj, Mr. Whitestone said that the United States did not intend to press a new government for renewed permission for Americans to stay.

“We do not stay where we are not wanted,” he said then in a statement that has since been widely quoted.

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