

CMDO

Thais to Close Base To U.S. Aircraft

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Thailand will not permit U.S. aircraft to use the strategic Utapao air base past the July 20 deadline for American military withdrawal from this country, Foreign Minister Pichai Rattakul said yesterday.

He said the air base, 80 miles southeast of Bangkok and a convenient refueling stop for American planes supporting the U.S. military installation at Diego Garcia island in the Indian Ocean, would be closed to U.S. aircraft.

All U.S. military facilities were to be closed down under the previously agreed upon July 20 date, and only 270 American military advisers are to remain in Thailand.

Pichai told reporters that the U.S. Embassy had given him a memorandum proposing that the U.S. retain an electronics intelligence center at Ramusen, the Koh Kha radar site and several other installations. He refused to divulge details of the memorandum.

He said that if the Ramusen base, which monitors communications inside Indochina and possibly China, remains operational, some of the information Thailand received from it would be shared "for the sake of regional security" with other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The association includes Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The U.S. Embassy declined to comment on the contents of the proposals. Earlier it said the withdrawal of U.S. troops and equipment was continuing and that as of last Friday there were 2666 American servicemen in Thailand.

Associated Press