

Thai Junta Re-Examines Relations With Neighbor Nations and U.S.

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By DAVID A. ANDELMAN

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BANGKOK, Thailand, Oct. 17—Thailand has embarked on a re-examination of its relations with other nations.

Already a new bitterness seems to have crept into relations between Thailand and its Indochinese neighbors, particularly Laos and Vietnam, and on Friday a senior member of the Thai military junta reported the first clash in months between Thai and Laotian forces across the border. At the same time, Thailand's new military rulers seem eager to develop a new warmth in relations with the United States, but many diplomats believe this may not be fully reciprocated.

"We used to have close relations with the United States, with Malaysia, with Europeans," said Dr. Thanat Khoman, a former Foreign Minister, now the chief foreign policy adviser to the military junta. "Then we gave them ultimatums, we desecrated their emblems, we were brought to the brink of disrupting our relations with the United States instead of discussing with them on a friendly basis."

In a speech the other day before the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand and in private talks with a number of Western diplomats, Dr. Thanat has expressed what he said was the "realistic view" that "we don't expect relations to go back to the former days of military cooperation."

"The United States doesn't want it, neither does Thailand," he said.

Military Leaders May Not Share View

But there is considerable question whether this attitude is entirely shared by the military leaders of the 24-member junta, or Administrative Reform Committee, which seized power 12 days ago, who recall fondly years of close ties between the Thai and American defense establishments.

There are many diplomats who question whether even Dr. Thanat's theory of benign cooperation is realistic.

"There is a presumption by the Thais that a return to a military government here will be seen as a good thing in the United States, while the U.S. Congress might not see it is a good thing at all," one Western diplomat observed.

Other Thai foreign policy specialists believe that there must be an improvement of relations with the United States, and certainly with the other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, known as ASEAN, if only to provide a counterbalance to a thorough chilling of relations with Laos, Vietnam and perhaps Cambodia that has begun. The ASEAN members, in addition to Thailand, are Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines.

Hanoi and Vientiane have started the most bitter series of attacks on Thailand since the fall of Indochina over all their external propaganda organs—a campaign that began intensively the day after the coup, disposed briefly last weekend when, Western analysts believe, the Indochinese leader were watching for any possible gestures of cooperation from the new regime here, and then when they were apparently convinced there was none, built to a new crescendo last week.

Roundup of Vietnamese Charged

Tonight, in its toughest statement to date, the Hanoi radio accused the Thai junta of having rounded up several thousand Vietnamese citizens and herded them into "disguised concentration camps" in northeastern Thailand. The broadcast statement said that if the Thai leaders "persist in their hostilities toward Vietnam" they would have to accept full responsibility for the consequences.

In a quick riposte, Radio Thailand denied Hanoi's allegations that a right-wing group here was trying to destroy the new relationship with Vietnam established during the previous democratic regime of former Prime Minister Seni Pramoj.