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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants:

Ex-Prime Minister Luang Thamrong Nawasawat,
and
Ambassador Edwin F. Stanton.

American Embassy
Bangkok, Siam
March 31, 1948

Subject: Current Political Situation

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NND 760050

Former Prime Minister Luang Thamrong Nawasawat had tea with us yesterday. He was looking well and said that he had gained some weight during the past three months and was happy to be out of politics. He said he intended to proceed to Hua Hin, the seaside resort, in the next few days and after a brief vacation there would go into the forestry business. In this latter connection he said that being Prime Minister of Siam was an expensive matter and that while in office he had found it necessary to supplement his small official salary of 2,000 baht per month by expenditures from his own personal funds.

I found Luang Thamrong disposed to discuss the political situation in his usual frank and forthright manner. He referred first to the coup d'etat and recalled that he had from time to time assured me that he felt fully capable of preventing Field Marshal Phibun from returning to power. He said by way of explanation of the events which took place on the night of November 8 that he was in fact capable of controlling Phibun by political means and had believed that General Adun would prevent any military coup d'etat. Speaking of the future and the intentions of the Field Marshal, he said he was certain in his own mind that Phibun's character had in no way changed, that the Field Marshal was still a very ambitious man and that he unquestionably desired to become Prime Minister. In this connection Thamrong said it was his belief that the Field Marshal would bide his time and seek to achieve his ambitions by Parliamentary means. Thamrong added he thought this development might materialize when Parliament was reconvened in October of this year. Luang Thamrong also described Madame Phibun as a very forceful personality and a person of consuming ambitions. He seemed to think that she was pressing the Field Marshal to take control of the country.

Referring to himself, Luang Thamrong said he had no intention of injecting himself into the present political situation. He said he thought it was in the best interests of the country that Khuang and his government should be given an opportunity to show what they could do and that therefore he had turned a deaf ear to numerous overtures made to him by so-called opposition groups in Parliament. He said that while the opposition in the Lower House was by no means well organized and did not represent a united group in view of divergent personal and political intentions, nevertheless these groups were already seeking to "make trouble" for Khuang. Thamrong said he had experienced precisely that same difficulty when he was Prime Minister and went on to say that the British Parliamentary system would not work in Siam and that the only way the government could

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- 2 -

be sure of Parliamentary support was by buying such support. He added he knew Khuang would have precisely the same difficulty. By way of illustrating his point, Thamrong mentioned the fact that he had been approached within the past week by five members of Khuang's Democrat Party who were willing to give him political support for a price.

In discussing the question of the late King's death, Thamrong said he did not know whether this tragic incident would ever be cleared up. He said speaking quite confidentially the evidence which was accumulated while he was Prime Minister tended to implicate the present young King, but that he would never have dared to hint by any official action that such was the case. He asserted that Nai Pridi had found himself in a similar predicament and scoffed at the idea that Pridi might be implicated in any way. I asked him what he thought the consequences might be if it should be revealed that His Majesty is in fact involved. He said he presumed that the present King would abdicate and thought that this development would be followed by a period of confusion and wild intrigue. He said Prince Chumphot was next in line, but because Chumphot and his wife were unpopular it was doubtful whether he would ever actually ascend the Throne. He added that next in line to Prince Chumphot was Prince Phanuphan, who he said was equally unpopular. He said that this question of personalities complicated the situation and was most unfortunate inasmuch as he felt Siam could not dispense with the monarchy, which represented a stabilizing influence.

I asked Luang Thamrong whether he thought there was any basis for rumors which circulate from time to time regarding the planning of another coup d'etat. He replied he had heard that General Luang Adun was busy attempting to arrange a coup which would place him in power. However, he said he did not believe that Luang Adun had any very substantial backing either among politicians or the military. As regards the young military group which executed the coup d'etat of November 8, he said they were restive but might be placated by being given promotions or government positions of some importance. He said nevertheless all these groups, including the Field Marshal, were in his opinion merely marking time and that there would be regroupings of these political and military forces in the next few months. I asked Luang Thamrong point blank whether he had given any consideration to joining forces with Phibun. He replied emphatically that he would not work together with the Field Marshal. Nevertheless I gathered from Luang Thamrong's statements that he too was biding his time and waiting for the political wheel to make still another turn. I took occasion to stress that these constant political changes did the country no good and that given relative political stability there was no reason why Siam should not make rapid progress toward a return to normalcy. Thamrong agreed with me that Siam's prospects are bright and added with a touch of humor that all that is necessary is to rid the country of the politicians.

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