

ATONEMENT BEFORE ABSOLUTION:
BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS THAILAND
DURING WORLD WAR II

by

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In his book *Thailand and the United States*, Frank C. Darling points to the 'sharp cleavage' between British and American policies towards Thailand at the end of World War II. The U.S. was not merely sympathetic to the maintenance of its independence as a model for other countries; it regarded Thailand as an occupied state to be liberated from the Japanese; and it did not intervene to destroy militarism there as it did in Japan itself¹. The attitude of the British differed. Darling quotes the proposals of Sir Josiah Crosby, their minister in Bangkok at the outbreak of the war, as representing their 'general position'. In an article published in October 1943, Crosby recommended that the United Nations should in a postwar settlement take steps to diminish the role of the military in Thailand, so as to allow democracy a fair chance². In another article, published in July 1944, he argued that Thailand, which had declared war on British and the U.S., was 'liable to punishment'. He also argued for 'some form of tutelage' after the war. The old system of 'advisers' should be revived, backed up by one of the United Nations member countries 'as a quasi-tutelary authority'³.

Given the relative power of the Allies at the end of the war, it was not surprising that U.S. policy prevailed. The execution of British policy indeed depended on persuading the Americans to back it, or at least tolerate it. There was little room for the British to take initiatives alone. Attempts to do so involved adopting a reserved attitude to the Americans that could only increase their distrust of imperialist policies. But attempts at persuasion in the event tended to lead the same way, partly because the objectives of the British were poorly defined, much less defined indeed than Darling implies in quoting Crosby. Britain could not perhaps hope to achieve much: it might have achieved more if it had taken an earlier decision on its essential aims.

The Thais were conscious that there was a cleavage of policy between Britain and the U.S., and they made use of it. Well aware of Britain's decline even before the war, they became increasingly aware also of the predominant role the U.S. was sure to assume after it, in Asia and elsewhere, and tailored their policy accordingly. The civilian elements realised that, initially at least, the ball would be at their feet: their views were more attuned to the aims of the Allies; and they were likely to be more acceptable to the ultimate victors than the military

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¹ F.C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States*, Washington, 1965, p. 41-43.

² J. Crosby, "The failure of constitutional government in Siam", *Asiatic Review*, XXXIX (October 1943), 420.

³ J. Crosby, "Observations on a postwar settlement in South-East Asia", *International Affairs*, XX, 3 (July 1944), 362.

faction that had, under *Luang Phibun Songkhram*, assumed control before the war, increased it at the outset of the war, and sustained it till the tide turned against Japan. The civilian elements were, however, divided: *Nai Pridi Phanomyong's* coup faction from the royalists, for example. Possibly a different Allied policy would have strengthened them. But while the U.S. was unlikely to intervene to destroy the military, the British approach had punitive aspects that were unacceptable even to the civilians, who were not less nationalist than the military. Britain's approach was too colonialist for the Americans, despite its concern for liberal elements; too punitive for the liberal element, despite their need for support. In the absence of adequate power to enforce it, Britain's policy was sure to fail.

Britain's policy towards Thailand at the end of the war was not indeed entirely, or even perhaps principally, that outlined by Crosby. Nor were its emphases quite the same: it did not have his antimilitary bias. But it had its punitive and tutelary aspects, and it was certainly not consistent with the objectives of the Americans, though it may be that Crosby's articles helped to arouse their anti-imperialist suspicions. And it was certainly inconsistent in itself, though again in a rather different way from Crosby's policy. In a sense, indeed, Britain had not managed fully to formulate a policy by August 1945, partly because of attempts to take account of a range of objectives that seemed relevant to the various departments and interests concerned, partly because of vain attempts to reconcile them with those of the Americans, whose war the Pacific struggle had largely become. Britain's policy towards Thailand was not simply Crosby's, nor even that of the Far Eastern Department of the Foreign Office. The defining of it in the years 1942-5 should be studied, indeed, as a problem of adaptation and transition, for the British and their empire and for other powers, great and small, at the conclusion of what was in a sense a second war of British succession. The framers of Britain's policy towards Thailand, as no doubt in other spheres, found it difficult to reconcile the imperatives of European empire in Asia, with which the Thais had long had a special relationship, and the demands of a postwar Asia in which European empire had to be re-established in the face of indigenous nationalism, Chinese assertiveness, and American anti-imperialism. At least at first, Crosby sought to harmonize British and U.S. policies: he envisaged U.S. tutelage in Siam, and British and Dutch empire to the south. But in 1943-4, he was suggesting tutelage by a United Nations member country; and in his book, *Siam: The Crossroads*, completed in summer 1944 and published in 1945, he clearly had Britain in mind⁴. The Foreign Office was more realistic. But its policy by 1945 still covered far more than the strictly defined objectives there could alone have been some hope of attaining.

In the heyday of Britain's imperialism, Siam had retained its independence. The two countries had come to an accommodation, based on the realities of power and mutual interest, and a degree of wisdom and forbearance. The British accepted the existence of an independent and friendly Siam, an outwork of British Burma and Malaya. The Siamese made concessions, commercial and territorial, to the British, but retained, in Mongkut's phrase, their house and home⁵. They made concessions to others, too, partly out of necessity, partly to make the concessions to the British less unique. Again, the absolute monarchy of Chulalongkorn

⁴ J. Crosby, *Siam: The Crossroads*, London, 1945, pp. 155-6.

⁵ A.L. Moffat, *Mongkut, the King of Siam*, Ithaca, 1961, p. 124.

appointed advisers, British, but not merely British⁶. In the interwar period, the power of the British declined. They sought to retain their influence by sustaining their prestige in Asia as a whole and, with the advice of men like Crosby, by coming to terms with the shifts in Siam's politics, with the move to abolish the unequal treaties in the 1920s and to upset the absolute monarchy in the coup of 1932. But the events of the late 1930s destroyed British prestige in Asia as elsewhere, and the vigorous chauvinism of the military faction of the 'Promoters' of the coup proved even less welcome than the 'communism' of the civilians whom they increasingly pushed aside.

In this historical context the wartime behaviour of the Phibun government seemed all the more unacceptable, deserving of chastisement. In looking forward, the British looked backward too: there was a tendency to seek the restoration of prestige, to adopt a punitive stance, even, with some, to go back on the territorial settlement of the colonial period. Such attitudes were comprehensible, but not as compatible, perhaps, with the conditions of the postwar period as attitudes more free of the burden of history would have been. The British could no doubt expect to retain India and to return to Burma and Malaya at least temporarily, whatever view the Americans took. But a punitive policy towards Siam was hardly viable, and a more positive line might have served better. Indeed the Americans would possibly have seen more reason in some of Britain's objectives if others had seemed more reasonable, and a joint policy might have emerged that could have benefited the Allies and the Thais. As it was, a cleavage of viewpoint existed almost from the beginning of the Pacific war, and it was never bridged. The British, proud of their realism, were not realistic enough. Crosby's policy was rejected, but nothing more consonant with American policy replaced it: indeed, his policy seemed to some Americans at the time (as later to Frank Darling) to be Britain's policy. Britain's reservations over Thailand confirmed, rather than overcame, the doubts of the Americans. Its policy took too long to settle; in so far as it ever was settled, it was poorly focused.

In June 1940 Thailand signed non-aggression treaties with Britain and France⁷. The latter was made on the understanding that boundary revision with Laos and Cambodia would follow, but the Pétain government was not forthcoming. The landing of Japanese troops in Indochina, and another rejection from Pétain, induced Phibun, whose irredentism enjoyed backing well outside the military faction, to invade Laos and Cambodia. Japan mediated, and Thailand obtained Sayaboury, Champasak, Siemreap, and Battambang. The British were apprehensive of further Japanese moves on Thailand itself, and especially anxious about a move

⁶ Thamsook Numnonda, "The first American advisers in Thai history", *Journal of the Siam Society* (JSS), LXII, 2 (July 1974), 123n.

⁷ E.T. Flood, "Japan's relations with Thailand: 1928-41", Ph.D thesis, University of Washington, 1967, pp. 232-8, 259-62.

on Kra, to the north of British Malaya. But, though the Thais themselves became apprehensive during 1941, the British could offer them no guarantee and only token support⁸. In 1941, as a later British Foreign Office memorandum put it, 'we realized that in the absence of a real prospect of adequate military assistance Siamese resistance could not be counted upon, and even if offered would not be effective for very long. We were therefore disposed to make every allowance for Siam when the Japanese attack materialised.'

At first, in fact, the Thais resisted, but Phibun soon agreed to permit Japanese troops to pass through the country, while Japan guaranteed Thailand's 'independence, sovereignty and honour'. Though distrusting Phibun, the British government were initially 'willing to believe that the Siamese Government as a whole had acted under duress', and simply issued a notification that Siam was regarded as enemy-occupied. British policy was influenced by reports that 'the majority of Siamese opinion was anti-Japanese if not pro-Ally'. Two press correspondents who escaped to Burma urged that 'every endeavour should be made to organize the pro-Ally spirit in Siam so that Allied forces might eventually be welcomed as friends and liberators'. Allied propaganda, they suggested, should not blame the Siamese but sympathize with them and, if possible, promise the restoration of Siam's independence and sovereignty after Allied victory. The announcement of a ten-year Japan-Thailand treaty of alliance on 20 December led to the withdrawal of Crosby, but the line of propaganda which the British proposed that the Allies should follow remained similar. It should express sympathy for the Siamese people, but not for their government. A promise to restore independence and sovereignty was, however, 'premature': British policy would depend on 'the degree of assistance' in fact given to the Japanese. In the United States, the Siamese ambassador, *M.R. Seni Pramoj*, had repudiated his government's action and announced his intention of working for the re-establishment of an independent Siam. Though attributing the ten-year alliance to *force majeure*, the Americans, however, did not believe anti-Japanese feeling in Siam to be as strong as the British did, and they contemplated, but deferred, a decision to recognize Seni as representative of the free people of Siam⁹.

The position changed in January 1942, when Thai troops entered Burma with Japanese forces, and Thailand declared war on Britain and the U.S. The declaration was not signed by all the Regents for King Ananda, Pridi, kicked upstairs by Phibun because he disapproved of the pro-Japanese policy, standing out against it: and it could later be claimed that the declaration was as a result unconstitutional¹⁰. Britain placed an announcement in the *Gazette* that a state of war existed, but it made no declaration of war, and continued to regard the Prime Minister as 'the main culprit'¹¹. The U.S., influenced by China¹², decided to ignore the declaration of war. 'From this point there was in fact some difference in the outlook

⁸ E.T. Flood, 'The 1940 Franco-Thai border dispute and Phibun Sonkhraam's commitment to Japan', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, X, 2 (September 1969), 304-25. Charnvit Kasetsiri, 'The first Phibun government and its involvement in World War II', *JSS*, LXII, 2 (July 1974), 49-50. Benjamin A. Batson, 'The fall of the Phibun government, 1944', *ibid.*, 92-93. James V. Martin, 'Thai-American relations in World War II', *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXII, 4 (August 1963), 454-5, 458-9.

⁹ FE (44) 14, 21 December 1944, F.O. 371/41848 [F6092/1599/40], Public Record Office, London.

¹⁰ Charnvit Kasetsiri, 54n.

¹¹ As note 9.

¹² Martin 461.

of the United States and ourselves towards Siam.' The reasons the British Foreign Office found in different pre-war treaty obligations—the U.S. had made no non-aggression pact in 1940—and 'in our own closer concern owing to the proximity of our territories' and the use of Siam made by the Japanese in attacking Malaya and Burma. The U.S. was also influenced by Seni's repudiation and 'the vague attractions of a Free Siamese Movement which this opened up'¹³.

Crosby's policies were unlikely to appeal in the U.S. and the publicity he secured may have contributed to a distrust of British policies. Yet Crosby's views were not wholly endorsed in the Foreign Office, though the reasons officials gave for their dissent varied, and their attitudes were at once more minatory in some respects and less in others. The policies Britain tried to work out as the war progressed were to be affected, not only by the opposition of the U.S., but also by other factors, by developments that took place in the war, often operating on attitudes that dated from pre-war times.

Even as he returned to London on board the repatriation vessel *El Nil*, Crosby had prepared a report for the Foreign Office on the events that led up to and followed the ten-year alliance of December 1941. He stressed the need for sympathetic propaganda. He also argued that *Luang Pradit* (Pridi) was potentially Britain's most powerful friend. 'It is to him that we must look for the formation of a new Government when better times have come'; and the British must encourage him to associate with himself not only the intellectuals, 'but also those adherents of the old regime who realize that the days of absolute monarchy are gone forever'. *Luang Phibun's* military faction should be 'cleared out', he urged, as he was later to urge in his 1943 article; the army should be drastically reduced. 'Painful though such a step might be to the national pride, I have little doubt that the liberals would not oppose it', he argued—aware, perhaps, of possible accusations of inconsistency—for the soldiers had made a mockery of the 1932 constitution and driven the civilians into the 'political wilderness'. G.P. Young of the Far Eastern Department pointed out that the Foreign Office was already following the policy Crosby recommended, not to treat the Siamese as all-out enemies. Sir Maurice Peterson, supervising the Department, thought Crosby overemphasized the extent to which Britain should see itself as having let the Siamese down, though 'it is on the whole a good thing that a British representative in a country which has got into difficulties with our own should retain some at least of his sympathies for the people among whom he has resided'. The real charge against Siam after the war 'will not be based so much on mere submission to an enemy of overwhelming strength, but on such acts of direct assistance as she may have performed in the enemy interest'. Crosby's views did not impress¹⁴.

Back in England Crosby sent the Foreign Office in January 1943 some suggestions on a postwar settlement. 'I discern a risk, if we are not ready in time with proposals of our own, of peace terms being imposed upon that country which might run counter to British interests, to say nothing of the legitimate interests of the Siamese themselves. American views of a settlement need not coincide with ours and there is, above all, the danger of China seeking to

¹³ As note 9.

¹⁴ Crosby to Foreign Secretary, 7 October 1942, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/31860 [F7056/1083/40].

bring Siam within her orbit...'. Perhaps a study group should be set up?¹⁵ Crosby's suggestions included abolition, or drastic reduction, of the armed forces; and a modified form of tutelage or mandate, in addition to advisers and to strengthen their hand. The mandate should preferably be exercised by the U.S. whose tutelage the Thais would accept 'less unwillingly' than that of others. And it would reconcile U.S. opinion to British rule in Malaya and Dutch in Indonesia. Military opinion, quoted by Crosby, was that Malaya would be best defended at Kra: annexation was out of the question, but he thought Britain might have bases there.

These suggestions were referred to G.F. Hudson, of the Foreign Research and Press Service of the RIIA at Balliol. Hudson, too, displayed a concern over Chinese ambitions in the region, and it shaped his view of the settlement with Siam. Chinese troops might enter Siam as Japan collapsed. Much would depend on the position in Indochina. If Decoux's *attentisme* became 'too obvious' to the Japanese, they might disarm the French and set up an Annamite puppet force. 'This sort of action by the Japanese would render it extremely difficult to restore French rule in Indo-China and would make it very easy for the Chinese to grab the country....'

The prospect led Hudson to point up the inconsistency in Crosby's views. A postwar settlement with Thailand, Hudson admitted, would have to include measures of 'retribution'; but, as far as possible, they must not prejudice 'arrangements for the future security and stability of the area'. Measures of retribution, Hudson thought, must include 'the removal and banishment of Songkhram and such of his associates as have actively supported Japan', and compensation for business firms and pensioners who had sustained loss as a result of Siam's hostile action. These measures would not cause 'lasting resentment among the Siamese; indeed, they would hardly believe in the reality of our victory or have any respect for us if we did less'. But the case would be different in regard to measures that would limit Siam's sovereignty and 'reduce her status as a nation below what it was before the war'. Furthermore, Crosby did not 'adequately consider the possibility of China acquiring a *de facto* control over Siam, either at the end of the war or subsequently, by military-political infiltration with the aid of the Chinese minority or the effect of such penetration on the Chinese in Malaya'. As long as Britain retained administrative rights and responsibilities in Malaya, 'it appears to be a British interest that Siam should not fall under such Chinese control, but should remain as a *strong and friendly buffer state*'.

The military occupation of Kra, urged by Crosby, Hudson thought would result from war operations; a more permanent arrangement might be based on a treaty like those with Egypt and Iraq. 'Such facilities, however, do not at all involve the disarmament of Siam and are indeed quite compatible with a policy of strengthening the Siamese State.' Crosby wanted the armed forces 'disbanded or drastically curtailed' for 'political, rather than military, reasons'; a large military establishment would hinder 'the growth of democratic institutions'. 'But', Hudson argued, 'if we wish to have a stable and independent Siam, we shall have to take as much risk in this respect as we take with Egypt or Iraq.' If Siam could not defend itself, it

¹⁵Crosby to Clarke, 9 January 1943, F.O. 371/35979 [F222/222/40].

would depend on foreign protection, in fact on British troops: that would mean an additional burden on the U.K., while leaving Siam without national self-respect or a sense of responsibility. 'It is particularly important that Siam, after her change of Government, should have an efficient army capable of dealing with large-scale internal disorder fomented from abroad, i.e. with the possibility of a coup by local Chinese organized and armed from China. . . .'

Hudson also criticized Crosby's 'quasi-mandate' from similar points of view: 'unless the excessive pro-Chinese bias of American popular sentiment—with its influence on official policy—is considerably modified, the American tutelage would be likely to open the way for dangerous Chinese intrigues'. Indeed, if the Americans took on the task, they would want China associated with it. 'If it is a British interest that Siam should exist as an independent buffer state, this interest will be best served by insistence on Siam's sovereignty, and such a policy will also be best for conciliating Siamese national feeling.' Advisers would gain influence as a result of the prestige the U.S. and Britain would win by gaining victory: there was no need for a special apparatus of tutelage. 'It is, however, very important that the U.S.A. should approve of whatever settlement is made with Siam and that she should, if possible, accept some responsibility with regard to it.' Siam might be covered by some scheme of collective security, involving the U.S. The economic adviser, and not merely the foreign affairs adviser as pre-war, should be an American, 'so that the American public can be assured that British influence in Siam is not being used to the detriment of American trade and investment'.

Siam, Hudson thought, would have to give up any British territory transferred by Japan during the war. But he doubted 'whether it would be wise to compel her to restore to France the territory of Indo-China ceded to her as a result of the Japanese "mediation" in 1941'. For that Britain was not responsible: it was a consequence of Vichy capitulationism. The only reason for reversing the cession would be the benefit to Anglo-French relations. 'There would be a great danger, however, that Siamese national feeling might be alienated from us by our action on behalf of France without any commensurate gain in the form of French gratitude.' If it supported Siam against Chinese dominion—while exerting influence against persecution of the Chinese minority—Britain should be able 'to establish friendly relations with even the more nationalist Siamese'. Time was likely 'to bring a spread of "nationality" consciousness' to Asia, and if southeast Asia were divided along ethnographic lines, 'the Indo-China province of Laos and what are now the Shan States would go to Siam rather than to Annam or Burma'. If, in the future, Indochina and Burma gained independence, that might indeed be the outcome, and Britain might be well advised, before granting independence to Burma, to find some way of giving the Shans a choice. Some such undertaking could be made to the Siamese, too: 'we need not commit ourselves to any policy which would preclude the ultimate voluntary union of Laos and the Shan States with Siam'¹⁶.

Here was a policy that was less inconsistent within itself than Crosby's, and more realistic also, although its appraisal of Kuomintang China's potential seems in retrospect so exaggerated. What it did not provide for very clearly was the encouragement of democracy. But it was at least arguable that Crosby's notion was somewhat crude, and that, so far as the Thais were

¹⁶ Hudson to Clarke, 2 February 1943, and enclosure, F.O. 371/35979 [F696/222/40].

concerned, a policy that did not polarize opinion between the 'nationalistic' and the 'democratic' was more likely to be fruitful, even in bringing about a more genuine democracy. And, so far as the U.S. was concerned, the suggestion of tutelage, even perhaps tutelage in American hands, was likely only to provoke anti-imperialist distrust, and thus to inhibit the injection into American idealism of a realistic understanding of the situation in Siam. Crosby's attempt to restrain the military may in a sense have contributed to their dominance. For Crosby's ideas on the armed forces were published in the 1943 article, and, more seriously, his references to tutelage, though not published till 1944, had been included in a Chatham House talk of July 1943, which formed the basis of the later article¹⁷. The idea of a mandate was also brought up at Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) conferences¹⁸, and other ideas got around, too. Yet, despite his suggestion of a study group, no action was taken at the Foreign Office on Crosby's recommendations, nor on Hudson's report¹⁹. Indeed, policy tended to harden in response to pressures from outside as much as by formulation in the Foreign Office: an earlier attempt to hammer out a minimum series of objectives might have made for a policy more realistic than Crosby suggested or than in fact emerged, one less distrusted by the Americans, more appropriate to the Thais. Already the Chinese had half-shown some sort of hand, while the British Prime Minister himself had displayed an interest in Kra.

In April 1942 the Chinese embassy in London had asked the Ministry of Information if a statement about Thailand which Chiang Kai-shek proposed to make would fit in with its propaganda. The statement was that the Allied nations attributed Thailand's alliance with Japan and declarations of war to coercion, cherished no malice towards the Thai people, and had no territorial design in Thailand nor any desire that might impair its independence²⁰. The Foreign Office, consulted, saw no objection: the statement, as M.E. Denning said, would come from Chiang Kai-shek and would not commit Great Britain. The U.S. reacted differently. The State Department suggested alterations, such as the omission of the reference to coercion, but added that, if the Chinese government made the statement, the U.S. government would indicate to the press that it was in general agreement. The objective was to encourage Thai resistance. The Foreign Office thought that, if the U.S. acted, Britain should take the same line. That made the wording more important, in particular, as P. Broad pointed out, that of the sentence on territorial integrity and independence. 'This would be the first time we had declared this, but anything different from such a sentiment would of course be inconsistent with the terms of the Atlantic Charter, so that nothing new is really involved.'²¹

¹⁷ Minute by de la Mare, 28 November 1944, on F.O. 371/41727 [F5482/168/61]. The Foreign Office had at first declined to sanction publication because the article contained criticism of China. Cf. *International Affairs*, XX, 3, 362-4.

¹⁸ J.K. Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, New Delhi, 1972, p. 156.

¹⁹ Minute by Young, 9 March 1943, on F.O. 371/35979 [F696/222/40].

²⁰ de la Valette to Denning, 10 April 1942, F.O. 371/31866 [F2878/2878/40].

²¹ Minute, 18 May 1942, on F.O. 371/31866 [F3617/2878/40]. For the Charter, see Theodore A. Wilson, *The First Summit*, London, 1970, p. 206.

The item drew Churchill's attention: 'it might be found necessary after the war', he pointed out, 'to consider some sort of Protectorate over the Kra Peninsula area, including Singgora, in the interests of the future security of Singapore'. This, Broad now remarked, had been in the minds of the Far Eastern Department, but it could not 'even be hinted at in any public statement' in view of the Atlantic Charter. It would be difficult to avoid endorsing the Chinese statement if the State Department endorsed it. A letter to the Chinese ambassador, indicating that Britain would endorse it if the U.S. did, was, however, deferred, at the instance of the Permanent Under-Secretary, Cadogan, and the Foreign Secretary, Eden, so as to check Churchill's reaction²². The Foreign Office stressed that press guidance on territorial integrity, not a formal pronouncement, was intended. A protectorate over Kra would be easier to reconcile with such guidance than with the Charter itself. But 'the creation of a military or naval base' could perhaps be justified by comparison with the bases leased to the U.S. in 1940, or with the situation in Egypt. 'Meanwhile to refuse to give the modicum of approval now asked for by the Chinese and which the State Department are already prepared to grant would undoubtedly give rise to undesirable comments and doubts as to whether we were not contemplating some really serious derogation from the Atlantic Charter.' Churchill preferred that no action should be taken in advance; after the statement, however, the press might be guided as the Foreign Office suggested²³.

Chiang's pronouncement finally emerged in a broadcast to the Thai people in February 1943²⁴. At a press conference President Roosevelt read out the statement, 'which he fully endorsed as of great value, assuring Siam that China had no designs on its territory. . . .' He said that it tied in with the principles of the United Nations²⁵. The State Department called the attention of the British Ambassador, Lord Halifax, to the President's remarks. That, as Young put it, amounted to 'a pretty direct invitation to us now to take a similar line'. There were two difficulties: that over Kra, and that of arousing press interest in the matter. But 'if we do nothing, particularly in view of the hints given to us by the State Department, we may be suspected by the Americans of having some ulterior motive and may as a result give rise to some misunderstanding. . . .' Press indifference did not matter, wrote N.M. Butler of the North American Department: a parliamentary question could put British policy on record. Kra mattered more; but if it were needed, it would presumably be as part of a United Nations security scheme. He thought that, if no statement were made, it would be better to tell the Americans why.

The risk in this is that unfriendly Americans might misconstrue our action. I incline to think that this is less than the risk of the Americans and Chinese thinking that we are concealing something from them and intend to do some land grabbing, probably in order to put ourselves in a stronger military position against some prospective Chinese aggression. It is highly important that we should give no cause for the Americans and Chinese gradually coming to combine against us in Far Eastern matters. The best safeguard is a clean record....

Sir D. Scott, Assistant Under-Secretary superintending the North American Department, thought Britain should endorse the President's statement, which had already tied its hands.

²² Martin to Harvey, 21 May 1942, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/31867 [F4097/2879/40].

²³ Harvey to Martin, 17 June 1942, and note attached, in F.O. 371/31866 [F4789/2878/40].

²⁴ Reuter communication, received 3 March 1943, F.O. 371/35983 [F1219/1219/40].

²⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 13 March 1943.

In the Far Eastern Department, Broad thought it a mistake to give any hint about Kra. 'Surely one result would be to make the Americans think that we were harbouring designs on territory elsewhere as well?' Sir M. Peterson, superintending the Far Eastern Department, opposed a parliamentary question and favoured merely press guidance, notified to the State Department, indicating that Britain was in general agreement, though, as Butler pointed out, this would not help Chiang's propaganda²⁶. The Prime Minister agreed, noting that 'it is not proposed that we should go out of our way to make any statement on our part. . . .'²⁷

During 1943 the Kra question was also considered at the Colonial Office in the context of postwar planning for Malaya. An old Malaya hand, Sir George Maxwell, in an article on *The Administration of Malaya*²⁸, had urged the acquisition of Patani and Singgora. At the Colonial Office, W.B.L. Monson commented that there were 'racial grounds for including Patani in whatever organization covers other Malay States, but these are not so strong in the case of Singgora, and it is not clear why Sir George Maxwell did not, when he was at it, suggest the extension of British influence to the Kra Isthmus as well. . . .'²⁹ In a memorandum to the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office stressed the importance of holding Singgora, or a defensive line 50 miles north of it: Kra would be narrower, but so far forward as to be difficult to maintain. Moreover, 'racial affinity' as a reason on which to base claims for the annexation of the Kra Isthmus gradually diminished beyond Setul and Patani, and any suggestion that the territory to the north should be brought into a Malayan federation on purely political grounds 'would doubtless invite serious criticism'. The establishment of British bases might be 'less embarrassing', but direct access to them by land would be 'very desirable'. Neither annexation nor bases would be decisive in ensuring the security of Malaya: that depended on the means available. The conclusion was that there was no special political or administrative advantage in adding any Siamese territory to postwar Malaya, but that the Malay-populated areas could 'without difficulty be taken into the Malayan political grouping if that course were required for defence or other reasons'.

At the Foreign Office T.E. Bromley pointed out that the greater range and striking power of aircraft made annexation less urgent; but bases would be desirable and would help to defend southern Burma. The point, said Denning, was not desirability, but practicability. 'I think we should be on far firmer ground if we were to demand that it should be part of the strategic base which Malaya must form to preserve the strategic security of the at present United Nations. The word "annex" is likely to offend the sensitive nostrils of the Americans. . . .'³⁰ This the Foreign Office told the Colonial Office, adding that the transfer by the Japanese to the Thais of part of Malaya, announced in July, might 'facilitate rather than make more difficult such adjustments as we ultimately deem necessary in this area'. The Thais had occupied the area around Kengtung in the Shan States in May 1942. By a treaty of 20 August 1943, Japan

²⁶ Telegram from Halifax, 14 March 1943, No. 1232, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/35983 [F1416/1219/40].

²⁷ Martin to Lawford, 22 March 1943, F.O. 371/35983 [F1516/1219/40].

²⁸ *British Malaya* (May 1943), p. 143.

²⁹ Minute, 5 January 1942 [for 1943], C.O. 825/35 Part I [55104/1/2/Pt. I], Public Record Office, London.

³⁰ Draft memorandum in Monson to Broad, 15 June 1943, and minutes and reply thereon, F.O. 371/35979 [F3088/222/40].

recognized Thailand's suzerainty there, and also turned over control of Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu³¹.

As these minutes show, the British were aware of the gaps between their attitude and that of the Americans, which the territorial transfers tended to widen. It was indeed difficult to decide whether it was better to tell the Americans what Britain would want, as Butler implied, in the hope of gaining their support or at least neutralizing their opposition, or to let silence (or rumour) breed suspicion. A firmer decision on what Britain would want would have helped. It was true that no one knew how the war would end. But it might at least have been possible to decide what Britain's strategic needs would be on the presumption of a return to Malaya and Burma, even if it were not possible to determine the political circumstances under which that return might take place. It was difficult to plan in detail, but that perhaps should not have prevented the spelling out of objectives. Clearer in their own minds, the British might have been able to make clearer statements to the Americans.

The emergence of a Free Siamese Movement also emphasized the gap between British and American attitudes. In March 1942 *M.R. Seni Pramoj* had proposed to organize a Free Thai contingent³². Thai funds had been unfrozen for the purpose of training Thais for use in Thailand under the auspices of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), ancestor of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Some Siamese had left the U.K. for India and might be used by the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the British equivalent of OSS. John Keswick asked in January 1943 for indications of British policy on the future of Siam.

I ask this because, with the sending of the American group, there appears to me to be a germ of future trouble or, if not trouble, of commitment. When I was in Washington, I came across no indication of American policy regarding Siam but with their present determination to fix up everybody all over the world regardless of the facts of the situation, it seems unlikely that the Siamese and their future welfare will have escaped the tender attention of American well-wishers....

It was, Young still thought, too soon for postwar plans, for they did not depend upon the U.K. but on the facts of reconquest and on the attitudes of China and the U.S. Broad agreed. It was difficult to 'outline any cut and dried policy. . . . The major factor is how Siam is won over to our side, whether mainly by the Americans, ourselves or the Chinese (if it is the Chinese it may well be difficult to get them out again). . . .' It was also important to avoid a clash between OSS and SOE: only one should work in Siam³³.

The setting-up of the Southeast Asia Command (SEAC)³⁴ led to closer consideration of the issue. So did the escape of Balankura, a Siamese emissary, to Chungking, where in August

³¹ Charnvit Kasetsiri, 59-60.

³² Martin, 462.

³³ Keswick to Clarke, 26 January 1943, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/35977 [F606/169/40].

³⁴ S.W. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, London, 1958, II, 426.

he had an interview with the British ambassador. He had, it appeared, been sent out following Chiang's broadcast, in order to confirm the American and Chinese attitudes to Siam and to ascertain the British. If Britain endorsed the same policy, he was empowered to set up a provisional government in India. He asked whether, if the Council of Regency came out, the British would recognize it; whether the British government would consider the Japanese alliance and the declarations of war 'null and void' because unconstitutional; whether it would resume diplomatic relations and unfreeze Siamese assets in Britain to enable the provisional government to prosecute war. Most of the Thai Assembly, he said, supported the Free Siamese Movement. Sir Horace Seymour told Balankura that the question of territorial integrity was covered by the Atlantic Charter. He asked about the strength of the Movement in Thailand³⁵. It was led, it seemed, by *Luang Pradit* himself, 'well disposed towards the British in particular', as Denning put it. But 'some despondency' had been caused by Britain's failure to endorse Chiang's declaration. The Siamese were 'suspicious of the Chinese'. The U.S. was likely to be able to give them material help. But 'politically' Siam would probably be 'more disposed to turn to us for guidance than anyone else'. Siam was in the SEAC area. 'That being so, it would surely be to our advantage that any nucleus of a Free Siamese Government should be set up in India under our supervision, but in close consultation with the Americans.' Now, said Denning, we have 'to make up our minds what we are going to do about Siam and the extent to which we should encourage those elements which are disposed to build up a front against Japan', bearing in mind the problems presented by the postwar security of Malaya and the transfers of territory since 1940³⁶.

The need for a policy towards Siam had been suggested during 1942, both as guidance for the British and in terms of political warfare. But it had not been formulated. It still seemed too soon early in 1943. The way the war would be fought would inevitably affect the peace. But the way it was going was too unclear to attempt the definition of a policy that took realistic account of Britain's needs and the attitudes of its allies, and sought to reconcile short-term and long-term aims, aims in the war and at the peace. The Foreign Office was unwilling, indeed, to define prime objectives, let alone detailed policy. SEAC, however, was a step in war strategy that had implications for peace strategy which the Foreign Office was not slow to recognize, and it had implications for Siam policy. It was still, of course, necessary to take account of the attitudes of allies, but SEAC, based in British territory and with a British Supreme Commander, offered advantages to Britain. Crosby's ideas of tutelage and demilitarization had not been well received, but no alternative policy had succeeded them. Now there was some prospect of basing British policy on cooperation with *Luang Pradit* and the liberals. That indeed might prove a way, about which the Americans could not complain, to realize certain British objectives: it would not only help to win the war, but the peace also. But those objectives would have to be defined; and they must not conflict with the desire of the liberals to rehabilitate Siam. There was, also, a danger even in this policy in regard to the U.S.: too reserved an attitude, too transparent a use of SEAC, might again promote mistrust.

³⁵ Memorandum by Young, 8 September 1943, F.O. 371/35977 [F4697/169/40]. For the text of Balankura's message, see also A. Gilchrist, *Bangkok Top Secret*, London, 1970, p. 23.

³⁶ Memorandum by Denning, 31 August 1943, F.O. 371/35977 [F4564/169/40].

Neither the British nor the U.S. had formally recognized any movement outside Siam at this juncture, though the Americans had unfrozen funds for the benefit of the movement led by Seni Pramoj, and he had sent a delegate, Mani Sanasen, to coordinate the movement in the U.K. A contingent of Free Siamese, controlled by SOE, and headed by Prince Svasti, alias Major Arun, was now in India³⁷, and a contingent run by OSS was in Chungking. Both groups were expected to enter Siam. The setting-up of a Free Siamese Movement in India, in consultation with the Americans, would have a 'useful political warfare aspect', Young argued. 'The establishment of a Free Siamese Movement in China under Chinese or American auspices would be less to our advantage and it is consequently desirable that we should not be confronted with a *fait accompli* by the other contingent.' But a formula was needed to define Britain's as yet undisclosed attitude to postwar Thailand. The formula Britain should use, Young suggested, should be that used in regard to Poland—a 'free and independent' Poland—with no commitment as to frontiers. Any 'organization' of the Kra Isthmus in the future would in any case be 'the outcome of international discussion for international security', and could not be described as a violation of sovereignty or independence. Young suggested an interdepartmental meeting on Siam. Peterson did not object to a meeting. But there was, he said, no question of recognizing a free Siamese government. 'The nearest parallel to Siam in Europe is I suppose Denmark, although I should hold this comparison to be unflattering to the Danes. We have not recognized a free Danish Government. At the most we might now recognize a free Siamese Committee if such a step appeared likely to do any good.' The interdepartmental meeting, held on 28 September, in fact suggested setting up a Free Siamese Committee in India, and the War Office and SOE were especially keen, as it would facilitate preparing a 'reception committee' to assist military operations in Siam³⁸. The difficulties in the way of an accommodation with the Thai liberals quickly became apparent: Sir Maurice Peterson's obduracy was not the only one.

Despite his reluctance, a draft paper was prepared for possible submission to the War Cabinet. This suggested that the British could not consider the declaration of war against them null and void: it was 'obviously out of the question'. It recommended a declaration that Britain favoured 'the restoration after the war of a free and independent Siam', which 'might be linked up with the Prime Minister's statement about certain countries being permitted to "work their passage home"'. The paper argued that it was also important to prevent overhasty action by the Siamese, possibly under American or Chinese auspices, which might precipitate Japanese repression, and to 'encourage and control' all the Siamese elements working against Japan. A Free Siamese Committee could be set up, with an indication to *Luang Pradit* that a provisional government might eventually be recognized. The Committee should be in India: that would be 'to our advantage', and it was also appropriate since operations in Siam were now under SEAC. The U.S. and China should be told of British intentions³⁹.

Commenting on the draft, the Treasury thought that Siamese funds could not be unfrozen—they were too large—but credits could be granted, as to the Free French⁴⁰. The Colonial

³⁷ Gilchrist, pp. 29-33.

³⁸ Memorandum as in note 35 and minutes thereon.

³⁹ Draft attached to *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Young to Clarke, 9 October 1943, F.O. 371/35978 [F5322/169/40].

Office wanted the Free Siamese to make a public disavowal of the Malayan cessions as a condition of their recognition⁴¹. The Burma Office disagreed. Such a disavowal might merely embarrass the Free Siamese without strengthening British rights, which were 'quite secure. . . . Moreover there is the risk that such insistence might be taken to imply our acquiescence in Siam retaining all her own pre-war territory, whereas, whatever may be the eventual decision in regard to that, we presumably do not want to be committed at this stage in respect of certain areas in the Kra Isthmus in which we are interested. . . .'⁴² The Colonial Office was concerned with 'the impression that may be created' in the four Malay states if a Siamese Committee were recognized 'without having made such a disclaimer'⁴³.

The memorandum was redrafted to take account of these comments, and also of discussions with Crosby and SOE. It now recommended a more elaborate series of steps. A preliminary measure would be to give Mani Sanasen the same sort of recognition as Seni Pramoj enjoyed in Washington, while stressing that he was a delegate of Seni, so as 'to avoid the appearance of rival Movements'. The goal, it was, however, repeated, was to set up a Free Siamese Committee. This would forestall any move to recognize the Free Siamese or a Free Siamese Government by the Americans or Chinese, who had less to lose, 'being less concerned than ourselves by the implications'. The Committee would coordinate all Free Siamese activities and avoid dangerous rivalries. Only *Luang* Pradit had the standing to make the Committee useful. 'The first step is therefore to convey a message to him that if he will come out we will recognize him as head of the Free Siamese Committee; we could add that, if the behaviour of the Siamese showed that it was deserved, we might eventually recognize a Free Siamese Government. We could wait three months for his reply.' If it were favourable, Seni Pramoj and Mani Sanasen could be transferred, together with the delegation in Chungking. If it were unfavourable, the Committee might be headed by Seni. First, 'we should have to explain our immediate proposals and our ultimate objective to the Americans and the Chinese. Agreement with the former is essential.'⁴⁴

These proposals involved an attempt to adapt British policy, so as not only to make the most effective contribution to the war, but also to make it more feasible to realize the potential for future British influence in Thailand without alienating the Americans. They carried, however, some burden: the prestige issue of the declaration of war; the territorial issue; the Kra reservation. And there was American distrust to get over: even if the Thais accepted Britain's proposals, the policy implied some finessing at American expense. In the State Department, Stanley Hornbeck indeed suggested that Siam was more a matter for the British than for the Americans. A declaration on Siam's future by the British, he inferred, however, would be more significant than one by the Americans, 'since it was historically we and the French who had carved off pieces of Siam in the past'. He was, too, unenthusiastic about a Free Siamese Committee, and doubted whether it would affect the course of events in Siam when Allied forces arrived. His lack of enthusiasm Young did not find surprising. The establishment

⁴¹ Gent to Clarke, 7 October 1943, F.O. 371/35978 [F5291/169/40].

⁴² Annan to Clarke, 14 October 1943, F.O. 371/35978 [F5401/169/40].

⁴³ Paskin to Clarke, 12 November 1943, F.O. 371/35978 [F6018/169/40].

⁴⁴ Revised Draft Memorandum, 20 October 1943, F.O. 371/35978 [F5696/169/40].

of a Free Siamese Committee was 'chiefly designed to enable us to make a declaration similar to the President's and unfreeze Siamese assets, thus abolishing the great advantage which the Americans now have over ourselves in dealing with the Siamese. . . .'⁴⁵ But in the Foreign Office itself, Peterson was unimpressed. The 'ingenuity' of the Far Eastern Department was 'misplaced'. Much of the pressure, he thought, came from 'small people in Siam', from advisers of the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) India 'more anxious to steal a march on the Chinese than strike at the Japanese', and from SOE, 'who complain that our present policy or lack of policy is drawing down the suspicions of OSS'. He suggested that Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander, and Denning, then Political Adviser to SEAC, should be squarely asked if the establishment of a Committee would be advantageous, on the understanding that only if someone of real authority came out could the British enter into even qualified undertakings.

I imagine that it is the benign influence of Sir J. Crosby which leads the Department to suggest that Siam should be treated on the footing of our Allies. This would be both wrong and at variance with the facts. Siam has not been overrun by the enemy—she has opened her gates.

The matter is one of military not political expediency. We do not need to compete with the Chinese for what is at most a very doubtful advantage.⁴⁶

Not surprisingly, Denning approved the proposals, 'emphasizing that a common front with United States is in our opinion essential. The matter is we think of urgency, in particular the declaration with regard to a free and independent Siam in the absence of which we at present lag behind the United States and China.' Clearly, Young agreed, the declaration should not await *Luang Pradit's* coming out. 'Our main objective has always been to ensure that OSS do not, with or without the Chinese, make any deal with the "Free Siamese" which would leave us out in the cold. . . .' The recognition of the Free Siamese was to be shelved, Ashley Clarke concluded, while Britain went ahead with a declaration. 'The latter is certainly desirable on general gds. in order to spike Japse. propaganda and encourage resistance groups inside Siam.' The change of approach would require another interdepartmental meeting. 'We might have a shot at a draft declaration', Peterson conceded; but it must not be 'an appendix' to the American or Chinese ones, nor 'a bolt from the blue'. And 'we had better (if possible) avoid "integrity" lest we be again faced with the Kra Isthmus'⁴⁷.

Before the meeting was held, another telegram from Denning arrived, which stressed

that we should arrive at a common policy with the United States [,] that we should disabuse the Americans of the idea (which some of them appear to hold) that we desire to influence in our own interests the form which the future Government of Siam should take and that we should endeavour to persuade them to join with us in preventing the Chinese from adopting a monopolistic attitude towards the Free Siamese Movement since there is a very real fear and suspicion of the Chinese among the Siamese.... Apart from the suspicion mentioned above, there does not seem to be any fundamental divergence of opinion between the United States and ourselves in regard to Siam. Chinese aims on the other hand appear less altruistic....⁴⁸

The meeting agreed that the Americans should be informed of Britain's 'general policy towards Siam'. It also agreed to recommend a declaration, excluding any reference to territorial integrity, but favouring the postwar restoration of 'a free and independent Siam', which

⁴⁵ Minutes by Clarke, 14 October 1943, Young, 19 October, F.O. 371/35979 [F5455/222/40].

⁴⁶ Minute, 24 October 1943, on F.O. 371/35978 [F5696/169/40].

⁴⁷ Telegram from Denning, 3 November 1943, No. 2, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/35978 [F5829/169/40].

⁴⁸ Telegram from Denning, 12 November 1943, No. 12, F.O. 371/35978 [F5996/169/40].

might perhaps be included in a speech on the anniversary of the outbreak of the Pacific war (an idea of Young's). The recognition of the Free Siamese Movement would not be put to the Cabinet. Not only the complexity of the issue, but also Balankura's death, conduced to this decision⁴⁹.

The new draft memorandum for the Cabinet explained that there would be no reference in the proposed declaration to territorial integrity in order that 'we should not tie our hands as regards any strategic arrangements thought to be desirable in the interests of collective security after the war'. The War Office did not like this: 'it was very keen that our grabbing of Siamese territory in the Kra Isthmus should not be put down to strategic reasons, whatever the Prime Minister may have said in writing'. But the Foreign Office recognized that the statement had to stay, though an additional argument for failing to refer to territorial integrity was included, the need to avoid countenancing the transfer of the Malay states⁵⁰. Moreover the Vice Chiefs of Staff wanted to be certain that Britain would be free to secure any strategic desiderata, and were for that reason opposed to endorsing Chiang's declaration⁵¹. Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, raised a further problem. In the declaration about Japan recently issued at Cairo, the Allies stated that they had no thought of territorial expansion: it would be hard to argue that this renunciation should not apply at least with as much force to Siam. Peterson suggested that the proposed communiqué went no further than the Atlantic Charter, pointed out both Churchill's interest in Kra and the moderate statement of Britain's possible claim, and stressed that the Cabinet paper on Siam was not intended for publication. When members of the Cairo conference returned, it was learned that the matter had been discussed there, and the view had been informally accepted 'that the disavowal of territorial ambitions did not preclude the setting-up of such bases': with a phrase inserted to cover this, the paper at last went forward to the Cabinet, though the suggested date of announcement had passed⁵².

In Cabinet 'the view was expressed that we should not make any general statement which might hamper our hands in regard to a country at war with us. In particular we must be careful to avoid specific commitments in regard to boundaries.' The Cabinet wished to see a draft of the proposed declaration before reaching a decision⁵³. The declaration, drafted by Young⁵⁴, was not very encouraging. 'A country with a long tradition of friendship with us betrayed that friendship at the first sign of pressure from Japan', and it declared war.

For these acts Siam is already paying the price and will undoubtedly pay a yet heavier price as the war reaches her territories. It is still possible for the people of Siam to do something to save themselves from the worst consequences of their betrayal and they will be judged by the efforts which they make to redeem their crime. Like other countries in like case 'they must work their passage home'. If they do, and only if they do so, they can look to this country to support the emergence of a free and independent Siam after the war is over.

⁴⁹ Minute of meeting, 17 November 1943, F.O. 371/35978 [F6089/109/40]. Gilchrist, p.21, implies that Balankura died not, as was said, of cancer, but of an ailment of more specifically Chinese origin.

⁵⁰ Memoranda by Cavendish-Bentinck, 29, 30 November 1943, by Clarke, 30 November, in F.O. 371/35978 [F5696/169/40].

⁵¹ COS (43) 295th, 3 December 1943, Item 4; 296th, 4 December, Item 4, CAB 79/68, Public Record Office.

⁵² Minutes in F.O. 371/35978 [F6287/169/40]. WP(43)574, 18 December 1943, CAB 66/44; PREM 3 159/6. Public Record Office. For the Cairo declaration, see S.W. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, London, 1969, v, 172.

⁵³ WM 1(44) 8, 3 January 1944, CAB 65/41.

⁵⁴ Minute, 13 January 1944, on F.O. 371/35978 [F6699/169/40].

The Colonial Secretary, who had wanted a promise to restore the Malayan and Shan territories, was satisfied. SOE wanted something 'slightly more forthcoming'⁵⁵. The 'severity' of the declaration might 'defeat its object so far as SOE are concerned'; indeed it would tend to drive the Siamese into 'the OSS/Chinese camp'. Perhaps more blame could be put on *Luang Phibun's* government than on the Siamese in general? Peterson reluctantly agreed⁵⁶; and the amended declaration was circulated to the Cabinet⁵⁷. No objection was received. But Eden was unenthusiastic, and would not include it in a speech. When a parliamentary question was suggested, he commented: 'I have never been keen on this; and I don't believe it will do any good, here or anywhere else.' He finally agreed, however, to a written parliamentary question⁵⁸.

Meanwhile the Americans had been informed⁵⁹. The plan had been to let them know Britain's general policy but not to consult them about it. Following a conversation between Hornbeck and Sir George Sansom, the Minister in Washington, the Foreign Office agreed to try to communicate the declaration before it was made⁶⁰. Hornbeck indeed seemed cooperative. He told Sansom that any wirecrossing between OSS and SOE—any differences on the 'gumshoe level'⁶¹—could be put right by State Department and Foreign Office. The best line, he thought, was first to get *Luang Pradit* out of the country, and leave him to set up his headquarters. The attitude of the Far Eastern Division of the State Department was 'friendly, but cautious', Sansom reported, largely because it was anxious to avoid a precedent for setting up a Free Korean Committee or Government. 'All very satisfactory', wrote Young. Peterson added: 'I hope Dr. H. can control OSS.'⁶² But the State Department proved not to like the policy or the declaration. Department officers declared informally that the latter 'would arouse suspicion of our motives amongst the American public', while the policy of not unfreezing funds would discourage *Luang Pradit*⁶³. Young suspected State Department motives were what Grut of SOE, Washington, suggested, 'viz. that they don't want to see liquidated the credit of good will they've built up with the Siamese by the fact that they've issued a declaration and we haven't. . . .' The Americans' objections must be clearly stated. Butler thought they might be opposed to the last sentence of the proposed declaration, as implying that John Bull might add Siam to his empire. Meanwhile Clarke thought it wise to hold up the parliamentary question⁶⁴.

Butler's was a more realistic view than Grut's or Young's. The declaration was too severe to win over the Thais. Nor was it likely to appeal to the Americans, since it appeared not only

⁵⁵ Draft and correspondence in F.O. 371/41844 [F134/23/40].

⁵⁶ Guise to Clarke, 12 January 1944, and minute thereon, F.O. 371/41844 [F242/23/40].

⁵⁷ WP(44) 72, 3 February 1944, CAB 66/46; PREM 3 159/6.

⁵⁸ Minutes on F.O. 371/41844 [F881/23/40].

⁵⁹ Telegrams to Halifax, 19 February 1944, Nos. 1483, 1484, on *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Minute by Clarke, 28 December 1943, on F.O. 371/35978 [F6717/169/40].

⁶¹ Hornbeck's phrase. Sansom to Clarke, 19 January 1944, F.O. 371/41844 [F540/23/40].

⁶² Telegram from Halifax, 18 January 1944, No. 255, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/41844 [F331/23/40]. Syngman Rhee had approached Seni Pramoj. Ray, p. 155.

⁶³ Telegram from Halifax, 13 March 1944, No. 1274; Sansom to Clarke, 7 March, F.O. 371/41844 [F1334, 1335/23/40].

⁶⁴ Minutes on F.O. 371/41844 [F1334/23/40].

severe, but also somewhat reserved over the future of Siam: there was some sense in the Foreign Secretary's remark. Britain's policy was bound to take account of Britain's interests, which were not those of the Americans. But if those interests made accommodation with Thais and Americans difficult, the failure to define them more clearly, together with rumour and suspicion, added to the difficulty. It was hard to say nothing. But saying what there was to be said at this point was unlikely to help. The Foreign Office was embarked on a risky course, partly because of its own internal differences, more because of attitudes elsewhere in the British government. It tried to bridge them, not by seeking a better definition of British objectives in relation, for instance, to Kra, but by preparing a declaration that was bound to be 'unforthcoming', and by an insistence on communication not consultation in its dealings with the Americans. Its chances of succeeding in its policy were never great, inasmuch as the Americans' policy differed. But it is doubtful if the course followed enhanced the prospects of even partial success. In fact, the Foreign Office now virtually shifted to consultation with the Americans over a declaration that had little chance of attracting the Thais in any case.

Sansom was told in Washington that the U.S. reply would object to the 'general tone' of the declaration, as likely to be unacceptable to Siam and likely to afford a propaganda opening to the Japanese: for it did not include a statement on the integrity of Siam⁶⁵. He was also given a statement of U.S. policy: it favoured the restoration to Siam of 'complete security as a sovereign state'⁶⁶. Young now recognized that the State Department might be genuinely concerned lest Britain have designs on Siam. 'We must obviously do our best to get our declaration into line with U.S. views; but provided that it does not cut across some principle of Allied policy we are clearly entitled to make it. . . .' 'Extremely tiresome', Cadogan thought, but he was against dropping the declaration at American behest: modify it and try again; and if it were still unacceptable, revert to the original or abandon. 'Tiresome', Eden agreed. Halifax was told why Britain had refrained from any reference to territorial integrity: in general no such commitments had been made, 'even in the case of more deserving nations'; and the transfers at the expense of Indochina and Malaya were not recognized. But if Secretary of State Hull felt 'very strongly', Britain would alter the emphasis of the declaration. 'We might begin by saying that H.M. Government favour the restoration to Siam after the war of complete security as a free sovereign and independent State, but remind the Siamese people that they must work their passage home.' The tone of the declaration, and the likelihood of its acceptability to the Siamese, were matters for Britain to determine.

This telegram crossed one from Halifax, giving the State Department's definitive views. 'We have come to the conclusion that the declaration as it now stands would not be helpful in giving encouragement to the Siamese people to resist the Japanese, might very likely be exploited by the Japanese to the disadvantage of the UN, and would augment distrust in the United States and in China and elsewhere of the motives of Great Britain.' It would be better to make no declaration than to make the one proposed; if it were made, it should include 'at least an unequivocal commitment that Great Britain has no territorial ambitions in Siam'.

⁶⁵ Telegram from Halifax, 17 March 1944, No. 1356, F.O. 371/41844 [F1398/23/40].

⁶⁶ Telegram from Halifax, 17 March 1944, No. 1357, F.O. 371/41844 [F1399/23/40]. See also Martin, 464.

⁶⁷ Telegram from Halifax, 21 March 1944, No. 1424, F.O. 371/41844 [F1486/23/40]. See also Martin, 464.

The U.S. hoped that, if Britain made a declaration, it could say something parallel⁶⁷. 'The temptation to drop the whole exasperating business is very strong', Young admitted. But C-in-C India, Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia (SACSEA), and SOE wanted a declaration 'for operational reasons, and having got this far I do not think we are justified in dropping it because the Americans don't like it'. He revised the text, to put it more in parliamentary question form, and to promise Siam 'complete security as a free sovereign and independent State'. When Cabinet approved it, he said, it must be communicated to the Americans, in the hope they would make a parallel statement. Clarke agreed to persist. But Eden was, not surprisingly, doubtful. 'I cannot believe that this will serve any useful purpose. . . . The last sentence can hardly be thought encouraging to anyone. But if Department really want it, I must get Prime Minister's approval before I take it to Cabinet. . . .' The last sentence was altered to take out a reference to the Siamese 'saving themselves from the worst consequences of the treachery of their Government'. Instead account was to be taken of their contribution to their own liberation, a phrase borrowed from the Moscow declaration on Austria. With Churchill's assent—extracted with difficulty—a paper went to Cabinet⁶⁸. But Cabinet did not get round to it⁶⁹.

One effect of moderating the statement was to revive the Colonial Office's concern about the Malay states. It was, as the Secretary of State put it, 'a much less austere pronouncement than the earlier proposal'. The proposed restoration of Siam as 'a free sovereign and independent State' might arouse 'suspicion and uncertainty' among Malays, especially in the transferred states. Perhaps a supplementary question could clarify the matter? Again the Far Eastern Department considered giving up the whole proposal, but decided not to. A supplementary question was, however, ruled out, as Eden still wished not to deal with the matter orally. He preferred to include a passage dealing with the Colonial Office point in the statement itself. But the Department were opposed to this, adding that it would only weaken the case with the Americans against including a promise on territorial integrity. The Colonial Secretary was told that it was proposed simply to brief the Ministry of Information with an appropriate reference, and he accepted this. The essential reason it could not go into the statement itself was that 'we are not anxious to get tied down to any declaration as to the exact boundaries of the future Siam. . . .'⁷⁰ But was this vagueness keeping options open, or losing opportunities?

The Foreign Office, indeed, was not the sole party concerned, divided as it was itself: besides other departments, there were other governments. The Australian government asked for a fuller explanation of the reasons for making the declaration and for information as to American reaction. 'There should be no commitments regarding Siam's independent statehood which would hinder or preclude satisfactory arrangements to ensure strategic requirements of security in this region. We are also concerned that independence should not be interpreted to the prejudice of arrangements for collaboration in development and welfare. . . .'⁷¹ 'This silly

⁶⁸ Minutes on F.O. 371/41844 [F1486/23/40]. Eden's minute, 29 March, in *ibid.*; PREM 3 15916. Minutes on F.O. 371/41848 [F1599/1599/40]. WP 208(44), 17 April, CAB 66/49.

⁶⁹ Minute by Lawford, 26 April 1944, F.O. 371/41844 [F2069/23/40].

⁷⁰ Stanley to Eden, 24 April 1944, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/41844 [F2069/23/40]. Stanley to Eden, 11 May, F.O. 371/41844 [F2368/23/40]. Minute by Clarke, 3 January 1944, on F.O. 371/41844 [F134/23/40].

⁷¹ WP (44) 233, 29 April 1944, CAB 66/49; PREM 3 159/6.

business becomes an increasing bore', wrote Eden. 'If Lord C[ranborne] had told me of all this, I would never have troubled myself with a manifesto I never liked.' But, as Young put it, the Australian queries had simple answers, if they had not been answered already; and Prime Minister Curtin could be given them while in London. 'In general, I venture to submit that the undoubtedly irritating series of objections which have been raised by other Departments and Governments to this proposal have all been shown to be without substance; and that since it is felt to be necessary to the prosecution of the war we should not be justified in yielding to a natural inclination to drop the whole admittedly boring business.' Clarke wondered if Mountbatten should be asked if he still saw advantage in a declaration. But the decision was in favour of clearing the whole matter with the Dominions before going to the Cabinet again⁷². 'But one of these days', declared Peterson, 'the editorial "closure" will be applied to this subject!'⁷³

During the delay Joseph Ballantine, the Director of the Office of Far Eastern Affairs in the State Department, suggested that, if a public declaration were inconvenient, the British government might communicate its attitude to the U.S., and the State Department convey it discreetly to Siam, presumably via Seni Pramoj. He said that the State Department 'thought of territorial integrity in terms of pre-war frontiers'. The wartime changes were not recognized. As for 'any future modification of frontiers to meet strategical requirements of a collective security system, though he could not speak with the same certainty on this point, he thought State Department would not consider the possibility of such modification to be excluded by a commitment that Great Britain has no territorial ambition in Siam'. The Foreign Office drafted a reply, explaining that the declaration was being revised, and reiterating its objection to a statement on territorial issues. Whatever Britain and the U.S. understood about territories transferred to Siam might not be 'so readily understood by others, including the peoples of the territories which have been annexed'; and it was not desirable to discuss them publicly at this time, 'nor even privately with the Free Siamese'. The Foreign Office also planned to communicate the text of the proposed declaration⁷⁴. But it did not survive Cabinet.

Among the Dominions, the Australian government suggested an amendment so that the declaration should state that the U.K. favoured the restoration 'as a free, sovereign and independent state and wished to see its security guaranteed within a general system'. For one thing, Australia wished to issue its own declaration. Second, it wanted to avoid the 'inference that Siam's security will be guaranteed without contribution by Siam, e.g. of facilities such as airfields'. The Foreign Office saw no objection. But it was thought that the proposed Australian declaration was 'spoilt . . . by being a tail piece to the U.S.A. and Chinese ones'⁷⁵. Canada, South Africa and New Zealand concurred in the declaration⁷⁶. A new Cabinet paper was prepared. It quoted Denning: capital was being made of the lack of a British declaration, which also affected SOE's relationship with Siamese whose cooperation it needed⁷⁷.

⁷² Minutes on F.O. 371/41844 [F2156/23/40].

⁷³ Minutes, 20 May 1944, on F.O. 371/41844 [F2384/23/40].

⁷⁴ Telegram from Washington, 2 June 1944, No. 2399, and draft reply, F.O. 371/41844 [F2670/23/40].

⁷⁵ Telegram, 15 June 1944, No. 136, and minutes thereon, in F.O. 371/41844 [F2887/23/40].

⁷⁶ Costar to Clarke, 20 June 1944, and minute thereon, F.O. 371/41844 [F2964/23/40].

⁷⁷ WP (44) 365, 3 July 1944, CAB 66/52; PREM 3 159/6.

The Cabinet, with Churchill in the chair, did not, however, approve. The declaration was felt to be 'unduly favourable . . . , bearing in mind the attitude of Siam in going to war with us notwithstanding the treaty of non-aggression between the two countries'. The representative of the Indian government, Sir Firoz Khan Noon,

stated that if a declaration were made in the terms proposed about Siam, we should be asked to make corresponding statements about neighbouring territories, e.g. certain of the Malay states. It was also urged that it was undesirable to make a statement about the future of Siam until we had made one about the future of Burma.

It was also felt that it would be better not to make a declaration of this kind until we had recovered some of the territories which we had lost in the Far East.

The Minister of Economic Warfare, Lord Selborne, doubted it would be of much operational assistance to SOE⁷⁸. Young did not think Sir Firoz Khan Noon's statement 'altogether convincing'; he thought Lord Selborne's 'inexplicable'—SOE was in fact 'distressed by Lord Selborne's statement'. He wondered if the American suggestion of a communication to the U.S. government and a leak to Siam might be taken up as a *pis aller*. Mountbatten was due in the U.K., and his view could be sought. But Peterson applied his 'editorial closure'. The U.S. was told no declaration would be made; nor was indirect communication 'opportune'⁷⁹.

Several American approaches followed. Dooman told Gore-Booth that the reply did not cover the idea of communicating British views to the U.S. only. 'The main difficulty arising out of a lack of knowledge of our intentions was that this held up the drafting of civil affairs directives for the military authorities likely to be engaged in that part of the world.' Also 'reports had come from American representatives in India to the effect that some of the British officials in that part of the world were thinking in terms of a post-war political unit in South-East Asia in which Thailand would be included. The State Department did not know what authority to attach to this line of thought, particularly in the absence of any indication of official policy from London. . . .'⁸⁰ Adolf A. Berle reminded Sir R. Campbell that British and American operations would soon converge on Thailand and suggested that an agreement on policy should be reached: recent developments in Indochina made the question 'more actual'⁸¹. A higher-level approach followed: John Winant, the U.S. ambassador, wrote to Eden. The earlier British draft declaration had failed to intimate that Thailand would be continued as an independent power. He suggested a British statement to the U.S. government.

⁷⁸ WM 89 (44) 11, 10 July 1944, CAB 65/43.

⁷⁹ Minutes and telegram on F.O. 371/41845 [F3360/23/40].

⁸⁰ Gore-Booth to Foulds, 3 August 1944, F.O. 371/41845 [F3737/23/40].

⁸¹ Telegram from Halifax, 30 August 1944, No. 4687, F.O. 371/41848 [F4031/1599/40].

My Government would view with extreme regret the inability of the United Kingdom and the United States to take an identical position with regard to problems which involve the long-term objectives for which the war is being fought. However, if the British Government is reluctant, because of considerations involving the security or integrity of any British territory, to give the undertaking desired for the confidential information of the United States Government, it would hardly be necessary to remind the British Government that any such undertaking, if given at this time, would in no way prejudice the right of the British Government to present any such problem of territorial security or integrity to the United Nations....

The absence of a declaration inconvenienced the U.S. 'in that it delays decision on important cognate matters relating to Thailand and Indo-China. . . .'

J.C. Sterndale Bennett, back from Ankara as head of the Far Eastern Department, proposed a personal letter in reply: a formal statement would require interdepartmental consultation and Cabinet approval and take weeks. Peterson assented: 'it makes a difference that the Americans should have made this direct approach'. The letter pointed out that the earlier declaration had not failed to intimate the continuance of Siam's independence. The U.S. had complained that it had not included an unequivocal commitment against territorial ambitions, though its own statement of policy was 'silent on the territorial point'; and it had upheld a doubt on a matter already covered by British undertakings in the Atlantic Charter and at Cairo. In fact both powers wished to see Siam restored as 'a free, sovereign and independent State, subject only to its acceptance of such special arrangements for security or economic collaboration as may be judged necessary within an international system'. Meanwhile, both wished to encourage the Siamese to contribute to their own liberation. But the ideas of the British and those of the Americans were not coordinated, and it was essential, as a preliminary to coordination, to recognize that they approached the problem from different angles. The U.S. did not regard itself as at war with Siam; the U.K. did. The British government did not rate the value of Siamese resistance high, and thought the stress should be on the Siamese helping themselves: 'if resistance is to be encouraged it may need a spur rather than a sugar plum'. The British government also had to consider the effect of any public declaration on neighbouring countries, 'and it is here that any reference to territorial integrity presents difficulties'. Siam could not retain 'ill-gotten gains. . . . Some special strategic arrangements may also be necessary in the Kra Isthmus within the framework of an international security system. . . .' The U.S. view was noted. 'But there is a danger that any pronouncement about territorial integrity might create popular misunderstanding unless hedged about with reservations on the particular questions referred to above. A detailed statement on the other hand would be likely to have the undesirable result of encouraging premature discussion of a matter which it is our policy to leave to the peace settlement. Even in the case of Allies we have refrained from any commitment about territorial integrity. . . .'⁸²

The approach of the Americans underlined the risk in the policies Britain was pursuing, or rather in its failure to define its policies: deferment enhanced doubt and distrust, which the Far Eastern Department deplored and SOE recognized as a hindrance to its activities. The resignation of Phibun in July emphasized the danger. That followed news of the Allied invasion of France and of Tojo's fall. Pridi, as Regent, ensured the acceptance of his resigna-

⁸² Winant to Eden, 18 August 1944, minutes thereon, and reply, 4 September, F.O. 371/41845 [F3857/23/40].

tion; his friend Khuang Aphaiwong became Prime Minister; the other remaining Regent, Prince Aditya, resigned, and Pridi became sole Regent. The breach between the civilian and military factions thus widened. Pridi continued to lead the Free Siamese Movement, but Khuang saw the need to keep on good terms with the Japanese, or at least to avoid a break⁸³. Such ambivalence did not help the Far Eastern Department to clarify British policy.

SOE had dropped three parties in Siam, all of whom had been picked up; but Pridi wanted more dropped. SEAC desired an organization in Siam, and SOE planned to contact the Regent by a route that was safer than the current one via Berne. Sterndale Bennett told SOE that he was doubtful on 'purely political grounds. . . whether we were anxious to do anything in Siam at present and I thought there might possibly be objection to trying to get into touch with Luang Pradit, thereby giving him the impression that H.M. Government were interested in him and prepared to play with him. . . .' SOE contended that there would be no commitment involved; also 'that if we did not take any action the Americans were almost certain to do so. The probability was that if they tried they would bungle the whole business. But if they succeeded it would mean a definite establishment of American influence to the detriment of our own.' Bennett also discussed the question with Crosby. He attached no great value to Siamese resistance, but regarded *Luang Pradit* as the future leader of Siam. Any message to him should not be 'too frigid', but it should indicate that 'our getting into touch with Siam or the sending of parties to Siam' did not 'prejudice the future in any way'. Peterson dropped his doubts following talks with SOE: he learned '(for the first time) that the real object of their manoeuvres in Siam is to interfere with the working of the Bangkok/Moulmein railway'⁸⁴. Denning contributed his support from Kandy: there was no need to offer inducements to the Siamese; but 'being tough to the Siamese. . . would serve no useful purpose'⁸⁵. Mountbatten, in London, wrote to Eden, urging the operational value of infiltration⁸⁶. A letter to SOE approved the operation, provided no commitment were made⁸⁷.

Eden, however, did not like the policy. Bennett explained that, while *Luang Pradit* was working with the Japanese, facts had to be faced: the Japanese were in occupation, Phibun was a potential power, resistance was 'not a physical possibility'. Yet *Luang Pradit* was taking an independent line, as Crosby stressed. Eden still found it 'hard for us all to swallow and British public to understand'. 'I don't pretend that I understand Far Eastern affairs.' But dealings with a collaborationist made no sense. He asked R.K. Law, the Minister of State, to look into it. When he accepted the Department's policy, Eden insisted it go to Cabinet⁸⁸. Meanwhile the instructions to SOE were modified: the party might go in, but for the time being no message was to be sent to the Regent⁸⁹. The Cabinet paper quoted Mountbatten's letter and followed Bennett's arguments, Eden inserting the reservation that 'if political considera-

⁸³ John Coast, *Some Aspects of Siamese Politics*, New York, 1953, pp. 24-27. Batson, 97, 107-11, 114-5, 119. Ray, p. 205.

⁸⁴ Minutes in F.O. 371/41845 [F3836/23/40].

⁸⁵ Telegram, 19 August 1944, No. 121, F.O. 371/41845 [F3849/23/40].

⁸⁶ Dickie to Anthony, 21 August 1944, F.O. 371/41845 [F3941/23/40].

⁸⁷ Bennett to Taylor, 26 August 1944, in F.O. 371/41845 [F3836/23/40].

⁸⁸ Minutes on F.O. 371/41845 [F3941/23/40].

⁸⁹ Telegram to Denning, 7 September, No. 171, on F.O. 371/41845 [F3836/23/40].

tions alone were at stake I should advise my colleagues against this step'⁹⁰. This time Lord Selborne supported the proposal, as did the Secretary of State for India, and Cabinet, with Attlee in the chair, approved it⁹¹. But, as Andrew Gilchrist, an officer of SOE's Force 136, observed, no directive could be framed at headquarters for those in the field: 'very wisely they chose rather to let us carry on as best we could, rapping us smartly over the knuckles from time to time . . .'⁹²

In October the State Department returned to the charge, stressing the importance of reaching 'if possible, a common policy towards Thailand'. The U.S. had made a disclaimer of territorial ambitions at the time of the Chiang-Roosevelt statements. It also agreed that territories taken must be restored to Burma, Malaya, and Indochina, though 'without prejudice to the presentation of claims by any nation, including Thailand, for adjustments of boundaries or transfers of territories by orderly, peaceful processes. . . .' The U.S. would like an explanation of the reservations in regard to security and to Kra. Delivering the note to Bennett, John Allison of the U.S. Embassy

explained that he thought that the State Department understood our position fairly well but there was a lot of uninformed opinion in the United States—of the type which asked why the United States should expend a lot of effort in handing back territories like Malaya and Borneo to the British Empire. It helped the State Department in dealing with this sort of opinion to be able to point to definite British statements about their policy in relation to particular territories.

Bennett repeated in reply that the two governments approached the problem 'from different angles'. In the Foreign Office J. Thyne Henderson suggested that the adjustments Britain had in mind had not been very clearly defined, but that they could be achieved without territorial expansion, if need be by territorial exchange. Winant himself, he pointed out, recognized the possibility of boundary adjustments, and perhaps Britain could come to an agreement with the U.S., 'which would have the advantage of not presenting ourselves and the United States in a different light to the Siamese'. Bennett agreed: but at present 'everyone's ideas about the eventual Far Eastern settlement' were too 'fluid'. Winant, he said, was trying to formalize the matter and to get explanations of Britain's reservations. But they 'were put in by way of precaution merely as principles to be elaborated in detail when all the factors were known'. The reply to Winant suggested that 'great precision' was impracticable. But 'ordinary prudence' suggested a reservation in regard to security and economic collaboration; and Kra would have to be considered in arrangements for the future security of southeast Asia⁹³. Such a statement did not really remove distrust. No doubt there was something in Bennett's view; but that the time had come to define policy had been recognized even in London.

⁹⁰ WP (44) 514, 9 September 1944, CAB 66/55; PREM 3 159/6.

⁹¹ WM 127 (44) 6, 25 September 1944, CAB 65/43; PREM 3 159/6.

⁹² Gilchrist, p. 83.

⁹³ Winant to Eden, 21 October 1944, minutes thereon, and reply, 22 November, F.O. 371/41845 [F4969/23/40].

An interdepartmental Far Eastern Committee had, indeed, been set up, and one of its terms of reference was to consider the future of Siam and Indochina⁹⁴. 'The Japanese', George Hall, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, told the first meeting, 'were being pushed back and many questions affecting the territories now occupied would call for the Committee's attention in advance of the ultimate peace settlement.' He stressed the importance of cooperation with the U.S. Bennett brought up the problem of Siam. Probably the Foreign Secretary would refer recent correspondence with the American ambassador to the Committee, and ask 'whether our policy could be defined in more detail'. Meanwhile the Committee could well consider what Britain's economic interests in Siam were⁹⁵. At its second meeting, Bennett introduced a discussion on Siam and the Eden-Winant correspondence. The aim must be to 'draw up our own definition of policy for our own purposes and for possible discussion with the Americans at some later stage'. The first question was 'whether it would be useful to encourage a movement of resistance in Siam. Bound up with this was the question of the essential conditions which any Free Siamese Movement might be required to accept before it was recognized, or which Siam would have to accept before restoration as a free and independent State.' The Siamese had allied with the Japanese and accepted British territory from them. 'In these circumstances it seemed reasonable that our minimum requirements should be the denunciation of the alliance with Japan, the renunciation of the territorial gains and a promise to restore British enterprise in Siam.' The second question was the arrangements for civil administration when military operations began. The third question was 'more remote—what sort of future did we anticipate for Siam?' An article by Crosby had advocated the restoration of the old adviser system on a more effective basis. But 'we were more or less committed to the restoration of Siamese sovereignty'. Representatives of other Departments raised other points. Gent of the Colonial Office, for example, referred not only to the regaining of the northern Malay states, but to 'the question whether Malay speaking territory adjacent to Malaya in Southern Siam ought not to be free to join Malaya'. Another issue was the anticipated rice surplus in Siam. 'If we paid for this rice', N.E. Young of the Treasury suggested, 'we should be giving Siam a claim either on the dollar area or on the sterling area. There ought to be some arrangement for the rice to be supplied as part of the price of defeat. The alternative would be to arrange for Siam to be brought in as a contributing member of UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agreement], but Siam should not have the benefit of both worlds.' The meeting asked the Foreign Office to consider the various points⁹⁶. But the process of interdepartmental consultation was likely only to aggregate demands, and given a British approach to Thailand, based not only on practical issues such as those involved in returning to Malaya, but also on attitudes deriving from the imperial past and from the opening of the Pacific war, such demands were likely to be pressed, even on a friendly Thai government and in face of American opposition. The British were now, perhaps belatedly, defining their policy. The delay did not conduce to success; nor, perhaps, did the chosen method.

⁹⁴ FE (44) 1, 7 November 1944, CAB 96/5.

⁹⁵ FE (44) 1st meeting, 15 November 1944, CAB 96/5.

⁹⁶ FE (44) 2nd meeting, 29 November 1944, CAB 96/5.

The rice question had been raised earlier by the Ministry of Food. It was a practical problem, the treatment of which was not free of more emotional considerations. On liberation Malaya, Hong Kong and perhaps Netherlands India would have large rice requirements. Burma's production would take time to restore, but Siam had large stocks. 'If we can lay our hands on this rice as quickly as possible after the process of liberation has begun in the Far East, we shall solve what is probably the major relief problem of that area.' But clearly political problems were involved. G.P. Young of the Foreign Office had pointed out, indeed, that the Siamese had declared war, 'and we can do what we like with their rice'. But a purely British scheme would have to be cleared with the Americans, the Chinese, and the Dutch, 'not to mention the Combined Food Board': SEAC forces could get hold of it, 'but the other powers concerned will presumably wish to have a say in the allocation. And of course UNRRA will be interested in the subsequent disposal of any surplus.'⁹⁷ At a meeting convened by the Ministry of Food early in September, H.L. Sanderson, the Director of Rice, stressed that it would not be sufficient for the occupying power to acquire the surplus: it would have to stimulate production, too. Yet world rice prices had risen, 'and it would be necessary to decide to what extent rice prices to producers in Siam should be allowed to rise also. If some control of Siamese prices were not instituted at the start they would inevitably have repercussions on prices and production in Burma and control of the industry in that territory would be more difficult.' The Treasury Young pointed out that buying the rice would only increase Siam's sterling balance. 'He asked whether the Siamese Government could be induced, as part of the peace settlement, to requisition existing rice stocks and hand them over to the occupying power.' The stocks, Sanderson replied, were already government property. A policy of requisitioning would not stimulate further production: an incentive was needed in the form of purchasable consumer goods⁹⁸.

Clearly, if other Departments had demands on Siam—in themselves not entirely unreasonable—the Foreign Office felt justified in adopting a punitive stance, despite its attempts to produce a declaration and to align policy with the U.S. Hudson also took a firm line, based, perhaps, more on prestige than on reality, on a desire to return to the status quo rather than to adapt to postwar conditions. The Americans, he thought, were being 'highly sophisticated' in maintaining that they were not at war, and in expecting the British to regard Siam 'as an injured innocent'. He did not think 'the Songkhram Government' could be held solely to blame; and if easy terms were to be offered in the hope of Siam's defection from the Japanese camp, it should be out of expediency, not on principle, as if the Siamese had a right to it.

On the contrary, they ought to be made to feel so frightened at the prospect of retribution for what they have done in joining the Japanese that the demands we have to make on them will come as a relief. If they are simply to be promised their future independence and integrity without qualification, it surely means that it is just as good to be an enemy as an ally of Britain in war—which is not what we should proclaim to Asia.

Hudson also thought that a base on Kra could be claimed as a safeguard against violation of the Anglo-Thai treaties of 1909 and 1940. Henderson found 'much cogency in Mr. Hudson's argument'. 'So do I', added Bennett. But the question of Kra depended on whether the

⁹⁷ Wall to Young, 23 June 1944, and papers attached, F.O. 371/41851 [F3031/3031/40].

⁹⁸ Minutes of Meeting to discuss Future Policy towards Siamese Rice Industry, 8 September 1944, F.O. 371/41851 [F4225/3031/40].

military needed a base. 'It may be necessary before long to ask them but it all depends on the wider set up which they are considering.'⁹⁹ A later meeting of the Far Eastern Committee agreed to refer the question to the Post-Hostilities Planning Committee¹⁰⁰.

Hudson also brought forward the question of Chinese expansion which earlier in the year he had again invoked in criticizing Crosby's wish to destroy Siamese militarism¹⁰¹. Military aggression was not to be expected. But 'Chinese nationalism, perhaps in an aggravated form, will continue to flourish, however weak and divided China may be'. The Chinese could become politically dominant in Siam 'if Siam were deprived of the power to preserve her national individuality by restrictions on Chinese immigration, education and political organizational links with China'. Possibly the U.S. would support China. But

a decisive strengthening of Chinese political influence in Siam would be bound to have serious repercussions in Malaya....There is a danger that a section of the younger Malayan Chinese, worked up by a nationalist agitation and hoping that the 'independence' of Malaya would give them control of the country, may resort to tactics of the sort used by the Kuomintang in China itself in the years 1925-8. Such a movement would be far harder to deal with if Siam were available as a base for political organisation, propaganda and the smuggling of arms....

France, too, should be interested 'in seeing that Siam does not fall under de facto Chinese control'. The French had been in conflict with Siam over the Indochinese frontiers, but the Chinese desired to evict them from Indochina altogether. Any control commission in Siam should, Hudson thought, include France¹⁰². Hudson's attitude to France had softened; his attitude to China had not. But he still seemed to think that the Thais could be brought to share the British views on both. His belief that the U.S. might back the Chinese in southeast Asia was strengthened in the New Year: it would be a compensation for not backing them in Manchuria¹⁰³. The idea was presumably that the Thais might as a result turn to the British and even accept the French.

Some of this, which Bennett found 'very interesting', was used in a despatch to Sir Horace Seymour in Chungking. Bennett did not expect Britain to adopt a 'harsh' policy towards Siam. But 'we have in fact a score to settle before a fresh start can be made....' Siam must be 'a good neighbour and not an Achilles' heel to Singapore and Burma'. China might, however, try to shield the Thais 'from even the minimum amends and safeguards' with a view to securing the regular treaty relations never yet established with Siam, and removal of the disabilities suffered by the Chinese community there. Alternatively, China might try to bring pressure on Siam—as an ally of Japan—with the same objectives. Possibly the Siamese would try to exploit differences between the U.K. and China; but they would need British support later. The

⁹⁹ Minutes on F.O. 371/41848 [F5550/1599/40]. In an annex to the treaty of 10 March 1909, the British government sought and was given an assurance 'that the Siamese Government will not permit any danger to arise to British interests through the use of any portion of the Siamese dominions in the peninsula for military or naval purposes by foreign powers'. W.G. Maxwell and W.S. Gibson, eds., *Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo*, London, 1924, pp. 92-93.

¹⁰⁰ FE (44) 3rd meeting, 21 December 1944, CAB 96/5.

¹⁰¹ Minute, 5 July 1944, on F.O. 371/41852 [F3054/3054/40].

¹⁰² Minute, 16 December 1944, F.O. 371/41848 [F6005/1599/40]. Hudson had also suggested earlier in the year a closer link between Malays and Indonesians as a means of countering Chinese nationalism in Malaya. Hudson to Clarke, 17 February 1944, F.O. 374/41745 [F963/963/61]. On the years 1925-8, see W.R. Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East 1919-1939*, Oxford, 1971, pp. 124 ff.

¹⁰³ Minute, 14 February 1945, on F.O. 371/46544 [F1016/296/40].

Americans' 'mothering' instincts and their economic interests were turning them towards Siam. 'But how the Americans will reconcile their solicitude for Siam with their solicitude for China ... it is impossible to forecast.' Discussions with the U.S. were anticipated and comment would be welcome¹⁰⁴. Seymour replied that, if Britain were 'particularly severe', China might become the protector of the Siamese. He did not think Britain would be, and as he did not think China's aims extended to political dominance in Siam, he saw no clash with Britain's interests¹⁰⁵.

If Seymour implicitly warned against severity and did not seem to think the Thais would turn to the British for fear of the Chinese, Denning was unhappy with the tone of the correspondence with Winant. He had expected Siam to be on the side of the big battalions in 1940-41, and he could not entertain any hard feelings about it. Nor could he now entertain expectations of Siamese resistance. At the peace, no doubt the Siamese must return the territories they had acquired, and no doubt Britain 'must have some kind of safeguard in the Kra Isthmus. Beyond that I would strongly advocate that we should forget and forgive. To this extent I think the American attitude is more realistic than ours, and if we are not careful, we shall find that it is they who in post-war days will have achieved popularity, while a grudge is borne against us.' Nor did he think the correspondence had 'removed the suspicion, which I think still exists in American minds, that we have territorial designs upon the Kra Isthmus. ... And I also do not think that we have made ourselves sufficiently clear as to what it is we want.' Details must indeed await the peace settlement, but 'something simpler and more categorical' was required than the statement in Eden's last letter. If that point were cleared up, the 'basic difficulty will have been removed. That will be a great step forward, although it will not prevent the go-getting type of American from continuing to make mischief as opportunity arises.'¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile the Post-Hostilities Planning Committee had been formally asked to report on the strategic importance of Siam, on any special arrangements necessary in the Kra Isthmus to safeguard the defence of Singapore, and on the likelihood of a United Nations base being required on Siamese territory¹⁰⁶. The Colonial Office also drew attention to its 1943 memorandum on Kra, Patani and Singgora¹⁰⁷. Consideration was put off while the Chiefs of Staff (COS) considered a regional appreciation¹⁰⁸. This turned out to be in the Foreign Office view 'naive and unimportant', and even the COS put it away as a 'staff study'¹⁰⁹. Its emphasis on the strategic importance of Indochina was, however, accepted in the paper on Siam the Planning Committee finally produced. 'Indo-China is the key to the security of our strategic interests in this area, and, so long as it can be denied to the enemy, Siam is of lesser importance.' But Siam would be important as a base for the defence of Indochina, and an effective air defence system in Siam would also help in protecting Malaya and Burma. In

¹⁰⁴ Bennett to Seymour, 6 February 1945, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Denning to Bennett, 14 December 1944, F.O. 371/46544 [F540/296/40].

¹⁰⁶ FE (45) 1, 11 January 1945, CAB 96/5. See also F.O. 371/46544 [F296, 405/296/40].

¹⁰⁷ FE (45) 1st meeting, 17 January 1945, CAB 96/5.

¹⁰⁸ PHP (45) 3 (0) (T of R), 16 January 1945, F.O. 371/46544 [F406/296/40].

¹⁰⁹ PHP (44) 6 (0) Final, 31 January 1945, CAB 81/45. Minutes on F.O. 371/50774 [U890/36/70]. Note on COS (45) 120 (0) (PHP), 21 February 1945, F.O. 371/50775 [U475/36/70].

the absence of sea and air control, the security of Malaya could not be assured by holding the land approaches, but a defensive position on the Kra Isthmus 'might prove of some value'. Britain should oppose the construction of a canal there: it would increase British responsibilities and decrease the strategic value of Singapore. A friendly government in Siam was a 'paramount interest'. It must be prepared to act on British advice in general defence matters, and grant the British Commonwealth the right in peace to take defence measures in Siamese territory on the Malay Peninsula and in the eastern foothills of the mountain range to the east of the Burma border. In war Britain must have transit facilities and unrestricted rights to take such defence measures as it deemed necessary. The facilities need not be reserved to Britain: 'it would indeed be an advantage that they should be available also to the United States of America, France and Holland'. Possibly they could be obtained as part of a regional defence system under the aegis of a world organization. But it was not possible to say at this stage whether such a system would include the establishment of a United Nations base on Siamese territory¹¹⁰. Churchill's references to Kra, it had at last become clear, were superfluous: they had, however, done their damage.

The First Sea Lord criticized the paper as

cast on idealistic rather than realistic lines. He did not believe that any British Government would be prepared in peace-time to spend money on developing airfields and defences in Siam. He was also doubtful as to the wisdom of permitting the promiscuous use of facilities in Siam by other leading Powers. This would not matter if the British had the primary responsibility for supervising Siamese defence measures. It would appear that since we were at war with Siam and the United States were not, we should be in a position to insist that our special claims were satisfied. He agreed that the requirements stated ... were probably what we should like to have but suggested that the reply should be re-drafted and should include only those requirements which we could achieve. He suggested that these might be obtained by the conclusion of a Treaty with Siam. . . . It would give us certain defence rights in time of war and also control of the training and equipping of the Siamese Armed Forces and responsibility for supervising Siamese defence measures. . . .¹¹¹

In a sense this was more realistic. The Planning Committee had taken too little cognizance of Britain's diminished capacity. But its stress on cooperation with other nations was more realistic than the First Sea Lord's view. The abandonment of the Kra issue might diminish American distrust: control of the Siamese armed forces would revive it.

The paper, redrafted according to the First Sea Lord's suggestions, was, indeed, again amended at the instance of the Foreign Office. A treaty with Siam might appear to imply a guarantee of Siam. The U.S. and France would resist any proposal for exclusive military rights, and Britain was committed to arrangements within the framework of the international system. The final version, dated 30 March, therefore proposed, not a treaty, but a British military mission. That alone would give advice, but the facilities would be available in war to other powers. It was hoped that the right to act as 'sole advisers' would be 'assigned to us under some international security system'. The distrust felt by the Americans was emphasized¹¹².

¹¹⁰ PHP (45) 3 (0) Final, 10 March 1945, F.O. 371/46544 [F1584/296/40].

¹¹¹ PHP (45) 3 (0), Revised T of R, 23 March 1945, F.O. 371/46544 [F1851/296/40].

¹¹² PHP (45) 3 (0), Revised Final, 30 March 1945, CAB 81/46.

A conversation between Allison and Bennett on 2 March had renewed indications of that distrust. Allison

mentioned that some member of the State Department had got rather excited by a report (Mr Allison did not know the source) that we contemplated some kind of control commission in Siam after the war. I said that this sounded to me like some sort of garbled version of somebody's idea of what might happen not after the war but when the Japanese were driven from Siam. I could tell him right away that we had no fixed policy at present as to what was to happen at that stage because no one knew what the situation would be.

Would Siam be an enemy so far as Britain was concerned? or would there be a complete change on its part? The position had been made as clear as possible, Bennett maintained, in the correspondence with Winant. He added that, aside from the difference between Britain and the U.S. on the question whether Siam was an enemy,

we had a much more concrete and direct interest in Siam because it was contiguous with our own territories in Burma and Malaya. We had suffered certain damage at the hands of the Siamese Government such as loss of territory, damage to British interests previously established in Siam, etc. Our attitude was that this damage had to be repaired before we could get back to the old footing with Siam but it was impossible to say at present whether this would be by a peace settlement imposed on Siam as an enemy or by agreement with some Siamese Government which repudiated what Siam had hitherto done.

This uncertainty made it unclear whether any, and if so what, control machinery would be required. But Britain had 'no nefarious designs'¹¹³.

No doubt Bennett was right to say that the future was uncertain. But an agreement with a friendly Siamese government was already in contemplation, though on a somewhat punitive basis, and more progress could have been made in defining Britain's requirements. These generalized statements probably did little to reassure the Americans, though their tolerance, if not support, was essential. The Foreign Office was more aware of the situation than other departments, though itself impressed by the element of contingency rather than the need for planning. But the making of policy by consultation with other departments added to the intractability of British policy, as well as delaying its formulation. And even within the Foreign Office the resentment of Siam's policy towards an imperial power introduced some air of unreality. Britain's policy was not likely to outbid U.S. policy in securing Thai friendship, as Young and Dening had hoped, however much Thai attitudes might be affected by China's policy or by America's support of China, as Hudson, and perhaps Bennett, anticipated. Nor was Britain likely to secure an alternative objective, of at once cooperating with the U.S. and modifying its stance, so as to bring Thailand into line. It was difficult to persuade the Americans of the rightness of the British stance, let alone persuading them to modify theirs. That difficulty was enhanced by the vagueness of Britain's aims, and by the reservations over communicating with the Americans, both on the part of those who wanted to outbid them in contacts with the Thais and of those who wanted to deal more harshly with the Thais than they did.

113 Conversation, 2 March 1945, F.O. 371/46544 [F1452/296/40].

That it was, however, not merely a matter of attitude and judgement was illustrated by the rice question: there were imperial responsibilities of which the Americans took too little account. In this context there had been talk of a control commission. Attention had already been drawn, not only to the rice surplus, but to the need to encourage production, for rice would be needed for Malaya, Hong Kong, and perhaps India and Ceylon also. Mere propaganda would not do: it would only encourage the Japanese to destroy the rice. An approach to the Siamese government would be preferable, the experts argued, with a promise to buy and to deliver consumer goods¹¹⁴. The Economic Sub-Committee of the Far Eastern Committee stressed 'the importance of securing that our short-term plans should not prejudice our long-term policy, either in the economic or in the political field'¹¹⁵.

Sanderson thought that the rice requirements of countries freed from Japan, apart from China, would exceed 1 million tons, 'and it will be disastrous if our re-entry into them coincides with a shortage of essential foodstuffs'. It was necessary to acquire surplus stocks in the producing countries and to restore their production. In Siam at the end of 1944, there was perhaps a surplus of 0.5 million tons on the 1943/44 crop, and there was a potential surplus of 800,000 tons on that of 1944/45. In Burma and Indochina, the position was much worse. Organizations for acquiring surpluses and restoring production should be coordinated in the three countries, 'because inconsistency in policy in one country, especially in regard to price levels, would inevitably react on the others'. The measures in Siam would depend on 'the diplomatic attitude which it is intended to adopt towards her'. The Ministry of Food proposed to introduce a Rice Unit. Government stocks could be requisitioned, and settlement adjusted later. But requisition of rice privately held or produced would destroy the incentive to produce more. Instead a price should be agreed with the Siamese authorities in proper relation with that in Burma. Rice acquired by the unit would be sold on behalf of the British government. The unit would also procure and distribute consumption goods and aid in restoring mills and transport. 'Unless control of this nature is imposed on the Siam Rice Industry undue profits will accrue to the Siamese, the price of paddy will advance and inflation will occur to the prejudice of the success of the Scheme which it is proposed to introduce in Burma.'¹¹⁶

In its report the Economic Sub-Committee suggested that planning could not advance until it was clear whether there would be a period of military government in Siam. If this, as the War Office suggested, was unlikely, what means would be adopted to ensure that Siam met Allied requirements? One aspect was the question of currency: if no control were exercised over Siamese currency, the Siamese price level would rise out of all proportion to that in adjacent rice-producing countries. Yet the U.S. was unwilling to settle the currency issue until general Allied policy was settled. Should rice supplies be exacted as a reparation? To what extent should plans be discussed with China?—the cooperation of Chinese rice millers in Siam would be needed. Without military control, or without measures of control over the rice

¹¹⁴ Streatfield to Bennett, 17 January 1945, and papers attached, F.O. 371/46544 [F541/296/40].

¹¹⁵ FE (E) (45) 1st meeting, 8 January 1945, F.O. 371/46327 [F149/149/61].

¹¹⁶ FE (E) (45) 1, 9 January 1945, F.O. 371/46327 [F232/149/61].

industry, 'no scheme will operate successfully', and the success of the scheme in Burma would be 'gravely prejudiced'¹¹⁷.

At the full committee, Sanderson again stressed the need for control, either through military government, or through a requirement to deliver rice under the armistice terms, and Gent agreed that plans should be based on the certainty that they would be enforced. It was not yet quite clear whether Chinese forces would enter Siam, as Chiang Kai-shek had objected to its inclusion within SEAC. The committee agreed 'that the importance of the Siamese rice surplus to British liberated territories was a very strong argument why Siam should come within British control, whether the country comes within S.E.A.C. operational control or not'. Decisions were needed on the machinery of control for Siam and on 'the country within whose sphere of influence it should lie'. It was also necessary to consider approaches to the U.S.—which might be concerned, as members pointed out, over the profits on rice acquired by the British government, or over the reparations proposal—and possibly to China¹¹⁸.

A memorandum was drafted for the Armistice and Post-War Committee. This sought in some degree to meet anticipated American opposition, and to take account of the need, insofar as it was practicable, to reconcile British objectives with the existence of a friendly Siamese government. Any surrender terms, it suggested, must give the Allies the appropriate powers. 'Alternatively, any agreement with an eventual friendly or co-belligerent Siamese Government should make it an obligation upon that Government to make available any existing rice surplus and to produce rice for export in subsequent years.' The Allies must have power to ensure this. A unit should be set up by SEAC to function either as part of a military government or control commission, or as a body in cooperation with a friendly Siamese government. It might be Anglo-American, but it should be 'predominantly British'. The policy should be explained to the Americans, but not at this stage to the Chinese, whose relationship with the large Chinese community in Siam was likely to be a 'very thorny' question. The rice stocks, mainly in government hands, should be acquired, but not at inflated prices that would enrich Siam. Perhaps they should be made available as reparation. Or, if the American view of Siam prevailed, Siam might contribute the rice 'as a concrete proof of friendliness to the liberators and to other liberated territories'. Account would have to be taken, the draft suggested, of possible American reaction if rice were acquired at less than the world price and sold by the British government at the world price¹¹⁹. The main committee decided, however, that it wanted a more precise definition of the powers the Ministry of Food would actually need before going further. It also considered the possible involvement of UNRRA, which it proposed to fend off by pointing out that the rice unit would be acting for the Combined Food Board¹²⁰. The task of reconciling rice policy with American and Thai attitudes was clearly intractable. The policy was not in itself entirely unreasonable. But American support for it would be hard, if not impossible, to win; and even a friendly Siamese government would find it difficult to accept, though there might be other aspects of British policy still more unacceptable.

¹¹⁷ FE (45) 5, also FE (E) (45) 5, Final, 22 January 1945, CAB 96/5.

¹¹⁸ FE (45) 2nd meeting, 28 February 1945, Item 3, CAB 96/5.

¹¹⁹ FE (45) 11, 10 March 1945, CAB 96/5.

¹²⁰ FE (45) 3rd meeting, 14 March 1945, Item 1, CAB 96/5.

Meanwhile the failure to resolve a relationship with *Luang Pradit* and the Free Siamese Movement had been worrying Force 136. Early in February Denning had reported that Force 136 had suggested to Colonel Donovan of OSS that *Luang Pradit* should be told that the British and Americans were working together. In that case, Denning said, the U.S. government would probably want to know what the objectives were, and he suggested they should include expelling the Japanese and restoring Siam's independence¹²². Bennett told Col. Victor Jaques, about to go to SEAC and possibly to Siam, to keep off political questions. 'It might be unpalatable, but she [Siam] had to work her passage.' Jaques suggested 'that the Americans might not be so unwilling to talk politics as we were, and that Siam might drift towards America as likely to be sympathetic'. But Bennett thought that 'the Siamese must surely realise that they would have a more direct concern with us than with the Americans after the war and that they might stand in need of our friendship'¹²³.

Luang Pradit's proposal to send to Kandy a mission including an ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Nai Direk Chaiyanam*¹²⁴, induced the Far Eastern Department to raise once more the question of a political statement to the Siamese. The mission could not be refused: if it were OSS might bring it out. A complete silence on political issues could not be maintained¹²⁵. A Cabinet paper, prepared by the Foreign Office and SOE, was circulated by the Deputy Prime Minister, Attlee, on 17 February. It pointed out that *Luang Pradit* had sent a mission to Chungking, and OSS had brought out another emissary, *Suni Theparaksa*¹²⁶. The Regent was thus in a position to play off powers whose 'angle of approach' differed. 'The contiguity of Siam with Burma and Malaya gives us a very close material interest. Moreover, whatever sympathy we may feel with the Siamese people on account of old friendship and their comparative helplessness under Japanese occupation, the Siamese Government which preceded the present Government did us certain injuries. . . . ' Redress must 'presumably precede reconciliation'; and the COS were still considering whether special strategic arrangements might not be needed. Britain thus could not make unrestricted promises to *Luang Pradit* about the future of Siam. But 'it is against our interests to leave the field to the Americans and the Chinese by remaining completely and indefinitely silent about our general attitude towards Siam'. The mission could be assumed to be going to Mountbatten as 'the highest British military authority', and not as SACSEA, but the U.S. should be informed of the instructions sent to him. They should stipulate that as Supreme Allied Commander he should confine himself to military matters; if political issues were raised, he should say he could only report them. But he might inform *Nai Direk*, either directly or through the Political Adviser, that the British government looked forward to friendly relations with a free, sovereign and independent Siam; that the

¹²¹ Cf. Gilchrist, pp. 85ff.

¹²² Telegram from Denning, 3 February 1945, No. 47, F.O. 371/46560 [F738/738/40].

¹²³ Minute, 9 February 1945, F.O. 371/46560 [F925/738/40].

¹²⁴ He had been Foreign Minister in December 1941, but, pro-Western, he was sent to Tokyo as ambassador. Late in 1943 he returned to Bangkok and was Foreign Minister till Phibun's fall. Batson, 96 n. The other members of the mission included *Nai Thanat Khoman* and General *Chatr Nakrob*. Gilchrist, p. 126n.

¹²⁵ Memorandum by Bennett, 19 February 1945, in F.O. 371/46560 [F1055/738/40].

¹²⁶ A member of the Thai foreign office. Herbert A. Fine, 'The liquidation of World War II in Thailand' *Pacific Historical Review*, XXXIV (1965), 68.

road to this was, however, 'not a smooth one'; and that much would depend on Siam's contribution to the defeat of Japan, and on its readiness to make good the damage done to Britain and its Allies in consequence of the association with Japan, and 'to ensure security and good neighbourly relations for the future'¹²⁷.

At the Cabinet the question of the return of British territory was again brought up, presumably by the Colonial Secretary. The Cabinet agreed, not to include a specific reference, but to allude to making restitution for injury rather than making good damage done¹²⁸. Bennett accepted this. The point was to have a phrase that, 'without arousing premature controversy or further criticism' from the Americans, would cover not only the seizure of British territory and injury to British commercial interests, but also any other injuries or even 'some general reparation'. The phrase was also 'wide enough to cover French territories taken from Indo-China by Siam and this may be a useful point with the French later on. But any phrase which obviously excludes French territories may put us wrong with the French at a later stage, while any phrase which obviously includes them will certainly put us wrong with the United States.'¹²⁹ Yet a further difficulty, Bennett's explanation made clear, obstructed the definition of British policy towards Siam, the future of Indochina. Its security was seen as bound up with the security of British territories; in addition the goodwill of France was important to Britain in Europe¹³⁰. Yet President Roosevelt was opposed to the return of the French to Indochina¹³¹; and, though he had advocated putting France on a control commission, Hudson had earlier argued that it would be possible to lose Siamese friendship without gaining French.

While the Cabinet defined what Mountbatten and Denning might say to *Nai Direk*—it offered the Thais in the event 'little butter with their bun'¹³²—Sansom discussed with Ballantine what Suni had suggested in Washington. This was the setting-up of a provisional government outside Siam, which should repudiate Siamese acts of war and acquisition of territory in Burma and Malaya, and also in Indochina, though the last case should be referred to an international commission. Ballantine recognized that the view of the British, who had interests in adjacent territories, might differ from those of the Americans, 'whose interest was of a general rather than a particular nature. . . . The American view . . . was that if, starting with some modest acts of recognition of a Free Siamese Movement, amicable relations could be built up with Siam in the post-war period, this would set a pattern for the relations of occidental and oriental states in the future which would be of all-round advantage.' He hoped that the British and Americans could agree on a modest recognition of the Free Siamese Movement. Perhaps a Free Siamese Committee could be set up. At least, L.H. Foulds of the Far Eastern Department commented, the State Department did not favour a government-in-exile. But *Nai Direk*'s proposal was preferable¹³³. He had suggested that the government should resign when the

¹²⁷ WP (45) 102, 17 February 1945, CAB 66/62; PREM 3 159/6.

¹²⁸ WM 21 (45) 3, 19 February 1945, confidential annexe, CAB 65/51; PREM 3 159/6.

¹²⁹ Minute, 20 February 1945, on F.O. 371/46560 [F1084/738/40].

¹³⁰ See, e.g., PHP (44) 2 (0) Final, 22 January 1944, CAB 81/45.

¹³¹ E.R. Drachman, *United States Policy toward Vietnam, 1940-1945*, Rutherford, 1970, pp. 43ff.

¹³² Gilchrist, p. 127.

¹³³ Sansom to Far Eastern Department, 24 February 1945, and minute thereon, F.O. 371/46560 [F1449/738/40]. See also Fine, 68.

invasion came, and that a Resistance Government would be set up in a place safe from the Japanese¹³⁴. The State Department denied there was a serious difference between the Siamese suggestions and proposed a Liberation Committee in Washington¹³⁵. Bennett told Allison once more that Britain—against which Siam had declared war and from which it had taken territory—must consider any Siamese approaches ‘rather carefully. We could not rush into their arms all in a moment. Nobody could tell yet whether the eventual settlement with Siam would be in the form of an armistice or of an agreement with some new and friendly Siamese Government which repudiated the connection with Japan. But in one way or another the past had got to be wiped out before we could get on back-slapping terms. . . .’ The U.S. must not misunderstand British caution¹³⁶. This was another reassuring statement that failed to reassure.

The State Department did not give the British government a copy of the proposals the Siamese made in Washington. Foulds and Bennett were suspicious that they were not the Thais’ own work. A letter from Allison increased the suspicion¹³⁷. Foulds decided that the note from the State Department made it ‘desirable for us to formulate more precisely than we had hitherto done the terms which we shall require the Siamese to accept as a condition of the restoration of friendly relations. . . .’ Bennett felt that ‘we must make it clear to the Americans that it is we who have the primary interest in Siam and who must therefore be allowed to make the running. . . . there will have to be some clear understanding on how the past is to be wiped out and the future provided for before H.M. Government (and the Dominion Governments who are also at war with Siam) can enter into formal collaboration with a new Siamese Government or a Siamese Liberation Movement.’ There were also members of Cabinet who saw Siam ‘with no particular benevolence’ who had to be carried along. Postponing a reply to the U.S. raised the danger of a *fait accompli*. An interim reply should be sent, and then terms for dealing with a Siamese liberation government must be worked out with urgency in order to avoid premature American action, to prepare for political warfare in advance of operations, and to provide for the possibility of a Japanese seizure of power, such as had just taken place in Indochina. The Far Eastern Committee should be invited to expedite its discussions and report to the Armistice and Post-War Committee on the terms on which Britain might recognize and collaborate with a liberation government. A reply went to the U.S. a day after another conversation in which Allison had alluded to State Department suspicions over Kra and over a control commission, suspicions which Sansom attributed to anti-imperialism, Allison to K.P. Landon¹³⁸. The reply stressed the importance of working through *Luang Pradit*¹⁴⁰. A memorandum was circulated to the Cabinet, seeking a directive to the Far Eastern Committee. This included a reference to the importance of Siamese collaboration in securing the maximum amount of rice¹⁴¹. Selborne supported the proposal, and the Cabinet agreed to it¹⁴².

¹³⁴ Telegram from Dening, 26 February 1945, No. 75, F.O. 371/46560 [F1229/738/40].

¹³⁵ Telegram from Halifax, 16 March 1945, No. 1729, F.O. 371/46560 [F1709/738/40]. Cf. Fine, 68-69.

¹³⁶ Minute, 21 March 1945, F.O. 371/46560 [F1830/738/40].

¹³⁷ Minutes on F.O. 371/46560 [F1845/738/40].

¹³⁸ Allison to Bennett, 21 March 1945, F.O. 371/46560 [F1856/738/40].

¹³⁹ Conversation, 30 March 1945, F.O. 371/46560 [F2033/738/40]. Sansom to Bennett, 23 April 1945, F.O. 371/46561 [F2694/738/40].

¹⁴⁰ Telegram to Halifax, 31 March 1945, No. 3133, on F.O. 371/46560 [F1845/738/40].

¹⁴¹ WP (45) 249, 13 April 1945, CAB 66/64; PREM 3 159/6.

¹⁴² WM 49 (45) 5, 23 April 1945, CAB 65/50, 52; PREM 3 159/6.

Gilchrist had spoken to *Nai Direk* in Kandy. Perhaps this had modified his proposals¹⁴³, just as the State Department may have expanded Suni's. At the same time Gilchrist urged on the Foreign Office a policy in which Bennett recognized a lot of sound sense. 'If we are going to be tough with Siam, we must get the Americans to take the same line, otherwise a sort of Gresham's law will apply.' He thought that, in any case, a tough line was unjustified, though a weak one was, too. What he favoured was a promise of recognition if *Luang Pradit* acted as Britain suggested, and perhaps also a guarantee of independence after the war and a notification that Britain considered the declaration of war null and void. Required by the directive to report on 'the terms which any friendly Siamese liberation government should be required by His Majesty's Government to accept as a preliminary to recognition and collaboration'¹⁴⁴, the Foreign Office now had to make the best of this advice, given the contrary pressures of the past and the future, the U.S. and the Thais, Churchill and the Cabinet, Dominions and departments, varying opinions in the Foreign Office itself. No doubt the prospect of a liberation government made it easier to focus British objectives. But an earlier attempt to define them might have better met the urgency of the case, and avoided assurances to the Americans that unsettled them rather than enlisted their support.

Early in May the Committee met to consider the directive. It also considered the paper on postwar strategic arrangements; another paper circulated by the Foreign Office on relations between Siam and China, which included points raised by Hudson¹⁴⁵; and one on French attitudes to Siam, which suggested that the French, having lost prestige, might be even more insistent than the British that Siam should be called to account for its collusion¹⁴⁶. Bennett suggested that the Committee's recommendations might take the form of a report with two annexes, one setting out factors for consideration, the other conditions for inclusion in the terms to be accepted by Siam. The Treasury representative suggested draft clauses on financial points, and some additional proposals were put forward, including 'redress in respect of the usurpation of British territory' and 'restitution and compensation to British protected persons as well as to British subjects'. A Working Party was set up.

The Committee also discussed the rice question. The Ministry of Food, which had been asked to consider the powers it needed, wanted the rice unit to be entirely British, but Bennett had reservations:

a delicate problem in Anglo-American relations was involved. It was undesirable that we should appear to be deliberately trying to exclude Americans. If we set up a British unit and presented the Americans with a *fait accompli*, it might be the surest way of encouraging the Americans to press for participation. The Americans were benevolently disposed towards Siam and very suspicious of British intentions after the war. They believed that we wanted to set up a system of control over the country.... This was the situation which the Foreign Office had to meet....

¹⁴³ Telegram from Brain, 29 March 1945, No. 118, F.O. 371/46560 [F1986/738/40]. Gilchrist to Brain, 27 March, in F.O. 371/46560 [F2145/738/40]. See also Gilchrist, pp. 126-7.

¹⁴⁴ FE (45) 20, 25 April 1945, F.O. 371/46544 [F2665/296/40].

¹⁴⁵ FE (45) 22, 30 April 1945, CAB 96/5.

¹⁴⁶ FE (45) 24, 30 April 1945, CAB 96/5.

A paper already circulated had again indicated U.S. suspicion, expressed at Lapstone by Moffat of the Southeast Asian Division in the State Department¹⁴⁷. Bennett carried the day against Sanderson. The latter also wanted sanctions should the Siamese not cooperate. Bennett argued that the situation was too uncertain to consider them: 'we did not know whether we should be dealing with an ex-enemy or a friendly country; whether British troops would be engaged in Siam; or what the attitude of the British public was likely to be, in post-war conditions, towards really drastic measures, for this particular purpose. . . .'¹⁴⁸

A revised paper was sent to the Armistice and Post-War Committee, outlining the proposals on rice and the problems. The unit should include American observers or members. Discussion with the Americans would, however, reopen the whole question of British policy, and should be delayed till Britain was ready for this. The Ministry of Food wanted the collaboration of the Siamese government, and a sanction to compel it, if need be. This would be difficult to arrange, especially if a Siamese resistance government were assuming a voluntary obligation and if, as was likely, there were no military occupation. But rice would only be forthcoming in sufficient quantities if the Siamese government and cultivators found it in their interest to produce it. Perhaps frozen funds could be released *pari passu*¹⁴⁹. Bennett told Law he did not think the matter could be taken any further. Till 'quite recently' policy towards Siam had viewed it 'as an enemy'. Now it was likely to have a pro-Allied resistance government, and the question might be 'on a different footing'¹⁵⁰. Dening pointed out that *Luang Pradit* saw that the Allied desire for rice was an asset to the Thais. The farmer, too, needed to be encouraged to grow it. As A.C.S. Adams of the Far Eastern Department put it, 'it is not going to be easy to reconcile Treasury, Ministry of Food and political aims in regard to the acquisition of Siam's rice. There is a good chance that as usual Siam will benefit from the conflict of interests.'¹⁵¹ In view of the urgency of feeding Malaya, the Armistice and Post-War Committee favoured an immediate approach to the State Department and the Combined Food Board, even though the general policy towards Siam was uncertain¹⁵². Telegrams went to Washington¹⁵³.

While the Working Party considered the general policy towards Siam, "Ruth"—as OSS, and also SOE, called *Luang Pradit*—made a new approach to Britain and the U.S. In this he held out the prospect that the Siamese government, resenting Japanese economic pressure, would resign, and a new one be formed, taking measures against Japan and declaring the declarations of war and the incorporation of Shan and Malayan territory void. He wanted Britain and the Dominions to declare at the beginning of Siamese action 'that they confirm respect of the independence of Siam and that they do not consider Siam as an enemy but as a member of the United Nations'¹⁵⁴. The Siamese, wrote Bennett, appeared to think early Allied operations in

¹⁴⁷ FE (45) 23, 29 April 1945, CAB 96/5.

¹⁴⁸ FE (45) 4th meeting, 2 May 1945, CAB 96/5.

¹⁴⁹ FE (45) 26, also APW (45) 64, 7 May 1945, CAB 96/5; CAB 87/69.

¹⁵⁰ Minute, 16 May 1945, on F.O. 371/46568 [F2815/1349/40].

¹⁵¹ Telegram from Dening, 12 May 1945, No. 168, and minute thereon, F.O. 371/46568[F2879/1349/40].

¹⁵² APW (45) 12th meeting, 17 May 1945, Item 2, CAB 87/69.

¹⁵³ Telegrams, 1 June 1945, Nos. 5797, 5798, on F.O. 371/46568 [F3052/1349/40].

¹⁵⁴ Telegram from Brain, 23 May 1945, No. 187, in F.O. 371/46562 [F3161/738/40].

Siam were anticipated, but Mountbatten would not wish to dissipate his forces. He had sought approval so far only for pre-operational measures; and that approval awaited the formulation of a policy towards Siam¹⁵⁵. Alternatively, Ruth wanted 'to produce a situation in which he feels that we shall have no alternative but to come to the support of a Resistance Movement with material help and with declarations of the type which he suggests—in this he may be judging shrewdly as we should be under pressure from the United States, both to make a declaration of the type suggested', and to send in military assistance to the possible detriment of other operations. A declaration would be necessary at some stage. But if possible it should not be made before an agreement had been reached with Ruth: 'there are several things to settle up before we welcome Siam as a member of the United Nations or commit ourselves to a declaration which would to all appearances entirely wash out the past and heal the breach with Siam. . . .'¹⁵⁶ The COS and the Foreign Office agreed on a warning to *Luang Pradit* 'not to bring matters to a head at present with risk of serious consequences for Siam'¹⁵⁷. The State Department also counselled against premature action, while indicating that it would publicly reiterate at an appropriate time that it respected Siam's independence and had never considered it as an enemy¹⁵⁸. A further discouragement was sent early in July: it was the wrong moment; terms were not ready¹⁵⁹. The former was a good reason, the latter a bad one. Nor did the delay extract Britain from obligation to Ruth: he could now say that he would have been more active in working his passage if he had been permitted¹⁶⁰.

The Working Party meanwhile struggled with its task¹⁶¹. There were indeed numerous complications. As Bennett put it, the settlement with a Siamese liberation government 'will have to embody many provisions appropriate to an armistice or Peace Treaty without having that appearance. . . .' It could not be confined to immediate military questions, but it must commit the Siamese to 'all we want'. It involved difficulties of form, too, since only some of the parties concerned regarded themselves as at war with Siam. The general conclusion was there should be two agreements, one signed by SACSEA and one covering British desiderata. Hudson suggested the value to Britain of putting the business on a four-power basis. It would make up for dissension with France in the Levant; Indochina was strategically important to Britain in any case; there was more in common with France than with the U.S. or China¹⁶². Hudson

¹⁵⁵ Cf. JP (45) 107, Final, 8 May 1945, F.O. 371/46544 [F3149/296/40]. COS (45), 124th meeting, Item 2, CAB 79/33.

¹⁵⁶ Minute on F.O. 371/46562 [F3161/738/40].

¹⁵⁷ Telegram to Brain, 30 May 1945, No. 210, on *ibid.* COS (45), 141st meeting, 31 May, Item 14, CAB 79/34.

¹⁵⁸ Telegram from Washington, 28 May 1945, No. 3711, F.O. 371/46562 [F3232/738/40].

¹⁵⁹ JP (45) 143 Final, 25 June 1945, F.O. 371/46562 [F4053/738/40]. COS (45) 162nd meeting, 27 June, Item 11, CAB 79/35.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Gilchrist, p. 196.

¹⁶¹ Records of its proceedings are in CAB 78/33.

¹⁶² Minutes in F.O. 371/46544 [F3491/296/40].

repeated his advice of late 1944 rather than the perhaps more realistic advice of 1943. The completion of the Working Party's report was delayed not only by the difficulty of the problems it faced, but also by the dissolution of Parliament.

Meanwhile Ballantine gave Halifax a memorandum on the State Department's views. It pointed to the areas of agreement between Britain and the U.S., but suggested that discussion on other questions was urgent in view of military developments in southeast Asia and political developments in Siam. First, referring to the 1944 correspondence, the State Department did not consider that acceptance of postwar international arrangements should be a condition of the restoration of Siam's independence and sovereignty. The discussions on security arrangements affecting Kra should be broadened to ensure that all security questions were a matter of joint agreement between Britain and the U.S., and to involve France and China also. The U.S. proposed to revive its commercial treaty with Siam, and hoped Siam would treat other nationals on a non-discriminatory basis: it wanted Britain's assurance that its policies were in harmony with these principles. The Indochina transfers of 1941 were invalid, the U.S. considered, but a Franco-Siamese agreement should provide for the later adjustment of boundaries by peaceful processes. The U.S. ceased to recognize the Bangkok government in January 1942 and regarded Siam as enemy-occupied. But it would accord recognition and resume diplomatic relations when a lawful government on Siamese soil repudiated the declaration of war, the legality of which Ruth denied, and declared war on Japan. The U.S. hoped that Britain could terminate the state of war similarly, thus avoiding embarrassment to an Allied command, and concurrent action might be taken by France and China. As part of the Allied command, and because of its policies, the U.S. wished not to take part in but to be consulted about any civil administration or control agencies.

Adams suggested an interim reply 'to allay as far as possible the suspicions that have been engendered in the United States by our prolonged reticence on the subject of Siam's future'. On the first point, Britain's view differed, inasmuch as it wanted 'atonement' before absolution. The U.S. required no commitment by the Thais against the repetition of the pre-war excesses of 'economic nationalism'; the adoption of the suggestion on Indochina might 'earn us the acute distrust and dislike of the French'. American conditions for recognition omitted the restitution of territory and failed to take account of the differences between Siam's relationship with the U.S. and its relationships with Britain, France and China. Clearly, too, the Americans were 'reluctant to be associated' with controls that might be imposed by a British civil affairs or military government. 'For mainly sentimental as opposed to practical reasons the U.S. Government desire to show Siam a degree of leniency that has not been perceptible in their policies towards Axis satellites in Europe, e.g. Hungary, Bulgaria, etc. This tendency to paternalism in Asia makes it difficult for us as an Ally to pursue a normally realistic policy. . . . 'The Americans', Hudson suggested, 'seem to claim some kind of moral superiority in their refusal to be at war with Siam'. It was 'strong doctrine' to suggest that because a declaration of war was 'illegal', it reduced the responsibility of state or person for that action. 'If the Americans insist on our taking account of their policy in making our Civil Affairs and other arrangements, we are surely entitled to ask them to explain why they think Siam should be treated so differently from other Axis satellites.' I.A.D. Wilson-Young stressed the importance of an explanation to

the State Department before the balloon went up and it issued a declaration. Bennett found the State Department statement 'smug and provocative'. It took 'no account whatever of realities. The State Department are only too ready to gloss over Siamese faults and from their constant attempts to extract assurances from us it might almost be supposed that we were the guilty party. . . . 'Rather a ticklish subject', Cadogan thought. 'Until we can tell the Americans our views in detail they will remain suspicious. Even when we do, they will probably oppose some of the things we shall wish to do. . . . ' An interim reply pointed out once more 'that a number of difficult questions require settlement before it is possible for us to resume normal relations with a new Siamese Government'. If a crisis came—such as a Japanese coup—it was hoped that the U.S. would not take unilateral action embarrassing to His Majesty's Governments at war with Siam¹⁶³. These views were repeated to Allison on 11 July¹⁶⁴. The realities the U.S. took account of were—despite the talk of sentimentality—those of power: Britain failed to do so. The Foreign Office, not itself free of responsibility, tried harder.

The draft report, the State Department memorandum, and comments by the Foreign Office were taken to a reconstituted Far Eastern Committee¹⁶⁵. The Foreign Office pointed out that the American comment on security arrangements was 'probably founded on the erroneous idea that we are seeking a base in the Kra Isthmus'. But it also meant that the U.S. would oppose any British attempt to obtain exclusive military rights in Siam. If Britain pressed the requirements of the COS, the U.S. government might 'forestall us with some offer to the Siamese of military advice, training and equipment'. At the meeting on 13 July, Bennett drew attention to the 'unusual features' of which the Working Party had had to take account. It had to deal with a 'hypothetical situation'; the settlement had to be 'comprehensive'; the recommendations had to have the agreement of Departments and Cabinet, and the Dominions and the U.S. and perhaps France had to be consulted, yet the matter was urgent. The chief difficulties he foresaw included the rice question: the Americans might not object to the proposal, but might regard the financial arrangements envisaged as 'savouring of reparations'. Another issue, compensation for the treatment of prisoners-of-war, the Foreign Office thought should be a Japanese responsibility. The Committee agreed, but wanted the Siamese government to pay compensation in respect of railway construction in Siam, the sum to be used for a benevolent purpose. The Committee also endorsed the Foreign Office's hope that the COS would reconsider their earlier recommendations on security in the light of the newly-adopted United Nations Charter and the State Department's memorandum¹⁶⁶.

Preparing for this reconsideration, the Joint Planners agreed with the Committee that it would be inexpedient to take a 'unilateral approach' and to propose a military mission at this juncture. A Siamese undertaking to furnish the right to deploy armed forces in war or on threat of war was also inexpedient, inasmuch as it might imply a guarantee. It would be preferable to request the Siamese to carry out such measures for preserving international peace and security as the United Nations might require pending their entry into the organization.

¹⁶³ Telegrams from Halifax, 25 June 1945, Nos. 4411, 4412, minutes attached, and reply, 8 July, No. 7280, F.O. 371/46545 [F3804/296/40].

¹⁶⁴ Conversation, 11 July 1945, F.O. 371/46545 [F4232/296/40].

The undertaking against a Kra canal should, however, remain part of the conditions. The Foreign Office sought comment on the State Department proposal, on which the Joint Planners had given no guidance, that the U.S. and Britain should each agree not to seek postwar security arrangements without prior approval of the other. Gladwyn Jebb of the Reconstruction Department favoured such a reciprocal agreement; Bennett, also W.E. Beckett, the Legal Adviser, thought Britain should reserve a right to make such security arrangements as it required, consulting the U.S.¹⁶⁷ The COS agreed with Bennett and Beckett that security matters should be discussed with the Americans, but that, in view of Siam's importance to the security of British territory, 'we do not consider that we should bind ourselves to take no action in furtherance of this security except with American approval'¹⁶⁸. These recommendations reached the Overseas Reconstruction Committee—successor to the Armistice and Post-War Committee—at the same time as the long-awaited general report of the Far Eastern Committee¹⁶⁹.

Siam was at war with Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa; it did not resist Japan; no liberation or resistance movement had appeared. The normal course to pursue in regard to Siam, the report suggested, would be to call for unconditional surrender, and to demand, not only restitution of territory and property rights, but reparation and measures to ensure that Siam would be a good neighbour in the economic sense and never again be a back door for the invasion of Burma and Malaya. But the situation was not 'so simple and straightforward'. Siam could not effectively resist in 1941 and received no outside help against Japan; the government that allied with Japan had been overthrown; its successor had refrained from action 'in accordance with our advice'. The Siamese government would have the sympathy and support of the U.S. and probably, 'at the outset at all events', of the Chinese. 'These circumstances need not and should not prevent us from securing just redress for the injuries done to British interests by the collaboration of Siam with Japan. But if we go beyond mere restitution and seek to impose some form of reparation or some form of control, economic or military, over Siam in the post-war period, it must be realized that we shall probably meet with great difficulty in achieving these ends.' The U.S. could block or hinder military operations through the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The effect of withholding reconstruction or consumer goods, or economic and financial advice, could be nullified by the Americans' supplying them. Furthermore, 'both our short-term and our long-term interests lie in the willing cooperation of a genuinely friendly Siamese Government'. An effective rice scheme required its collaboration. Future trade depended on Siamese goodwill. Britain had to rely, too, 'on the cooperation of a stable and friendly Siamese Government in measures for the defence of South-East Asia'. An agreement with a friendly government would not be like an armistice involving unconditional surrender. It would have not only to liquidate the war, but to provide a framework for cooperation after it.

¹⁶⁵ FE (45) 29, 27 June 1945, F.O. 371/46545 [F3861/296/40]. FE (45) 31, 10 July; 32, 11 July, in *ibid.* [F3804/296/40].

¹⁶⁶ FE (45) 5th meeting, 13 July 1945, CAB 96/5.

¹⁶⁷ JP (45) 176 Final, 19 July 1945, and minutes thereon, F.O. 371/46545 [F4620/296/40].

¹⁶⁸ COS (45) 479 (0), 21 July 1945, F.O. 371/46545 [F4542/296/40]. COS (45), 180th meeting, 20 July, CAB 79/36.

¹⁶⁹ FE (45) 29 Final, 14 July 1945, in F.O. 371/46545 [F4542/296/40].

The report went over some of the questions that had caused 'particular discussion'. One was the rice question. Siam's surplus had not been available in the war, and it would be equitable for it to be used to relieve the burden the Allies had borne as a result, and to feed neighbouring territories usually dependent on imports from Siam, like Malaya. Paying for the rice at even half the current price would place Siam in a more favourable financial position than territories which had not collaborated. Reparations could not be exacted in an agreement with a liberation government. A free delivery to UNRRA would not, under existing arrangements, help Malaya. It was therefore suggested that, on 'the analogy of Mutual Aid', 1.5 million tons might be demanded 'as a contribution from Siam towards the Allied war effort'. As a counter-part, arms and munitions might be made available 'for the use of Siamese troops in the prosecution of the war against Japan'. Some of the rice would come from current production, but the cultivator would be paid by the Siamese government at prices agreed with the Rice Unit. The Committee believed that the Siamese should pay for Allied troops on Siamese soil, though the U.S. might wish to be more lenient, as it had been in Italy's case. They should also offer compensation for railway construction work by prisoners-of-war. All these obligations, the report emphasized, should not be represented as 'purely voluntary and unilateral gestures on the part of the Siamese Liberation Government', which would create a wrong impression. They should be regarded as 'just requirements', accepted as 'definite obligations'.

The report also covered the form of the proposed agreement. There was some urgency, since it would pave the way for anti-Japanese activities in Siam that would assist SEAC. Clearly it would be convenient for SACSEA himself to sign it, but it would be 'a long business' to secure general Allied agreement to an appropriate document. Moreover, it would be difficult for Mountbatten, as representative of Commonwealth governments at war with Siam and of the U.S. which was not, to sign an agreement covering all the points sought by Britain. A separate military agreement should therefore be signed. But the British government must be sure of a political agreement. In view of the time factor and security considerations, the report suggested that this should be purely British in the first instance, without excluding parallel agreements with other parties, including the Dominions. The agreement would cover the proposed arrangements in general terms, while specifying that some issues, like rice, would be the subject of detailed special agreements, and others, like postwar military facilities, negotiated later. The first part of the agreement would cover the liquidation of the war and injury to Allied interests. But after that it should as far as possible take the character of a mutual aid agreement, and the liberation government should be encouraged to ask for advisers in the financial and economic field.

In order to avoid criticism, the British government's agreement must be 'sufficiently wide to safeguard the immediate interests of our Allies'. But insofar as the provisions were aimed at securing a special position for the British Commonwealth in strategic and economic matters, they would 'meet with difficulties—perhaps more so from some of our Allies than from Siam itself', not only the U.S. and China, but France also, given 'her present mood'. France saw itself as in a state of war with Siam, and might contend that the Anglo-French agreements of 1896 and 1904 gave it a claim to participate in any agreement with a Siamese liberation government and in any postwar military facilities granted. 'Her misfortunes and the frustra-

tion with which she has hitherto met in her attempts to play a larger part in the Far Eastern war will probably make her all the more tenacious in this direction.' Moreover, the treaties of 1940 were negotiated in consultation and Britain had an interest in Indochina defence. In some ways, it might be to British advantage 'to bring France in'. But France and Siam were antagonistic, and till recently the U.S. had been 'very reserved on the whole question of France's return to Indo-China'. Insistence on French concurrence might embarrass Mountbatten's operations and complicate British policy in relation to Siam and the U.S. Perhaps it would be sufficient to notify France of the terms Britain proposed to present to Siam, and provide that the British agreement safeguarded French interests and ensured the return of the 1941 cessions. The report stressed that, despite the correspondence between Winant and Eden,

the Americans remain deeply suspicious of our motives. There is a marked tendency in the State Department to see in everything we do or say about Siam an indication that we desire to impose controls upon her after the war incompatible with her freedom, sovereignty and independence. It is by this yardstick that any terms which we may propose for Siam will be judged by the United States Government and the scrutiny of such terms will be extremely close.

The Foreign Office had no doubt stressed this to other Departments represented on the Committee, and well it might. British policy had indeed evolved considerably from the embattled and embittered attitudes taken earlier in the war. The emergence of a potential liberation government in Siam, the indications of American attitudes, and a recognition of the diminution Britain's real strength, even in victory, no doubt contributed to a growing realism. But the report was still a rather ambivalent document, and the course it recommended difficult, if not risky.

Bennett pointed out that the COS had revised their views on strategic requirements: it would be difficult for the U.S. to take 'legitimate exception to what is now proposed'. But telegrams from Washington, proposing an American purchasing agency, showed that there would be much discussion on the rice question, both as to acquisition and distribution¹⁷⁰. The Minister of State, William Mabane, took the report to the Overseas Reconstruction Committee. Here there was doubt about pressing for compensation for prisoner-of-war labour. But, while sharing that doubt, Sir James Grigg, the Secretary for War, thought that as a whole the conditions proposed were 'far too lenient. . . . In particular, we should press for a substantial increase in the amount of rice to be provided free by Siam. We should not let the attitude of the United States of America . . . influence us unduly. . . .' Sir A. Salter, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, agreed: the prospective commerce with Siam was less significant than an increased contribution of rice. Sir John Anderson, Chancellor of the Exchequer, favoured 'securing the largest possible contribution of rice', telling the U.S. that Britain reserved its right to reparations, considering the cancellation of the Siamese sterling balance. The Committee expressed general agreement. The report was referred to the Dominions, India and Burma for comment. Then it would go to Cabinet, with a view to subsequent consultation with the U.S.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Memorandum, 23 July 1945, F.O. 371/46545 [F4619/296/40]. Telegrams from Halifax, 21 July 1945, Nos. 5102, 5103, F.O. 371/46568 [F4460/1349/40]. For the agreements of 1896 and 1904, see M.F. Goldman, 'Franco-British rivalry over Siam, 1896-1904', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, III, 2 (September 1972), 210-28.

¹⁷¹ ORC (45) 2nd meeting, 24 July 1945, Item 1, F.O. 371/50906 [U5725/5342/70].

The reference to the Dominions was made¹⁷². But, as Bennett was to write on 12 August, 'we have found ourselves overtaken by events so far as the formulation of our policy towards Siam is concerned'¹⁷³. These events included the fall of the government and a delay in considering the Overseas Reconstruction Committee report¹⁷⁴. Then came the surrender of Japan which, as Dening had warned, would make it difficult to 'hold the situation in Siam'¹⁷⁵. The question, as the Far Eastern Department said, had been 'extremely complex. . . . In the Foreign Office we have had to wear down the original stipulations of most of the Departments concerned to something which would give us at least the chance of reaching an agreed policy with the United States . . . '¹⁷⁶ At the gumshoe level, Gilchrist was inclined to blame the Foreign Office: 'I could not help feeling then, and indeed I still feel, that the Foreign Office were quite remarkably hoity-toity about Siam, considering how easy they had just found it to make friends with Italy. . . . I could equally well cite Burma and Aung San. . . '¹⁷⁷ It was not merely, or even chiefly, the Foreign Office. But the Foreign Office itself was divided, and perhaps its own efforts to define a policy had been belated and inadequate. At all events, the policy, inadequate as it still was, had finally emerged only in circumstances that demanded its further modification. The Thais made the most of them.

¹⁷² Telegram, 26 July 1945, D1304, in F.O. 371/46545 [F4298/296/40].

¹⁷³ Bennett to Balfour, 12 August 1945, in *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Minutes in F.O. 371/46545 [F4787/296/40].

¹⁷⁵ Telegram from Dening, 27 July 1945, No. 319, F.O. 371/46545 [F4574/296/40].

¹⁷⁶ Minute, n.d., in F.O. 371/46545 [F4831/296/40].

¹⁷⁷ Gilchrist, p. 192.