

RICE AND RECONCILIATION: THE ANGLO-THAI PEACE NEGOTIATIONS OF 1945

by

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Only by July 1945 did a high-ranking government committee produce a defined, though still not definitive, British policy towards Thailand. Within a month that policy, the detail of which was still under discussion, was challenged by events, in particular by the sudden conclusion of the Pacific phase of the Second World War. One of the reasons for the belated definition of Britain's policy had indeed been its Foreign Office's emphasis on contingency: the way the Pacific war would be won was uncertain, and that must influence policy towards Thailand, which had declared war on Britain, though not on the United States, but in which contacts with a resistance movement, even with its leader, Luang Pradit, the Regent, had been established. The belief that uncertainty was almost the only certainty tended to overlay or even obscure the recognition that the U.S. was certainly the most powerful of the Allies and that, whatever Britain's policy was, what it could achieve would be limited by what the U.S. could be persuaded to accept, if not support. The sudden conclusion of the war forced a reconsideration of Britain's policy. But the primacy of the U.S. was, perhaps still more evidently, the cardinal feature of the situation in east and southeast Asia.

In a previous paper that examined the framing of or failure to frame Britain's policy in the war years, I suggested that given so basic a constraint, British policymakers might have done well to set aside detail and de-emphasize contingency, so as to concentrate on some essential objectives that could perhaps have been acceptable to the U.S. What would have been acceptable was perhaps unclear, at least in detail. But it was clear—and many in the Foreign Office recognized this—that any 'imperialist' line that appeared to infringe Thailand's independence would be unacceptable, and that any 'punitive' line that might damage the prospect of a new relationship between Asian and Western nations would be unacceptable also. Within such a framework, Britain might have worked out objectives that made the most of its earlier contacts and commerce with the Siamese kingdom and that could have been pursued so as to minimize the impact of contingency and the burden of detail.

In face of this, however, there were several obstacles. It may be that, structured as it was, and habituated to a hand-to-mouth policy in the interwar years, the Foreign Office was poorly adapted to framing objectives, though well adapted to recognizing problems and analyzing them, well aware of the fragility of human contrivance. The Foreign Office had certainly taken account of the changes in southeast Asia prewar: it had, for example, seen the need to come to terms with the 1932 revolution in Thailand, as it had rightly appraised the importance of President Quezon in the Philippines. It was not entirely tied to the 'colonial' past. But other departments were on this subject less realistic; so were many politicians, including the wartime Prime Minister. During the war the British government indeed began

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to hammer out policies for the future in relation to southeast Asia and elsewhere. But they were policies made by interdepartmental and Cabinet committees, and not by the Foreign Office, which, though divided itself and perhaps too doubtful of the value of planning, was often doing battle for realism almost alone. Blueprints were developed that played down contingency but obscured realism. Objectives were set out but detail raised up. The committee structure tended rather to produce camels when the kingdom needed horses.

This is not to say that the other departments or the politicians were merely perverse. For the problems they faced were both enormous in themselves and also an aspect of a problem still more enormous, the perception of Britain's diminished power in the world and adaptation to its implications. The problem had been developing since the turn of the century and particularly since the First World War. The Second World War marked a further stage in the diminution of Britain's power, but adaptation to its implications was not made easier by the fact that Britain was on the winning side. What had to be accepted was that being one of the victors did not mean victory. It meant a more precipitous decline in Britain's role in the world; it meant that the U.S. was clearly its successor. To some extent this was to be made acceptable to the public by adding to the myth that Britain had acquired empire in absence of mind, the myth that it had great presence of mind in giving it away: an amateur and unready colonizer, it was an expert, even enthusiastic, decolonizer, moving smoothly from serendipity to senility. But that myth could hardly be developed during the war. The feeling that the War was not being fought to give the empire away was not Churchill's alone, despite the implications of the Atlantic Charter he had endorsed at Placentia Bay. In such a context it was hard to set aside, or to regard as mere details, events like the declaration of war by an old client of Britain, its invasion of Burma, its acceptance of the northern Malay states from the Japanese.

Yet there was a case for looking to the future rather than to the past. The case was certainly put in the Foreign Office, though often by 'old hands' whose testimony might be discounted as partial rather than welcomed as expert. A.C.S. Adams recognized the problem of 'the immense body of opinion in the U.S. that is violently, if uninformedly, antagonistic to what is regarded as "tutelage" of would-be independent peoples'. That had to be considered. But there was a problem in the U.K. too. 'There exists, I feel, an historically unjustifiable idea in responsible circles in this country that Siam is not only a very small country but also a quite negligible consideration. If traditional and long-standing friendship with Siam is not thought to be a relevant consideration at this stage, perhaps a reminder of the British Commonwealth's material interest in that country may count for something....'¹ M.E. Denning, political adviser to Lord Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander Southeast Asia, shared this view: 'we are not likely to be in a very strong position in the Far East after the war, and our primary need everywhere will be markets. That being so, I should have said that Siamese goodwill would be in our best interests and that any policy which seeks for immediate concessions and ignores the long-term advantages to be gained by a liberal attitude is short-sighted....'²

1 Minute by Adams, 25 July 1945, F.O. 371/46547 [F5739/296/40], Public Record Office, London.

2 Denning to Bennett, 3 August 1945, F.O. 371/46546 [F5336/296/40].

Emotion may have clouded the treatment of some issues, though for politicians who had to face an electorate that had fought for victory, even that may not have been entirely unrealistic. There were, in the case of Thailand, issues that were intractable in themselves, and on which the American attitude was unrealistic. One of these was the rice question. Whatever view was to be taken of Thailand, Malaya and Indonesia—not to mention Indochina and the countries of east Asia—were seriously deficient in rice at the end of the war. Britain did not of course wish to return to its old colonies emptyhanded: but there was a better case than the U.S. was prepared to recognize, and not merely an 'imperialist' case, for the rice policy the British put forward, even if they found difficulty in putting it forward in the right kind of way. If the Americans were unduly suspicious, the British (partly a cause, partly a result) were unduly secretive.

Something similar might be said in relation to Indochina. Defeated in war, the French were all the more anxious to return. Opinion had varied on the desirability of their coming back so far as Britain's interests in southeast Asia were concerned: the strategic importance of Indochina, and the supposed ambitions of China, tended to prompt the Foreign Office to favour the return of the French. Britain's policy in southeast Asia was always, however, greatly affected by its policy in Europe, and the clinching argument, it may well be, was the need for good relations with France itself. That was important for the U.S. too. Under Roosevelt, the U.S. was, as Adams said, even more distrustful of French colonial policy than of British³; and his policy had been a curious mixture of idealism, ignorance and Machiavellianism. But once Roosevelt had passed from the scene, the U.S. had no policy for Indochina. The lack of realism within the Allied camp was not all within the British quarter. In the long run, it might be thought it mattered less to the more powerful, though in the still longer term of the 1960s and 1970s, even that can be doubted.

To some extent the difference of attitude over Siam and Indochina reflected not only a different attitude to imperialism, but a different attitude to China itself. Both the U.S. and the U.K. overestimated the potential of the Kuomintang regime. Particularly in relation to southeast Asia, the British viewed it with more concern than the Americans, 'always Sinophil and Empire-phobe'⁴; and this provides a clue to British planning for postwar Siam as well as Malaya. The British also believed that the Thais shared something of their attitude and concluded that they would tend to look to Britain rather than to the U.S. as a result.

Of the differences among the Allies the Thais were aware, in general if not in particular. Their government had annexed British territory; the U.S. had not responded to its declaration of war, and Seni Pramoj, their prewar ambassador, remained in Washington. It is a truism of southeast Asian historiography to comment on the Thais' ability to maintain their independence during the colonial period. That they had been able to do so, of course, partly reflected the interests of the major colonial power. But the diplomacy of the Chakri kings and their ministers was important, too. The passing of Britain's primacy required adaption by the Thais as well as others. That was forthcoming, though not, in the end, without deepening

³ As note 1. See also E.R. Drachman, *United States Policy towards Vietnam, 1940-1945*, Rutherford, 1970, chs. 2, 3.

⁴ Minute by G.P. Young, 17 April 1944, F.O. 371/41745 [F963/963/61].

the cleavage between the military and civilian factions of the 'Promoters' who had dominated Siam since the coup of 1932. If more united in policy, the Allies might perhaps have limited the impact this had on postwar Thailand.

It surely could not have been done, as Frank Darling suggests⁵, by limiting the military. Would even civilians have accepted foreign intervention with that objective? Even if they had, could Thailand have maintained its independence with curtailed military forces? No one has yet succeeded—if they have tried—in reconciling a prescription for sustaining civilian rule in an independent country with its obligation to itself, if not to others also, to maintain a military force. Japan is an exception to prove the rule: the Allied occupation reorganized Japanese civilian life, but the burden of defending Japan was implicitly placed on the U.S. In the case of Thailand, neither the U.S. nor Great Britain was prepared to follow this course: the one because its attitude to the Thais differed from its attitude to the Japanese; the other, partly because its attitude to the Thais also differed—it had relations with the Regent and had advised against an anti-Japanese rising—partly also because of the Americans' attitude, partly, too, because of the burden involved in protecting the Thais if their right to protect themselves were denied. But if the Allies would not or could not weaken the Thai military, they might have strengthened the civilians. Two major issues were the focus of the Anglo-Thai negotiations at the end of the war: the terms on which the two countries were to be reconciled, the delivery of rice. For the Thais, the former was initially more important than the latter. For the British the latter was really more important than the former. But their concern with 'prestige' issues like the declaration of war and the acquisition of British territory made it difficult promptly to come to terms with the Thai government. As a result, the position of the civilians, led by Pridi (Luang Pradit), was weakened, and, among others, the militarist followers of Pibul could accuse them of selling Thailand out. The Allies would not play MacArthur's role in Thailand: their role risked being like that of the Allies towards Weimar. The Americans, distrusting the British, did not promote an early conclusion of the negotiations, though a prompt conclusion might have assisted Pridi more than their intervention. They made more of the rice demand than the Thais themselves. Their action helped to make it seem what they thought it was, an act of imperialist oppression, and to transform something that could have been seen as a gesture of reconciliation into an obligation reluctantly accepted and imperfectly fulfilled.

The report on "Policy towards Siam", prepared by the interdepartmental Far Eastern Committee, was dated 14 July 1945⁶. It endeavoured to take account both of Britain's interests and its prestige, its need to enlist Siam's cooperation, and its desire that it fulfil certain requirements. The British government, the report pointed out, had already declared that its attitude to Siam would depend on the measures the Siamese took to expel the Japanese and

⁵ F.C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States*, Washington, 1965, pp. 43-44.

⁶ FE(45) 29 Final, 14 July 1945, F.O.371/46545 [F4542/296/40].

assist in their defeat, together with their readiness to make restitution to Britain and its Allies, and to ensure the security of southeast Asia. The Committee listed particular steps Britain should expect a Siamese Liberation Government to take as a condition of recognition. These included (A) Measures of Repudiation, including (1) orders for the cessation of hostilities, (2) repudiation of the declaration of war of January 1942 and (3) of the alliance with Japan of the previous month, and (4) renunciation of the territory acquired since 11 December 1940, including that ceded by Vichy on 9 May 1941, following the Japanese mediation; (B) Measures of Readjustment and Restitution, including (1a) compensation for loss or damage to property rights arising out of Siamese occupation of Allied territories since 11 December 1940, (2a) release and care of prisoners-of-war and (2b) compensation for the construction work done by them, and (3) restoring British and Allied property rights and interests in Siam; (C) Measures against Japan, including (1) carrying out any pre-occupation activities required by the Allied Military Authority, (2) disarming and (3) interning the Japanese in Siam, (4) seizing and handing over all Japanese war material; (D) Facilities to be granted to the Allied Military Authority, including (1) use of Siamese forces and their establishments, (3) provision of supplies and services free of cost, (9) acceptance of a military mission appointed by the appropriate Allied Military Authority, 'to advise on the organisation, training and equipment of the Siamese armed forces', (10) controlling banks and business as required by the Allies, (11) agreeing to prohibit, except as directed by the Allies, exports of rice, tin, rubber and teak during the war and for such time after that as was deemed necessary in the economic circumstances prevailing, (13) taking Allied advice on currency policy; (E) Measures for Postwar Strategic Cooperation, including (1) recognition of the importance of Siam to the defence of Burma, Malaya and Indochina, and ultimately to British strategic interests in the Indian Ocean and southwest Pacific, (2) acceptance of British advice on defence matters in peacetime tendered through a British military mission, and (4) undertaking that no Kra canal be built without British consent; and (F) Measures for Postwar Economic Cooperation, including agreement (1) to work for the revival of trade, (2) to negotiate a new commercial treaty, including provisions against excluding British commercial or industrial interests or professional men from participation in Siamese economy and trade, (3) in the meantime not to enforce measures of this sort, and (5) to participate in any international arrangements regarding tin and rubber.

The list also included the rice clauses. One (D12a) provided that the Siamese government should make available 1.5 million tons of rice or paddy, free of cost at Bangkok 'as quickly as may be compatible with the retention of supplies adequate for Siamese internal needs'. The Committee did not regard the delivery as reparations, an inappropriate approach to a Liberation Government. Nor did it favour a free contribution to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agreement (UNRRA), which would not be operating in some of the neighbouring territories like Malaya. It invoked the analogy of mutual aid: the rice would be a contribution to the war effort, and arms and munitions for the war against Japan might be made available as a counterpart. Stocks were estimated at 0.5 million tons; the anticipated surplus in December 1945 at 800,000 tons. The demand should not adversely affect current production, since the cultivator would be paid at a rate agreed by the Siamese government with the Rice Unit; while future production would depend largely on the availability of in-

ducement goods. Another clause (12b) alluded to the Allied Rice Unit, to which the Siamese government was to make available rice surpluses at an agreed price. With it (12c), the Siamese government was to make a detailed agreement covering both the free and the remunerated deliveries of rice.

The Far Eastern Committee had also considered the form of the general agreement that might be made. The need for an agreement was urgent, it argued, in order to pave the way for activities in Siam which would assist Mountbatten's military operations, and it would be convenient if he could sign it as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia (SACSEA), with the authority of all the governments at war with Siam and in the interests of the United Nations in general. But it would be time-consuming to secure general agreement on the document, and to some of the clauses the U.S. would not agree. Any agreement made by Mountbatten would have to be confined to Supreme Allied Commander (SAC) matters, e.g. A1, B1, 2 and 4, C and D. But he should not make a military agreement of this kind without being sure of a political agreement covering the parts with which he could not deal. Such a political agreement should, in view of the time factor and security considerations, be British in character. It would record in general terms the Siamese Liberation Government's intention to carry out all of section A and its acceptance as the basis of relations of the rest of the other sections. Some of the provisions, like those relating to military action and to rice, would, it should be stated, be covered in immediate agreements with SACSEA; others, like postwar arrangements, be negotiated later.

The report suggested that a number of the demands, designed to secure a special position for the British Commonwealth in strategic and economic matters, might 'meet with difficulties—perhaps more so from some of our Allies than from Siam itself', not only the U.S. and China, but France, too. Furthermore, it was hard to reconcile the need for good relations with France with the need for good relations with the U.S. The U.S. had till recently been 'very reserved on the whole question of France's return to Indo-China', and though it had more recently declared that the Siamese government should accept the pre-1941 boundary, this was to be without prejudice to subsequent adjustment. Moreover, though developments in Anglo-French relations 'outside our sphere' might be important, the Committee admitted, 'if we were to place ourselves in a position where our progress would depend upon the attitude of France the results in South-East Asia might be most unfortunate'. Rather than negotiate concurrently with France, it might be sufficient to notify it of the terms proposed, and ensure that the British agreement safeguarded French interests and the return of the 1941 cessions.

The Chiefs of Staff (COS) revised their view of Britain's strategic needs shortly after the report was presented, and dropped the 'unilateral approach', and the insistence that the Siamese act in defence matters on British advice, for fear of taking on an obligation to defend Siam. A Siamese undertaking to furnish the right to deploy forces in time of war was deleted for the same reason⁷. These changes, as Sterndale Bennett, head of the Far Eastern Department, suggested, might diminish American opposition⁸. But telegrams from Washington indicated that the rice question could well be the source of 'much discussion'⁹.

⁷ COS(45) 180th meeting, 20 July 1945, CAB79/36, Public Record Office. COS(45) 479(0), 21 July 1945, F.O. 371/46545 [F4542/296/40].

⁸ Minute, 21 July 1945, F.O. 371/46545 [F4620/296/40].

⁹ Memorandum, 23 July 1945, F.O. 371/46545 [F4619/296/40].

The Americans had been informed of the proposal for a Rice Unit, with allocations of the rice acquired through Combined Food Board procedures: they had not been told of the idea of a free Siamese contribution of rice¹⁰. The State Department had recognized the desirability of restoring Siamese production and of exporting the surplus uncovered or thereafter produced. It surmised that the American military and naval authorities might wish to purchase rice for military or civilian needs, and it envisaged a mission or agency acting in coordination with the proposed Rice Unit. The rice exported should be applied first to the needs of British, American and Chinese military forces, and those of civilians for whom they were responsible, and then to civilians in accordance with Combined Food Board (CFB) recommendations. So far as possible, Siam should receive credit for rice and other exports in currencies that would meet its foreign exchange needs. The Embassy in Washington suggested that the British should propose in reply a combined Anglo-American unit, with all allocations approved by CFB. 'There was never more than a slender chance that we should get away with the proposal for an entirely British unit.'¹¹ At the Foreign Office Adams thought that an American agency, buying for dollars, would ensure the failure of the British Rice Unit, saddled with the 'free rice' scheme, and obtain both rice and a footing in the import trade. 'Plainly the "free rice" scheme must be supported by the Americans, or we must modify it, perhaps even drop it as it now stands...'¹² A reply was sent following interdepartmental discussion. Rival units would mean chaos. Allocation by CFB would make the international character of the unit less significant, but the U.S. should certainly be represented. Siam had substantial gold reserves and had no need to sell rice for dollars¹³. Still nothing was said as to free supplies.

Consideration of the report itself—as indeed of this reply—had been subject to delay as a result of the fall of the Churchill government. The Overseas Reconstruction Committee of the old government had considered the report on 24 July. There the general impression was that the treatment of Siam it recommended was too lenient, that more rice should be secured, and that a claim to reparations should be reserved¹⁴. The report had then been referred to the Dominions, but further consideration was put off when the election went against the Conservatives. Meanwhile events in east Asia had been moving at a great pace. Denning urged that the announcement by wireless of the terms Japan must accept made it urgent to tell the Thais the terms for their collaboration: 'if we do not act soon, I should estimate that it will be hard to hold the situation in Siam, and that if Japan should give in, we (the British) would find ourselves at a serious disadvantage in a situation where only we are at war with Siam, while the United States and China are not...'¹⁵

On 3 August Adams prepared a brief for the new Secretary of State, Ernest Bevin. This pointed to the difference between the British and the Americans, who were suspicious lest Britain tried to establish some kind of control over Siam and 'themselves aspire[d] to guiding

10 Telegrams, 1 June 1945, Nos. 5797, 5799, F.O.371/46568 [F3052/1349/40].

11 Telegrams, 21 July 1945, Nos. 5102, 5103, F.O./371/46568 [F4460/1349/40].

12 Minute, 23 July 1945, *ibid.*

13 Telegram, 8 August 1945, No. 8181, F.O. 371/46568 [F4897/1349/40].

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

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

Siam politically after the war'. The difference was 'embarrassing', especially as South East Asia Command (SEAC) was a combined command. 'Our hope is that events may allow the policies of the United States and ourselves to be reconciled before Allied troops enter Siam'. The Overseas Reconstruction Committee had wanted to stiffen the proposed British policy towards a Siamese Liberation Government. The Dominions' views were being sought. Then the Cabinet must deal with the question, which related to SEAC's operational needs, and to the possibility that the Japanese might seize complete control, as they had in Indochina, and precipitate the emergence of the new Siamese government. 'The dealing with this matter is growing very urgent', minuted Bevin. 'Speed up the answers.'¹⁶

A reply had just been received from Australia. The state of war with Siam was not to be regarded as 'a mere technicality... Chauvinist and anti-Western elements in Siam contributed to the acutely dangerous situation in the Pacific in 1942. Allied policies towards the future of Siam should be such as to discourage such influences'. The new government must be 'democratic in character', the Australian government believed; not quite consistently, it added: 'because Siam made and assisted Japan to make war against us, treatment of Siam must be stern'. The two points were to be made consistent, if not practicable, by Allied occupation and control: MacArthur not Weimar. Pro-Japanese Thais should be arrested; Thais as well as Japanese should be covered by provisions on war criminals; Thai obligations in regard to future security should be 'more specific'. There should be no haste over Siam's entry into the United Nations.

We would expect to see Siam pass through a period akin to tutelage, the first stage of which would be the occupation and Allied military control through a Siamese Resistance Government... These and subsequent arrangements should be compatible with the emergence of indigenous Siamese Government on democratic lines and Siamese cooperation in international and regional welfare arrangements. We think it likely that measures of foreign assistance to Siam will be necessary for these proposals even after the military period, though it should be a basic policy to modify any such measures progressively with evidence of Siamese capacity for effective internal administration and international cooperation...¹⁷

The New Zealand government in general endorsed the Australians' views. 'In our view, Siam should be treated as far as possible as an enemy State, and, until she has given proof of her goodwill after a reasonable period of probation, we do not consider she should be admitted to the United Nations Organisation, nor should undue concessions be made in her favour...'¹⁸

Commenting on the Australian attitude—'rather stiffer' than that of the British—Adams hinted at, but did not really resolve the inconsistency between the two principles advanced.

I think the anti-Western elements referred to will be discredited anyway unless fresh grievances arise from e.g. Allied military occupation or economic pressure.

The British government had rejected the kind of tutelage the Australians envisaged, knowing that the Americans would not accept it and recognizing that it was hardly in keeping with the relations that had developed with Pridi. Adams saw that the best hope of civilian rule lay in avoiding the anti-Western grievances that might result from occupation or economic

16 Minute, 3 August 1945, F.O.371/46545 [F4944/296/40].

17 Telegram, 7 August 1945, No.217, F.O.371/46545 [F4870/296/40].

18 Telegram, 11 August 1945, No. 222, *ibid.*

The natural tendency will be for a democratic form of Government to emerge but its continuance in effective control will depend largely upon the size of the armed forces allowed to Siam. If, for instance, the Siamese Army can again become a powerful influence in politics, a repetition of the military regime (similar to Pibul's) with its attendant Chauvinism, xenophobia and totalitarian methods is likely.¹⁹

pressure. But he seems also to have contemplated some restraint on the army, which was not very consistent, nor very practicable.

In any case, 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'²⁰. The Japanese had offered to surrender. The new Cabinet in London reconstituted the interdepartmental Far Eastern Official Committee, and also set up a Ministerial Committee. Bennett introduced the July report to the former. It had then been assumed, he said, that a Siamese Liberation Government would take over and an agreement be made with it. 'This development would presumably not now occur.' Siam was technically at war with Britain. 'It would be difficult however to proceed by way of an armistice owing to the attitude of the United States and also because we were under a certain moral obligation to the Regent of Siam', Pridi, who had been dissuaded earlier from breaking with the Japanese. A fresh approach was needed, Bennett declared. His idea, however, was that the British should try to reach agreement with the Siamese along the lines of the July report so far as its recommendations were practicable, and the Committee agreed²¹.

Dening had been worried that 'Ruth'—the Regent—would declare war, which might precipitate Japanese action and so interfere with the release of prisoners-of-war and the acquisition of rice²². As the Japanese surrender drew nearer, he pressed for instructions: that would make it impossible to have 'one command actuated by two different policies'²³. A memorandum was prepared for the Cabinet. 'If the Japanese surrender materialises it will have overtaken our plans for Siam. It will also place the Siamese Regent in an awkward position since Siam will not have been enabled to play the part in her own liberation which had been anticipated', and would be technically still at war. Unconditional surrender seemed inappropriate. 'The right course . . . seems to be to proceed on the lines already recommended in so far as these are still appropriate to the changed situation. . . .' The memorandum recommended a procedure. The Special Operations Executive (SOE) representative in Bangkok should 'give it as his personal advice to the Regent that the latter would be well advised to make an announcement disavowing his country's declaration of war', repudiating the Japanese alliance, placing his country at the service of the Allies, referring to his earlier wish to act,

19 Minute, 9 August 1945, *ibid.*

20 Bennett to Balfour, 12 August 1945, F.O.371/46545 [F4298/296/40].

21 FE(O) 1st meeting, 12 August 1945, F.O.371/46328 [F5211/149/61].

22 Telegram, 11 August 1945, No.341, F.O.371/46562 [F5019/738/40].

23 Telegram, 12 August 1945, No.344, F.O.371/46546 [F5042/296/40].

and offering to send a representative to Kandy to get into touch with the Allies. The message should be sent without prior consultation with the Dominions or the U.S.: indeed the time factor made that necessary. Later the Dominions should be consulted, and the U.S. informed, of the terms for the Kandy negotiations. Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary, secured the agreement of the Defence Committee on behalf of Cabinet. The Dominions must be given the reasons for the proposed policy: 'difference between our situation and that of the U.S., the fact that we held the Regent back in May, the desirability of preventing U.S. forestalling us, etc.'²⁴

The proposal was, of course, a more moderate one than the Australians and New Zealanders contemplated: it opened up the prospect of prompt negotiations between the British and the Regent. If they could be carried through, the Americans might have little opportunity, even little reason, to interfere, and rice would be secured. But the attempt to pre-empt American intervention evidenced the British secrecy that counterpointed American distrust and was likely to increase it. With the notion that the Americans could be informed of the terms, not consulted about them, the British were not even being honest with themselves. They wanted to know the Americans' reaction to their political terms, and the Far Eastern Official Committee soon saw that the military terms needed American approval. It thought that 'there would be advantage, from the point of view of getting the agreement of the Combined Chiefs of Staff [CCS] to the military terms, to consider whether the British political terms and Allied military and quasi-military terms could be stated separately'. Then these could be presented to CCS when the political terms were notified to the State Department, and they could be asked to issue a directive to Mountbatten. The Committee also decided against the Overseas Reconstruction Committee's suggestion that more than 1.5 million tons of rice should be provided free: an increase would require going beyond the December crop²⁵.

A telegram from Denning of the 13th had suggested that the Siamese government would resign if the Japanese surrendered, and that Seni Pramoj would head a new one. 'How does this affect Cabinet decision taken last night?' asked Bevin. 'I think it makes it all the more necessary to act quickly on the decision', replied Bennett. 'This has been done'²⁶. If Ruth took the course recommended, it was thought, the British government would itself issue a statement, and there would be negotiations at Kandy for a political agreement. 'Though it will be desirable to conclude such an agreement at the earliest possible moment, it is not, in the changed circumstances, so necessary a preliminary to dealings between Admiral Mountbatten and the Siamese Administration' as it had seemed in July. Military questions could be dealt with *ad hoc* meanwhile²⁷.

The Japanese surrendered on 15 August, and next day the Regent made a broadcast, stating that the declaration of war on the U.K. and the U.S. and the United Nations was con-

24 Memorandum, 12 August 1945, and note thereon, F.O.371/46546 [F5115/296/40].

25 FE(O) 2nd meeting, 16 August 1945, Item 2, F.O. 371/46328 [F5380/149/61].

26 Telegram, 13 August 1945, No. 345, and minutes, F.O. 371/46563 [F5050/738/40]. Telegrams, to Denning, No.342, to Balfour, No. 8381, to Dominions, No.D1446, 14 August 1945, F.O.371/46562 [F5019/738/40].

27 Telegram, 15 August 1945, No.349, F.O.371/46546 [F5116/296/40].

trary to the will of the people, and was null and void. Siam was ready to cooperate fully with the United Nations, ready to return the Malay and Shan states to Great Britain²⁸. There were a number of omissions from this broadcast, as Dening pointed out. The Regent did not put his forces at the disposal of the Allies, nor mention the resistance movement's wish to act earlier. He did not refer to Indochina: Dening thought Thailand should not gain as a result of the Japanese mediation, though he inclined to the American view that the frontiers should be negotiable. Nor, finally, was there any reference to a mission to Kandy: 'as to this there are indications that the Regent was doubtful as to the purpose of the mission and evidently some fear existed that it might be interpreted in Siam as a mission of unconditional surrender'. Some early statement from Britain and the U.S. was essential, Dening declared²⁹.

The Ministerial Committee met in London on the 17th, two days after the surrender, and considered both the Regent's proclamation and the revised British terms. In reference to the former, Bevin pointed to the need for a British statement, indicating that Britain's policy would depend on Siam's cooperation in matters arising out of the termination of the war, and on its readiness to make restitution to Britain and the Allies and ensure security and good-neighbourly relations in the future. In reference to the terms, he observed that rice could no longer be obtained by invoking mutual aid, since the supply of arms for use against the Japanese was no longer appropriate. 'The free rice would therefore have to be justified as Siam's contribution to the general Allied war effort'. The Committee agreed to proceed along the lines suggested, consulting the Dominions, and communicating with the U.S. 'in such a way that we are not necessarily committed to accepting the views of that Government regarding the political conditions'. The military/quasi-military conditions were to be referred to CCS³⁰.

The political terms included in the first group the repudiation of the declaration of war and the Japanese alliance (now A1, A2), and renunciation of the territory acquired since 1940 (A3). Among the measures of restitution and readjustment, the new draft made minor changes, designed to make the agreement British rather than Allied. It added a new clause (B6), giving an undertaking to conclude an agreement with SACSEA on the military points in the annex. It omitted the list of measures against Japan and facilities to be granted (the old C and D), but included the measures for postwar strategic cooperation, more or less according to the COS amendments (now C1-3) and the measures for postwar economic cooperation (now D). It also provided for a formula, not included in the previous draft, to cover the regularization of the Siamese position in relation to bilateral and multilateral treaties and membership of international organizations (E). The military annex included measures of readjustment and restitution in regard to the Allies, among them those relating to prisoners-of-war, and provided for cooperation with the Allied forces in disarming the Japanese. It included, among the

28 Telegram, 17 August 1945, No.361, F.O.371/46578 [F5226/518/40].

29 Telegram, 17 August 1945, No.364, F.O.371/46546 [F5290/296/40].

30 FE(M) 1st meeting, 17 August 1945, CAB 96/9.

measures against Japan, provision for cooperation in apprehending war criminals. It also covered facilities to be granted, and included here the clauses covering the delivery of rice (old D12, now 23) and the acceptance of an advisory Allied military mission (old D9, now 20)³¹.

The separation of the agreements in this way did not greatly differ from that contemplated by the Foreign Office earlier, but of course it at once brought up the problem the Foreign Office had so far evaded. The 'stern line' suggested by the Dominions it had ruled out. Australia was told that 'a "tutelage" period' was 'unlikely to be practicable in light of probable developments and known attitude of United States Government. Having regard to United States attitude it is not at all clear that there will be any control organisation for Siam, such as has been established in European enemy countries or is being considered for Japan'³². But the rice scheme remained, and it was in that section of the agreements to be dealt with by SACSEA. 'If our "free rice" scheme cannot be successfully put over to the Americans in such a way as to receive their support', Adams wrote, 'the Treasury and Ministry of Food may well have to reconsider whether (a) it is still workable in practice (b) it is not going to cost us more in the long run than it is worth (c) a revised scheme entailing payment for all rice, in some form, is not preferable'. A colleague pointed out that payment would involve £20-30 million when Britain was 'manifestly broke'³³. The Foreign Office recognized that the State Department was likely to question the rice proposals, not yet presented, as Balfour of the Embassy had pointed out³⁴. But 'in our view the 1½ m. tons of free rice is amply justified as a contribution by Siam to the general Allied war effort'³⁵.

Not only were the revised terms under consideration; so also was a response to the Regent's proclamation. The State Department had been reported on 16 August to be planning to declare that the U.S. had always regarded the Siamese people 'as essentially friendly and as having acted under force majeure'. Adams hoped that the State Department could be restrained until the U.K. had announced its attitude, since it was at war³⁶. The Regent, too, wanted Seni to conduct negotiations, whereas the British wanted them to be at Mountbatten's headquarters at Kandy³⁷. Seni told Balfour that he hoped to clear up relations with Washington by an exchange of notes, and then negotiate in London³⁸. This led the Foreign Office to state that it felt that the U.S. should refrain from recognizing and resuming relations with a government with which Britain was at war, and to express the hope that any statement would be deferred till Britain had made one. 'It would seem appropriate that first public step intended to clear up the situation in Siam should come from us as the principal Power actually at war with Siam...'³⁹

In fact the State Department had already indicated that it would shortly make a statement in response to the Regent's proclamation. The American government, it declared, 'has always

31 Telegrams, 18 August 1945, Nos.365, 366, F.O.371/46546 [F5116/296/40].

32 Telegram, 17 August 1945, No.306, F.O.371/46546 [F5446/296/40].

33 Minutes, 18, 24 August 1945, F.O.371/46546 [F5336/296/40].

34 Telegram, 17 August 1945, No.5672, F.O.371/46546 [F5293/296/40].

35 Telegram, 19 August 1945, No.8550, F.O.371/46546 [F5116/296/40].

36 Telegram, 16 August 1945, No.5656, and minute, F.O.371/46563 [F5217/738/40].

37 Telegram, 15 August 1945, No.5625, and minute, F.O.371/46563 [F5169/738/40].

38 Telegram, 17 August 1945, No.5674, F.O.371/46546 [F5294/296/40].

39 Telegram, 19 August 1945, No.8559, *ibid*.

believed that the declaration [of war] did not represent the will of the Siamese people': the Siamese government was 'completely controlled' by the Japanese. The free Siamese had contributed to the Allied cause, and overt action had been delayed only at the request of Britain and the U.S. The Americans looked forward to 'even closer' friendship between the U.S. and Thailand than in the past. 'During the past four years we have regarded Siam not as an enemy but as a country to be liberated from the enemy. With that liberation now accomplished we look to the resumption by Siam of its former place in the community of nations as a free sovereign and independent country'. 'The Americans have behaved very badly', Bennett lamented, 'in rushing in first with their statement in total disregard of our major interest as a belligerent who has still to settle with Siam for the injury done to us by her association with Japan. But this is typical'. Apart from the discourtesy, the situation was 'not so bad. The statement does not go so far as we had feared, i.e. it does not constitute a final liquidation of the position as between the U.S. and Siam but merely expresses the hope that the friendship between the countries will be even closer for the future than in the past'⁴⁰. If it did not go so far as had been feared, the American statement did not help Great Britain. It showed what advantage might be lost by delay. But the statement the British prepared suggested a stiffness of attitude that might impede any negotiations that were started.

The U.S. State Department, when asked, declared it was 'physically impossible' to withhold its statement, but suggested that a British one might appear at the same time⁴¹. A British comment had already been drafted for inclusion in a speech by the Foreign Secretary⁴². This Bevin now accepted in substance⁴³. It recorded the 'disagreeable shock' of the Japanese alliance and the Siamese acceptance of British territory. But it also recorded the displacement of the government that took those measures, the growth of resistance in Siam, and the Regent's proclamation. The text of the latter would be examined 'to see whether it provides an adequate basis for an instrument which would regularise the present anomalous position'. Many practical questions had to be settled. 'These will be examined and our attitude will depend on the way in which the Siamese meet the requirements of our troops now about to enter their country; the extent to which they undo the wrongs done by their predecessors and make restitution for injury, loss and damage caused to British and Allied interests and the extent of their contribution to the restoration of peace, good order and economic rehabilitation in South East Asia'⁴⁴.

The Regent expressed appreciation⁴⁵. He also announced that a mission would be sent to Kandy for 'entering into agreement in regard to military situation and political questions which may arise therefrom', and explained the omissions from his broadcast. The delay in placing Siamese forces at the disposal of SACSEA and in sending a mission he attributed to a wish to avoid provoking the Japanese. Indochina was not mentioned as it was on

40 Telegram, 18 August 1945, No.5706, and minute, F.O.371/46578 [F5353/5180/40].

41 Telegram, 19 August 1945, No.5708, F.O.371/46563 [F5387/738/40].

42 Minute, 16 August 1945, F.O.371/46578 [F5214/5181/40].

43 Minute, 20 August 1945, F.O.371/46578 [F5353/5181/40].

44 Speech, 20 August 1945, F.O.371/46547 [F5646/296/40].

45 Telegram, 23 August 1945, No.385, F.O.371/46547 [F5597/296/40].

a different footing from the Shan and Malay states: Siam wished to retain the Laotian and Cambodian territory in question. Justice would be 'best assured by following the procedure prescribed in United Nations charter or by a plebiscite under supervision of United Nations...'⁴⁶ The prospects of negotiations at Kandy thus advanced, despite the stiffness of the British declaration and the potential interposition of the U.S.

The other issue raised by Dening and the Regent was that of Indochina. Should that be allowed to impede the negotiations? The French had, not surprisingly, been showing an interest in the matter. On 8 August Francfort of the French Embassy in London had suggested that it would be in the spirit of the Anglo-French agreement of 1896 for the two countries to consult over it. Bennett had reminded him that the general principle of British policy was not to recognize changes of frontier brought about since the war otherwise than by mutual agreement. Francfort expressed a wish to work in agreement with the British government⁴⁷. On 18 August Adams suggested that the French should, as the July report had recommended, be acquainted with the British proposals initially, he thought, by a reference in the Foreign Secretary's speech, and then by apprising them, and also the Chinese, of the terms in mind. Bennett thought that the terms could not be communicated until Britain was sure of the Dominions' concurrence and had become aware of the first U.S. reactions. Meanwhile he informed Paris of the French embassy of the Regent's proclamation and Bevin's speech. Paris 'fastened on the reference in the Secretary of State's speech to British and Allied interests, and I confirmed that this was intended to safeguard French as well as other interests...' Bennett did not communicate anything to the Chinese, since China was not at war with Siam. 'A communication at this stage might possibly lead Chiang Kai-Shek to reiterate his interest in Siam on the ground that he still regards it as within his operational theatre, and we might get an embarrassing request to be consulted about any settlement, military or otherwise, with Siam...'⁴⁸ On the receipt of the Regent's explanatory comments, I.A.D. Wilson-Young suggested modifying the specific reference to French territory in the proposed terms, since it would involve 'very considerable difficulty not only with the Siamese but with the Americans'. The Regent's suggestion would, to judge by their views in June, probably secure the latter's support. Wilson-Young thought A3 might be split into two clauses, one covering renunciation of British territory and one the invalidating of Japan's award of 9 May 1941, and a new B2 might refer to arrangements with the French government for giving effect to the new A4⁴⁹.

Two days later Paris returned to his conversation with Bennett and urged that, in conformity with the 1896 agreement, the two governments should develop 'a common attitude on the principal questions raised by the restoration in Siam of an independent government'. Bennett doubted that the 1896 agreement applied, and suggested that the need for speedy decisions also worked against extensive procedures of collaboration. But 'it was certainly our wish to safeguard French interests to the best of our ability'. He asked Paris whether

46 Telegram, 22 August 1945, No.380, F.O.371/46547 [F5550/296/40].

47 Conversation, 8 August 1945, F.O.371/46545 [F4979/296/40]. For the 1890 agreement, see Chandran Jeshurun, *The Contest for Siam 1889-1902*, Kuala Lumpur, 1977, pp. 350-1.

48 Minute, 20 August 1945, F.O.371/46545 [F4298/296/40].

49 Minute, 23 August 1945, F.O.371/46547 [F5550/296/40].

the French would contemplate any kind of compromise over the 1940 frontier. 'I asked the question because we had good reason to think that difficulties might arise in this connection in which the Siamese would probably have the support of the United States'. Paris thought his government would be opposed to any change: 'the French had a responsibility towards the inhabitants of Indo-China and he did not think that they would be prepared to compromise merely "to humour" the United States. . .'⁵⁰ Two days later again Paris read Wilson-Young part of a telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. France demanded restoration of the Indochinese territories, would consider itself at war till it had received guarantees to that effect, and would make known its views on reparations and 'the degree of political and military control to be imposed on Siam' when these demands had been satisfied. Paris referred to the French government's desire for a common agreement and asked if the British views on a settlement had been communicated to the U.S. Wilson-Young said that the State Department knew 'how our minds were working'. Paris also asked whether Britain was seeking U.S. approval. 'I said that while we naturally wished to carry the U.S. Government generally with us, he would appreciate that there was an essential distinction between our position as a belligerent and the position of the United States of America as a country not at war with Siam. . .'. The Foreign Office decided to drop the explicit reference to French territories, keeping the question open for later consideration according to Thai attitudes⁵¹. It was clear that the French intended to negotiate themselves. No doubt the Foreign Office was also affected by the rigidity that, as had been feared, the French were showing: if possible that must not impede Britain's success with the Americans or the Thais.

Bennett gave Paris the draft agreement on the evening of 29 August. A little later the latter telephoned back to ask the British to tell the Siamese that a French representative would go to Kandy to negotiate a settlement between France and Siam simultaneously with the British negotiations⁵², and this was done⁵³. Paris followed up by expressing the hope that the Regent would be told that he must meet the demands both of France and Britain. Adams thought that joint action would mean 'infinite difficulties'⁵⁴. Denning, too, was apprehensive over concurrent negotiations. 'I fear the French may make use of our influence and prestige with Siam to further their own cause and that, by holding out, they may retard satisfactory conclusion of our negotiations. . .'. The territory should be handed back, as was agreed, but the French would be intransigent over reopening the question of ownership, which the Thais would wish to do. Britain should not support doubtful territorial claims; France had not really been in the war with Siam; and the Americans 'would be severely critical of anything they might interpret as British support of French imperialism'. Adams agreed that it would be 'fatal if we tie ourselves to the French unless they are prepared to make concessions that at the moment they do not appear even to consider'. France could be allowed to act in concert only if it agreed to a re-examination of frontiers. But Bennett thought that the British must support the French 'up to a certain point', and not press them to compromise until the

50 Minute, 25 August 1945, F.O.371/46547 [F5848/296/40].

51 Minute, 27 August 1945, and telegram to Balfour, 29 August, No.8962, F.O.371/46547 [F5940/296/40].

52 Minute, 29 August 1945, F.O.371/46547 [F6172/296/40].

53 Minute, 7 September 1945, F.O.371/46548 [F6275/296/40].

54 Minute, 4 September 1945, F.O.371/46547 [F6172/296/40].

strength of Siamese and American opposition had been 'tried out'⁵⁵. Britain should reserve the right to cover the question of Indochina in the British agreement⁵⁶.

The 'stern' Dominions could be fended off; the rigid French postponed if not persuaded; the Chinese—important in Britain's consideration of southeast Asia—ignored. But the Americans were less easy to deal with. Their statement had already somewhat undermined the British response to the Regent. Now they reacted to the terms that Britain was considering, and their reaction could not after all be disregarded. They had already asked about D5—relating to agreements over rubber and tin—and alluded to 'the apparently far-reaching economic control suggested', which was being further studied⁵⁷.

On the other hand Denning, concerned over major troop movements, but so far without definite instructions, had urged that negotiations should begin as soon as possible. The Foreign Office agreed, but pointed to the difficulty of coordinating policy with the U.S., France, the Dominions. Maybe, as already envisaged, some matters arising between Mountbatten and the Siamese would have to be dealt with *ad hoc*: perhaps the Kandy mission would initially have to be one of military liaison only⁵⁸? Denning felt that the military and political issues could not be divorced: the Siamese could be given credit in the political settlement for their military assistance, but he would find it hard to give such an assurance with conviction 'since it is not clear that the Siamese are to get anything out of the political settlement'. He planned to tell SAC not to wait and advised him to inform COS he was sending for the delegation in order to discuss military points⁵⁹.

Through his deputy, Denning had already asked the Far Eastern Department what the Siamese should expect to get from the Kandy negotiations: would they merely end Siam's state of war with the Commonwealth or would that country become a member of the Allied nations? The Foreign Office stressed that the object was to liquidate the war: membership in the United Nations, despite the Americans' view, must be considered later. 'There is a danger of our getting on the wrong track unless Siamese are made to understand quite clearly at the outset that it is entirely for Siam to put herself right by rapidly accepting the stipulations. . . . These represent the minimum satisfaction which we feel entitled to receive as a precondition to the liquidation of the state of war and to the resumption of normal friendly relations and collaboration with Siamese. . . .'⁶⁰ Denning's reaction was a little querulous. He did not wish 'to offer sops to Siam'. But the movements of men required planning, and the absence of 'clear-cut decisions from London' made it difficult. 'I have little doubt I shall be able to persuade the Siamese to do what they are told. But it is human nature. . . . to expect that when you have acceded to the demands of someone with whom you are dealing that some indication should be given of what the consequences will be. On the assumption that the

55 Telegram, 1 September 1945, No.422, and minutes thereon, F.O.371/46548 [F6190/296/40].

56 FE(O) (45) 19, 1 September 1945, F.O.371/46548 [F6250/296/40]. FE(O) (45) 5th meeting, 5 September, F.O. 371/46329 [F6491/149/61].

57 Telegram, 22 August 1945, No. 5798, F.O.371/46547 [F5666/296/40].

58 Telegram, 24 August 1945, No.390, and reply, 25 August, No. 426, F.O.371/46547 [F5667/296/40].

59 Telegram, 28 August 1945, No.409, F.O.371/46547 [F5980/296/40].

60 Telegram, 25 August 1945, No.399, and reply, 28 August, No.434, F.O.371/46547 [F5732/296/40].

Siamese are going to accede to our request I would suppose His Majesty's Government have it in mind to adopt some attitude. I was merely asking what that attitude would be⁶¹.

Adams thought there was something in Denning's view, but that the Siamese could accept an instrument that made it clear that resumption of diplomatic relations and support for United Nations membership would follow. 'The release of their blocked assets here and our agreement that UNRRA should operate in Siam are material inducements that might help provided the State Dept. do not undermine our position'. Wilson-Young thought that the Siamese could certainly sign the temporary limited undertaking the Foreign Office had in mind, since it would not include the rice clause that would be in the main military agreement. A limited agreement need not be delayed and if the delegation to Kandy was being asked to deal with that, the proposal fitted in with the Foreign Office's views. If it was to be asked to sign the full military agreement, the Siamese might well ask what the *quid pro quo* was⁶². Both at Kandy and in London, it was recognized that the British would have to be more responsive to the Thais than the stiff tone of the reply to Denning suggested. Would that stiff tone get in the way? What in fact damaged the prospects was not only American objections but Mountbatten's not inexcusable haste.

As advised by Denning, Mountbatten indicated that he was inviting a military mission to Kandy to discuss purely military details relating to the entry of his forces into Siam⁶³. The Foreign Office considered whether, subject to informing the Americans, Denning could after all present the Thais with the political heads of agreement and the military annex. Not that SACSEA need wait for them; and he could make an *ad hoc* military agreement. Even so he would need guidance as to how far he could go along the lines of the annex. CCS, it was clear, were awaiting the State Department's comments, and so the State Department could delay any authorization to negotiate. Perhaps the position would be different after the formal acceptance of the Japanese surrender on 2 September? or could the British COS or the CCS authorize Mountbatten to negotiate on purely military matters without prejudice to a comprehensive agreement⁶⁴? While Bennett reflected on all this, the American Chiefs of Staff indicated that any agreement made by SACSEA should be made only with the representative of the Regent, 'and should be more strictly limited to matters of military concern to the Allies in relation to effecting the surrender of Japanese forces, than is the case with certain provisions of the British proposal. . . .'⁶⁵ The British took exception to the proposal to negotiate only with the Regent's representative: it looked like 'an attempt to manoeuvre us into recognising the Siamese Government before our entry into Siam and accepting a position which would imply that the state of war with Siam was already liquidated'. Any agreement made by Mountbatten should not compromise the position of Allied governments. An initial agreement should be signed only with representatives of the Siamese High Command⁶⁶. The military

61 Telegram, 29 August 1945, No.412, F.O.371/46547 [F6033/296/40].

62 Minutes on F.O.371/46547 [F5980/296/40].

63 SEACOS 457, F.O.371/46548 [F6220/296/40].

64 Bennett to Price, 30 August 1945, F.O.371/46547 [F5980/296/40].

65 JSM 27, 30 August 1945, F.O.371/46547 [F6065/296/40].

66 Telegram, 4 September 1945, No.9176, F.O.371/46548 [F6195/296/40].

mission in Washington was asked to secure American agreement to negotiating a preliminary agreement in this way and to 'more specific guidance' on its contents than the U.S. Chiefs of Staff proposed. The matters to be covered should include releasing prisoners-of-war, disarming the Japanese, holding internees, delivering war material, making Siamese forces available⁶⁷.

Meanwhile the U.S. State Department's comments on the proposed agreements had arrived in London. The U.S. government hoped for an early settlement of the state of war between Great Britain and Thailand, of a kind, moreover, that did not conflict with 'the viewpoint, interests, or policies of the United States', but would 'contribute to Anglo-American unity of action in the Far East'. It alluded again to D5, and assumed that the tin and rubber agreements referred to would be those effected with United Nations approval. It had 'misgivings' over D2 and D3. 'A requirement that Thailand may not reserve for itself or its own nationals certain economic, commercial or professional pursuits without the agreement of the British government, in so far as British interests or professional men are concerned, would. . . . constitute a definite impairment of Thai sovereignty and independence. . . .' The U.S. hoped for assurances that Britain sought only 'non-discriminatory treatment'. Thailand, it felt, should offer compensation for losses for which its own government was responsible, but the question of those for which the Japanese were responsible should be postponed until the question of Japanese reparations was settled. There might be reparations payable by Japan to Thailand, for the Japanese effected damage before the Thais declared war. Moreover it was important that Thailand return to economic stability as soon as possible, and it might already be facing a serious problem as a result of compulsory loans to the Japanese. The Allied command must be particularly careful in the case of Thailand, since one government was at war, the other not. Any military agreement made by Mountbatten, the State Department considered, should be 'limited strictly to matters of concern to the British and American Governments in the war against their common enemy'. The combined command should not 'take any action which would tend to compromise the position of the United States which has considered Thailand not an enemy but a country to be liberated from the enemy, and with which it expects to resume diplomatic relations in the near future'.

The U.S. note also dealt with the rice question. It agreed that CFB should control allocations of rice for military and civil requirements, and recognized the value of combined stimulation of production and export; but, not at war with Thailand, it could not concur with the proposals made by the British. It was, however, prepared to join with Britain in negotiating with Thailand a tripartite agreement under which the Thai government would agree to prohibit exports of rice, tin, rubber and teak except in accordance with the recommendations of CFB or its successor. The U.S. and the U.K. would establish a Combined Thai Rice Commission (CTRC) to advise the Thai government on the production of rice and to arrange for its export directly or under its authority according to CFB allocations. The Thai government would agree to cooperate and to make all surplus available at prices agreed between it and CTRC, and to charge no duty on it beyond that in force on 15 August 1945. CTRC would recommend to the British and the Americans measures of assistance, in regard to providing items required

⁶⁷ COS(W) 93, 94, 4 September 1945, F.O.371/46548 [F6359, 6357/296/40]. COS(45) 197, 3 September, F.O.371/46549 [F6497/296/40]. COS(45) 214th meeting, 4 September, Item 3, *ibid.*; CAB79/38.

for milling, transport, and repair of port facilities, and to the importation of incentive consumer goods. So far as practicable, payment for rice would be by the establishment of credits in currencies which would meet Thailand's foreign exchange needs. The agreement would last till 1 September 1946, but be renewable for six months at the request of Britain and the U.S. Pending its conclusion, American civil and military purchasing authorities would be free to effect direct purchases in accordance with CFB allocations. The American proposal, the State Department added, relied primarily on Thai cooperation and good faith, and it omitted the levy of 1.5 million tons. The latter, it felt, would not be just, in view of the Thais' readiness to join in the war. The amount, too, might be in excess of the total amount available for export in the coming year⁶⁸.

These comments were considered by an interdepartmental working party of the Far Eastern Official Committee on 4 September, with Bennett in the chair. It suggested a modification of D5 which it was thought would meet the State Department's views. The demands in D2 and 3, however, it wanted retained: they were 'reasonable in view of the past misdeeds of the Siamese Government and the favourable financial position in which Siam now finds herself'. Britain wanted 'national' treatment, not most-favoured-nation treatment; but such treatment should be equally available to others of the United Nations. Siam, it was felt, should make compensation: Japanese reparations to Siam were unlikely to materialize; and Siam's external financial position was strong. The demand for 1.5 million tons of free rice should stand. 'If we paid Siam for this rice at present world prices Siam would profit in an unreasonable way from this transaction. Siam might even be twice as well off as before the war, and the large sterling payment made would provide her with a means of purchasing scarce goods in the sterling area. The present high price of rice was itself in part due to the withholding of Siamese supplies from the world market.' The proposal to negotiate a tripartite agreement with Siam was, however, *prima facie* a reasonable one. The unit provided for should contain American as well as British staff, but the direction should be in British hands; the price should be determined in London; the unit should control all Siamese rice from the outset; and the duties should be as in December 1941. 'The question of obtaining the one-and-a-half million tons of rice free of cost was felt to be the most difficult problem, particularly in our relations with the United States. It was decided that we should give the Siamese an opportunity of making an offer of this free rice in return for our recognition, and it was felt that this method would provide the best chance of winning the Americans over to our point of view....'⁶⁹ It had been impossible to evade the interposition of the U.S. But maybe this kind of deal could still be made between the British and the Thais, and the effect of that interposition thus minimized.

The notion may have been revived by Bennett's interview the day before the working party met with Seni Pramoj, who had passed through London *en route* to Bangkok. Bennett had stressed that it was for Siam to make possible 'a resumption of the old friendly relations'. He mentioned two questions of special importance. One was the treatment of prisoners-of-war, 'where public opinion here was not quite aware the blame was Japan's'. The other was rice:

68 Telegram, 1 September 1945, No. 5977, F.O.371/46548 [F6195/296/40].

69 Gen. 68/6th meeting, conclusions, 4 September 1945, CAB 78/33.

'we should be faced with famine conditions in some of the territories in South East Asia. The Siamese could contribute very materially to the alleviation of these conditions by a substantial contribution of rice'. Seni said rice was already under consideration by the Siamese government: there was a stockpile of about 1.5 million tons, though this year's yield was expected to be poor. Bennett put the British position on Indochina, and Seni mentioned his concern about relations with China⁷⁰. Seni was not forthcoming over Indochina, but in other ways the conversation was encouraging for Bennett. In fact about this time Seni raised with Pridi the idea of offering 1.2 million or 1.5 million tons of rice. Thawi Bunyaket, the Minister President, was doubtful, but Pridi wanted a quick answer, and it was agreed to accept the idea in principle, the exact amount to be agreed upon later⁷¹. There was therefore some chance for the British to win rice, make an agreement with the Thais, evade American objections. Possibly Bennett's optimism, which thus had some foundation, was increased by Seni's reference to China, concern over which might make the Thais more amenable. Perhaps he underestimated the importance they attached to the terms of recognition. The working party recognized that the offer would be in return for recognition. That, of course, could not be explicitly stated in a treaty. But it would be necessary to be forthcoming over recognition—and not too 'stern'—if an offer were to be elicited.

Bennett told the Official Committee that the working party had 'examined the extent to which the American point of view could be met without undue concessions from the British side. . . . the major difficulty was that of rice. The Americans were opposed to a free distribution. The Working Party felt, on the other hand, that the arguments in favour of maintaining our demands were conclusive, although there was room for hope that the Siamese would voluntarily take the first step to offer the free rice. . . .'⁷² 'The theme which runs through the aide-mémoire from the State Department is that our requirements should be subordinated to the consideration that the United States does not consider Siam as an enemy and that Siam should be treated with the utmost consideration for her sovereignty, independence and economic position'. Though it was important to meet American views 'as far as possible', the Committee believed the thesis could not be accepted. The Committee was impressed with the case for a free contribution of the rice—which might otherwise cost £45 million—'though they would hope that the Siamese Government might be disposed to make a voluntary offer of this contribution rather than accept it as an imposition'. Arrangements should now be made to present the Heads of Agreement to the Siamese delegates⁷³. The Ministerial Committee supported these views. The First Lord, A.V. Alexander, 'said that without the 1½ m. tons of rice which we wished to obtain free from the Siamese Government, the Service Departments would not be able to meet their requirements'. The Secretary of State for India and Burma, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, thought Siamese rice of especial importance in view of reports on the crop in Burma. There was general agreement 'that no compromise should be made on this

70 Conversation, 3 September 1945, F.O.371/46548 [F6285/296/40].

71 Direck Jayanama, *Thailand im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Tübingen and Basel, 1970, p.173. Cf. J.K. Ray, *Portraits of Thai Politics*, New Delhi, 1972, p.109.

72 FE (O) (45) 5th meeting, 5 September 1945, F.O.371/46329 [F6491/149/61].

73 FE (M) (45) 7, 6 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6572/296/40].

issue'. A draft telegram, put forward by the Official Committee, was approved, explaining Britain's position to the U.S. and its determination to proceed⁷⁴.

The telegram, drafted by Bennett, began with some general observations. The British Government was 'most anxious to attain the maximum degree of unity of action' with the United States and wished to see 'a free, sovereign, and independent Siam' restored and good Anglo-Siamese relations renewed. 'But if these objectives are to be reached the facts of the situation must be faced'. The U.S. State Department had noted that Siam was the only country with which Britain was at war and the United States was not; but that was because the U.S. had ignored the Siamese declaration of war. It did not entitle the U.S. to ask other governments in a state of war to forego their rights, nor could it be adduced as a reason for mitigating the conditions upon those countries were prepared to liquidate the state of war. The British government indeed hoped that the American government would take no action 'to embarrass them or to compromise their position as an ally at war with Siam'. The British government would give all possible weight to the assistance of the Siamese resistance movement. But the state of war remained to be liquidated. The attitude of His Majesty's Government would, as stated on 20 August, depend on that of the Siamese. If they responded in the spirit of the Regent's proclamation of 16 August, 'there is good reason to hope that a satisfactory solution may rapidly be reached'.

The State Department had suggested, the telegram went on, that some of the proposed terms for liquidating the state of war and recognizing the Siamese government might 'constitute an infringement of the sovereignty and independence of Siam. This is only true in the sense that any provisions which an enemy country is required to accept as a condition of the liquidation of a state of war are an infringement of its sovereignty and independence'. The terms were not unjust, and it was 'for Siam by the fulfilment of these conditions to resume her place in the community of Nations on a basis of full equality with other sovereign and independent States'. The British government did not aim at retaliation. But it could scarcely accept a position in which Siam should profit from its association with Japan, 'or, in such matters as the export of her commodities during the liberation period, from the needs of countries which have suffered from Japanese aggression'. The British government had also sought to safeguard the interests of the Allied powers until they could reach their own settlement with Siam.

The telegram then turned to specific issues: first of all, rice. On this His Majesty's Government could not agree with the U.S. State Department. First, Siam would not face any serious external financial or economic problem: and very soon it could enjoy a very favourable trade position. Second, Siam had been able 'to accumulate a very large surplus of a commodity essential to the life of neighbouring territories, for the lack of which those territories have suffered hardship and even famine. The consequent rise in the price of rice to approximately three times the pre-war level has aggravated inflationary conditions in neighbouring and other countries...' Even at half the present scarcity prices, the unloading of Siam's stocks would double its foreign exchange holdings, and it would 'end the war in an incomparably better

74 FE (M) (45) 2nd meeting, 8 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6730/296/40]; CAB96/9.

financial position than any of the other countries which were in a position to offer more serious resistance to the aggressor'. The British government 'would regard it as contrary to all principles of justice that a country in Siam's position should thus increase her claims upon the production of the rest of the world at a time when so many other nations must continue for many years efforts comparable to those which they made during the war in order merely to restore their pre-war standards of living...'. The British government understood there was a stockpile of 1.5 million tons and must maintain clause 23(a), unless, as they believed was possible, a free contribution were offered. The future production and export of rice might be dealt with along the lines proposed by the U.S., provided that the Rice Commission was under British direction. In the meantime the need to avert famine was so great that competent personnel were being sent to arrange for the collection and shipment of rice pending the setting up of the commission. The telegram also modified the wording of the clause on tin and rubber, and added a sentence to indicate that in D3 the British government was not seeking exclusive advantages. It could not, however, agree to postpone the question of compensation: Siam, moreover, was in no worse position for the purpose of external payments than before the war. Denning, the State Department was told, was being instructed to arrange for a Siamese mission to Kandy to negotiate on the amended Heads of Agreement. The British government, it was added, had also tried to meet the views recently expressed by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff⁷⁵.

These referred, of course, to the military negotiations. On some of the related issues the Foreign Office, pressed by immediate needs, had been contemplating an interim agreement, while suspending the main agreement pending consultation with the U.S. Mountbatten anticipated it. On 5 September telegrams from Kandy announced the terms of an agreement SACSEA proposed to sign there on the 7th⁷⁶. This covered in six articles a number of points which the Siamese military mission was authorized to accept, including such questions as the treatment of prisoners-of-war, internment, delivery of material. Another agreement was to be signed at the same time if approval from Bangkok had been secured by then. This comprised 15 articles drawn from the proposed military agreement of August, including, as articles 12 and 13, part of the rice article, but not the requirement for the delivery of free rice. The agreements were to be made with the Siamese government as martial law did not obtain in Siam. Mountbatten's 'impatience' was 'understandable enough in view of the imminence of the entry of his troops into Siam and the absence of definite instructions owing to the obstructionist attitude of the Americans', wrote Bennett. But his 'precipitate action has placed us in a very embarrassing position vis-à-vis the U.S. Government and the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, and perhaps vis-à-vis the Siamese Government also'. His action would only confirm America's unwarranted suspicions of British policy. And he had communicated to the Siamese only 'an arbitrary selection of the provisions in the Annex to the Heads of Agreement'. Bennett suggested that COS should instruct Mountbatten to sign nothing pending instructions; instruct him then to sign his first agreement, making it conform as far as possible to that proposed to the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, and adding a clause binding the Siamese government to accept further demands. And, if the agreement were after all to be made with the Siamese government, and not the

75 Telegrams, 8 September 1945, Nos. 9289, 9290, 9291, F.O.371/46548 [F6195/296/40]. Heads of Agreement, s.d., F.O.371/46546 [F5485/296/40].

76 SEACOS 466, 5 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6646/296/40].

High Command, it should be made without prejudice to any settlement contemplated by Allied governments. This would enable the British government to proceed along the lines already envisaged⁷⁷. The British Chiefs of Staff agreed⁷⁸.

As instructions were being prepared, telegrams arrived from Washington giving the detailed views of the American Chiefs of Staff on the military agreement originally proposed. They again insisted that the agreement should be made by the Allied command with the representative of the Regent, and 'limited to matters of military concern to the Allies arising out of the settlement of the war against Japan'. They also assumed 'that no separate military agreement will be negotiated with Thai representatives so long as Thailand is within the theatre of an Allied command'. Among the clauses to be excluded were those relating to the advisory military mission, to control of banks, business and the economy, to currency policy, and to rice, which should be covered by an agreement reached through diplomatic channels. The interim agreement with the representatives of the High Command should be limited to the release of prisoners-of-war, the disarmament of the Japanese, the making over of war materials and bases. The Joint Staff Mission in Washington pointed out that, if Mountbatten went ahead with his agreements, 'he will be subscribing to policies with which the U.S. Chiefs of Staff are not prepared to agree'. If the British government wanted their assent to any agreement signed by Mountbatten as SACSEA, he must be instructed to refrain from signing anything at this point⁷⁹.

Late on the night of 6 September, Bennett was called to a discussion with the Prime Minister, John Winant, the U.S. ambassador, and Col. Hollis. Winant was acting on telephone instructions from Washington in relation to the agreements Mountbatten proposed to sign. 'Mr Winant said that the view of the United States Government was that nothing should be done to compromise their position in relation to Siam'. Bennett 'said that our attitude, on the other hand, was that we hoped that the United States Government would do nothing to compromise our position, which was based on the fact that we were still in a state of war with Siam and that it was difficult therefore for us to agree that Admiral Mountbatten's action in Siam should be limited solely to matters connected with the Japanese surrender'. Some agreement was urgent. From Winant's remarks it was clear that the U.S. government was 'not much worried' about the first Mountbatten agreement. 'What did worry them was the proposed Agreement No.2'. Bennett explained that, 'although it might be for different reasons, we did not like Agreement No. 2 either', and that it was intended to suspend action on it. As for the first agreement, it was 'necessary for us to reserve the right to secure such further facilities as might be necessary in Allied military interests', and to ensure that the agreement did not prejudice the position of Britain or other Allies. Winant 'appeared satisfied'⁸⁰. A telegram was sent to Mountbatten authorizing him to sign the first agreement with these reservations

⁷⁷ Telegrams, 5 September 1945, Nos. 450, 451, 452, and minute, 6 September, F.O. 371/46548 [F6362/296/40].

⁷⁸ COS(45) 216th meeting, 6 September, Item 9, F.O.371/46549 [F6795/296/40]; CAB 79/38.

⁷⁹ JSM 36, 37, 38, 6 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6647/296/40].

⁸⁰ Minute, 7 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6645/296/40].

included⁸¹. And the Ministerial Committee was asked to modify some of the wording of the military annex so as to bring it nearer what the American Chiefs of Staff wanted⁸².

Mountbatten, instructed to sign the first agreement, said the Siamese were ready to sign both. But Timberman, American representative in Kandy, now objected to the signature of any agreement: the instructions to Mountbatten did not entirely tally with the telegrams from Washington. Mountbatten said he would wait no more than 24 hours for the matter to be cleared up⁸³. 'It is to me an absolutely unique experience', Denning declared, 'that the power with whom we are negotiating should agree to sign, while another power protests against a signature...' The Siamese leaning, he believed, was towards the British; but the Americans, influenced by Office of Strategic Services (OSS) reports, were trying to delay agreement, a matter of genuine suspicion of British intentions and of petty jealousy inflamed by 'the ever sinister activities of O.S.S.' 'My view... is that, given non-interference by the Americans, we shall get the Siamese to do what we want, within reason, and have them on our side in the future...' ⁸⁴ The interim military agreement was in fact signed on 8 September⁸⁵.

Denning was, however, too optimistic. Whatever their views of China, the Thais were already prepared to turn to the Americans. Mountbatten's hasty presentation of the '21 points' led them to seek U.S. help⁸⁶, and, as Bennett saw, increased U.S. suspicion, already evident and fostered by British secretiveness. As a result this episode damaged the prospects of the more general negotiations, in which generous terms for reconciliation might elude an offer of free rice. The Thais' distrust of the British had increased, even though Mountbatten's 21 points did not cover the rice delivery. The important issue for the Thais was recognition, and now Britain needed to be still more explicit if it was to counter their misgivings, elicit rice, and avoid American interposition. The British had moved one step towards the kind of agreement that would serve them badly, in which rice—all the more needed as famine grew—had to be exacted, and that would serve Pridi badly, since the British were reticent over recognition.

The revised Heads of Agreement were sent to Washington with instructions to accompany their transmission with an oral communication. The State Department and the American Chiefs of Staff seemed to suspect 'that we are seeking to impose military and economic domination over Siam and to continue for an indefinite period after the state of war with her has been liquidated such servitudes, restrictions or controls as may be desirable'. The suspicion

⁸¹ COSSEA 345, 7 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6581/296/40]. Cf. COS(45) 218th, 7 September, CAB79/38.

⁸² Minute, 7 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6647/296/40].

⁸³ SEACOS 470, 7 September 1945, F.O.371/46549 [F6582/296/40].

⁸⁴ Telegram, 7 September 1945, unnumbered, F.O.371/46549 [F6583/296/40]. Denning to Bennett, s.d., F.O.371/46550 [F6867/296/40].

⁸⁵ Telegrams, 9 September 1945, Nos. 467, 468, F.O.371/46549 [F6589/296/40]. SEACOS 479, s.d., F.O.371/46549 [F6644/296/40].

⁸⁶ Direck, pp. 229-30.

was 'baseless'. Once the state of war with Siam had been ended, the action of SAC should indeed be limited to matters connected with the conclusion of the Japanese war. The Foreign Office also discussed the British position on the Indochinese territories. At present, it was explained, the British conditions did not cover them, because it was assumed that the question would be settled in a simultaneously negotiated Franco-Siamese agreement. But the British did not recognize the frontier changes, and reserved the right to cover them, if necessary, in their own negotiations⁸⁷. Denning was told that the government did not wish to be 'involved unnecessarily' in this question, nor to have their own agreement held up. But, because the British did not recognize the Japanese award of 1941, and because of France's position as an ally, 'we could scarcely conclude our agreement with Siam without safeguarding the position of France to the best of our ability...' The Siamese should be told that the British would reserve the right to include the matter in their treaty. There was no need to take the initiative in telling the French, however; and if they were told, Denning should make it clear 'that in your view it is not intended to commit His Majesty's Government to any particular view on the merits of the pre-1941 frontier...' ⁸⁸ Bennett had received a visit from Paris, and later the French delegates to Kandy, and had again made the position plain⁸⁹. On 10 September Francfort saw the revised texts and urged that the British agreement be not concluded in advance of the French. 'No direct answer was given him, but he was told it was our hope that the agreements with H.M.G. and the French Government would in fact be negotiated and concluded concurrently...' ⁹⁰

The doubts of the Foreign Office had not been diminished by a reading of the French terms. They included the return of the Emerald Buddha to Vientiane, 'a fearful humiliation for the Siamese', as Adams put it. The French had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The claim was 'iniquitous... Even its presentation to the Siamese by the French will do us no good.' Bennett feared the French would be 'an embarrassing liability in any attempts to get an already complicated situation... cleared up'. But Sir A. Rumbold in the Western Department stressed the need not to oppose France at this point: differences in the Levant had to be resolved; an alliance made. Let Siam and the U.S. fight the battle, wrote Hoyer-Millar⁹¹. The Far Eastern Department, however, thought the French might be warned that the Buddha clause was unwise. If no warning were given them, but they later found the British would not back them, the effect on Franco-British relations would be worse than that of a warning now. Moreover, it was not simply a matter of

the relative importance of Anglo-French and Anglo-Siamese relations... Unfortunately... what we do in regard to Indo-China and Siam reacts on our relations with the United States and on our general position in the Far East. After all, we and everyone else concerned have suffered a good deal from the action of the French in letting the Japanese into Indo-China in 1940. Admittedly the men who let the Japanese in were Vichy representatives. But they were still French. If the present French Government now try to go back to Indo-China to deal with Siam in the spirit of the 19th Century, they are likely to bring us into trouble as well as themselves.

87 Telegram, 8 September 1945, No.9316, F.O.371/46548 [F6195/296/40].

88 Telegram, 10 September 1945, No. 532, *ibid*.

89 Minute, 4 September 1945, F.O.371/46548 [F6414/296/40].

90 Telegram, 10 September, No.533, F.O.371/46548 [F6195/296/40].

91 Minutes, F.O.371/46548 [F6414/296/40].

And a delay in Britain's negotiations might prevent the British obtaining the rice needed to avert famine elsewhere in southeast Asia. Rumbold repeated that the British should not take the initiative in suggesting that the French drop their claim. Duff Cooper thought Bennett might talk to Catroux. But he preferred to talk to his contacts in the French Embassy⁹².

Denning had been instructed to arrange for a Siamese mission to visit Kandy, informing the Regent also that the French government was sending two representatives to negotiate a French agreement. He was to present the head of the mission with the Heads of Agreement and the military annex. Together they represented what Britain required Siam to accept as 'the pre-condition to the liquidation of the state of war and to the resumption of normal relations', a minimum demand 'in view of Siam's collaboration with Japan', requiring 'integral acceptance'. In the light of the American attitude, 'it will clearly be preferable to obtain the rice as a free contribution voluntarily offered by the Siamese Government rather than as an exaction imposed by His Majesty's Government. . .'. Denning could at his discretion therefore raise the matter with the Siamese before presenting the Heads and annex. The Siamese should not be given, the Foreign Office repeated, the impression that they were entitled to receive any *quid pro quo* for accepting those conditions other than the liquidation of the state of war and the resumption of friendly relations. Questions like the time and manner of eventual admission to the United Nations might arise: they should be referred to London and would be dealt with in the light of the general attitude of the Siamese. The agreement should look as much like a friendly settlement as possible. Perhaps the next step should be an exchange of letters indicating that the parties accepted the liquidation of the state of war on the basis of the Heads and annex⁹³.

The ambivalence of the British attitude is clear. The British wanted a friendly agreement (and rice), but spoke in stiff terms on recognition because of their concern over 'prestige' issues like the declaration of war and annexation of British territory. There was some hope that the Thais might agree, but the tone made it less likely. Denning and others in the Foreign Office overestimated their readiness to accept British patronage and did not seem to see that prospects for success had been harmed by Mountbatten's precipitate action.

While there was hope that the Thais might offer rice, its exaction was included in the treaty terms sent to Washington. It bulked large in the continuing Anglo-American discussions, for the Americans saw many grounds to object to it. First reactions seemed, however, encouraging. A.L. Moffat was 'not the least put out' by the latest British telegram, 'and seemed to think it brought us a step nearer agreement. He had heard the Siamese were thinking of offering rice free of charge for "United Nations relief".' Probably, Wilson-Young noted, the Siamese realized that a free contribution was inevitable: 'either on their own initiative or possibly as a result of a hint from the State Department or U.N.R.R.A.', they might want to specify that it was for United Nations relief, and so distributed by UNRRA. This would be 'totally unacceptable to us'⁹⁴. Over the rice proposal, however, the Washington embassy

92 Minutes, F.O.371/46550 [F6961/296/40].

93 Telegram, 10 September 1945, No.531, F.O.371/46548 [F6195/296/40].

94 Telegram, 8 September 1945, No.6119, and minute, F.O.371/46549 [F6587/296/40].

itself raised various problems which it felt sure the State Department was considering. The 'levy' was to be regarded 'as a general act of atonement'. But CFB, if it allocated the rice, would do so on the basis of supply and shipping considerations. 'We presume you would agree that it would not be practicable to regard the first one and half million tons of rice shipped out of Siam as free rice since amounts which various nations receive will bear no relation to equity based on relative degree of harm inflicted by Siam during the war.' Perhaps a limit should be set on the amount of free rice received; and so the free rice would not necessarily coincide with the first 1.5 million tons shipped out. Sanderson of the Ministry of Food and the Treasury drafted a reply. Allocation of the free rice by negotiation among the recipient countries would not prevent actual physical distribution in accordance with CFB allocation. Thus 1.5 million tons would be initially procured free of cost; this and subsequent rice would be distributed under CFB procedure to participants in the free scheme, who would pay only for rice beyond the limits of the free quota, and to others, including UNRRA, who would pay in full⁹⁵.

The Americans, it was thought in Washington, would suggest that the rice scheme be taken out of the military annex and dealt with by negotiation between the British and the Siamese. They would prefer to see a voluntary contribution, perhaps to UNRRA. The American reply would cover other matters too, the Embassy believed. The State Department, it was suggested, was not happy with the British reply on the treatment of British subjects: 'they feel that the Siamese ought not to be prevented from reserving to their own nationals the exercise of certain professions or cabotage for example'. The Americans also thought 'that our military terms should not demand of the Siamese compensation for damage done by the Japanese. They think it particularly unjust to demand compensation for damage done to our interests before the Siamese declared war on us...' Perhaps, Wilson-Young thought, the Americans' reply was only "for the record". They must realise we are hardly likely further to modify our terms at this late stage'. Sir George Sansom was asked at least to head off the unacceptable UNRRA suggestion⁹⁶.

In the event this was impossible: it was too late to modify the State Department reply⁹⁷. The State Department agreed to the British suggestion on customs duties: they should be as on December 1941, not 15 August 1945. It was also ready to agree that the chairman of the Rice Commission and most of the personnel should be British, 'it being understood, of course, that all decisions of the Rice Commission... would be by agreement between the British and American representation on the Commission'. The U.S. regretted the British decision to require a levy on Siamese rice if the Siamese did not make a voluntary gift. Such a gift might best be made to UNRRA, for 'there would be serious administrative and political difficulties if the allocation of a free contribution of Siamese rice had to be made by the Combined Food Board, as every rice-importing nation might wish a share regardless of practical considerations'.

⁹⁵ Telegram, 15 September 1945, No.6250, and reply, 21 September, No.9608, F.O.371/46550 [F6986/296/40].

⁹⁶ Telegram, 15 September 1945, No.6240, minute, and reply, 16 September, No.9488, F.O.371/46550 [F6988/296/40].

⁹⁷ Telegram, 20 September 1945, No.6324, F.O.371/46550 [F7254/296/40].

If the levy were made, it must be a matter of British-Siamese determination, and not part of an Allied agreement. Nor could the discharge of the levy precede the application of the principles proposed in the tripartite agreement. The U.S. and other countries should be able to buy rice, from stocks now available as well as those that would become available. The U.S. believed that the amount available for export from the 1944 crop would be about 780,000 tons; the present crop would yield an export surplus of only 510,000; and Seni's earlier estimate that stocks on hand were 1.5 million tons was not confirmed. Controls over exports should have a termination date. The State Department also repeated its view that Siam should not pay compensation, especially prior to its declaration of war. The U.S. would prefer not to include the clause about a military mission in the annex, and clause 14, on economic controls, it wanted limited. The State Department, as forecast, repeated its doubt about D4, which 'could be interpreted to prevent the Siamese Government without the consent of the British Government from establishing any monopolistic industrial, commercial or economic enterprise', or from reserving certain pursuits to Siamese nationals. This would 'deprive Siam of full equality with other sovereign and independent states'. Finally the State Department pointed out that it would recognize the Siamese government when it had abrogated its treaties with the Japanese. This abrogation would soon take place, and the U.S. would want to have a diplomatic representative in Bangkok as soon as possible. It would, however, be willing to delay the resumption of diplomatic relations 'for a reasonable period', so that the British could resume relations at the same time⁹⁸.

Wilson-Young thought that the differences of view had been 'very considerably narrowed down'. Rice and UNRRA were still at issue; but a date-limit for the economic controls could be fixed. The claim for damages must remain, if only in the interests of the Allies. Other departments would have to consider other points⁹⁹. A reply was approved by the Official Committee on 27 September. Dening had been instructed to present the Heads and the annex. But His Majesty's Government had studied the State Department's comments 'most carefully... with a desire to contribute what they can to bringing their views and those of the United States Government into still closer harmony'. The rice question could be resolved. 'It is common ground that all rice procured from Siam, as from elsewhere, should be sent to those recipients to which the Combined Food Board gives the highest priority. These would not necessarily be the recipients most equitably entitled to participate in free rice'. All rice would be procured by the Rice Commission from government stocks, or through Siamese government purchase, or by direct purchase, with local currency provided by the Siamese government. The questions remaining concerned the allocation of the free rice and the payment of foreign exchange for the rest. The rice could be paid for or invoiced provisionally, then payment or invoices cancelled in accordance with any share of the free quota. CFB would not determine who received free rice: that would be a matter for negotiation among those of the United Nations claiming a share. A free gift to UNRRA would not be desirable: Malaya, 'by any criteria likely to be adopted... one of the most deserving claimants', would get none. His Majesty's Government agreed that the decisions of the Rice Commission should be by agreement

98 Telegram, 19 September 1945, No.6300, F.O.371/46550 [F7249/296/40].

99 Minute, *ibid.*

between the British and American representatives: any serious difference could be resolved by the two governments, any minor issues by the British government. The British government wished to consider further the question of a termination date for rice controls. Clauses 4, 13 and 14 of the military agreement—relating to compensation, military mission, and economic controls—would not go into any Allied agreement without U.S. assent. But Allies need not avail themselves of clause 4; clause 13 was being considered; and clause 14 must not be so limited as to hamper dealing with any matter arising out of the war with Japan. D4 of the Heads could be slightly modified. It was designed to bridge the gap pending the negotiation of a new treaty of commerce. The British added an assurance that they would interpret their restrictions 'in a reasonable manner'¹⁰⁰.

The State Department had meanwhile offered its delayed comments on Section C of the Heads, dealing with strategic matters. This still included the original E1, by which the Siamese were to undertake to recognize the importance of their country to the defence of its neighbours and the southwest Pacific. The State Department wondered what that implied. It was drawn up, Bennett observed, to provide the basis for the stipulations about a British military mission and military facilities. These had now been altered. But it had 'a certain psychological value', and it might make it easier later to propose a regional scheme of defence under the United Nations¹⁰¹. This line COS adopted¹⁰². The State Department declared, however, that it did not consider the clause necessary in order to make a negotiation for a regional scheme easier; and it was 'concerned lest the clause as now stated might later be construed as an advance commitment by the Siamese for measures of a military or strategic nature to which this Government might have serious objection. . .'. It would, moreover, be more in keeping with Eden's statement of 22 November 1944 if C1 were reworded to require Siamese cooperation in international security arrangements under a United Nations organization. 'This government believes that by consultation and by scrupulous respect for the position and interest of the other with relation to Siam a reconciliation of British and American views with regard to that country has been nearly achieved. It hopes that this co-operative approach will be continued so that there may be complete Anglo-American community of views in relation to Siam'. In the Heads, the only other point at issue was D4. In the annex, there was the question of compensation: the requirement should not go beyond what the British and American governments were agreed upon, the question of additional compensation being left for separate negotiation by the countries concerned. Clause 13 should be left to Siamese initiative; the duration of the controls in clause 14 should be limited; and the clause on control of rice and important exports, 15 and 16(b), should conform more fully to the American proposals for a tripartite agreement. As for 16(a), the U.S. 'strongly disapproves' a rice levy. If the British insisted on it, it should be a matter for separate British-Siamese agreement, and it should not interfere with procurement, in accordance with CFB allocations, by the U.S. and other countries not concerned with the levy. Maybe, Adams observed, 'it might be practicable to assess the amount

¹⁰⁰ Telegram, 28 September 1945, No. 9799, *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Telegram, 8 September 1945, No. 6122, and Bennett to Hollis, 12 September, F.O. 371/46549 [F6586/296/40].

¹⁰² Stapleton to Bennett, 14 September 1945, F.O. 371/46550 [F6974/296/40]. COS(45) 224th, s.d.. CAB 79/39.

of free rice required for the British Commonwealth alone. If it was originally an altruistic gesture to make this demand on behalf of our Allies this does not seem to have been appreciated'. The fact that free rice was subject to CFB allocation was not still clear to the State Department, he thought¹⁰³.

The State Department's comments had arrived before the reply to their previous memorandum had been sent off, but it was resolved to let it go, and give further consideration to the new points raised. Brigadier Dove explained that COS believed that the defence of Burma and Malaya depended on providing certain requirements in Siam. The best way of securing them might be by a military mission. This need not be a condition imposed on Siam, but if it were not, 'nothing should be done to prevent us from making an agreement to secure our object separately at a later stage'. It could not be left, as the U.S. suggested, to Siamese initiative. Bennett, the chairman of the Official Committee, thought 'we ought to take a firm line with the Americans regarding our defence requirements in this area'. C1 and clause 13 should go to COS for further consideration¹⁰⁴. The Joint Planning Staff stressed the strategic importance of Siam, but had no real objection to the American redraft of C1. They considered that a British military mission was still desirable¹⁰⁵. COS, however, preferred the original C1. But, as the British military mission was 'already established' in Siam, that clause could be omitted, and the matter left to subsequent negotiation¹⁰⁶.

On 5 October the Far Eastern Official Committee approved the retention of C1, with the American words as a corollary and in replacement of the existing C2. The State Department was told this. It was also told that clause 4, on compensation, must, in the interests of allies, remain in the annex. Clause 13 would be deleted, though it was not a matter that could be left to Siamese initiative. The question of the duration of the proposed tripartite agreement concerned Wilson-Young. Sanderson thought rice controls would be needed till 1948¹⁰⁷. A separate telegram was prepared. The date 1 September 1946 was too early for termination. Possibly, too, renewal till 1 March 1947 would be of little advantage, as there would be no incentive to market the 1946-7 crop harvested in December 1947. The agreement should remain in force till September 1947¹⁰⁸.

Dening had meanwhile on 19 September reported a delay in the arrival of the delegation at Kandy, which he was inclined to blame on local OSS interference. 'The rats seem to have

103. Telegram, 26 September 1945, No.6459, and minute, F.O.371/46551 [F7505/296/40].

104 FE (O) 6th meeting, 27 September 1945, F.O.371/46552 [F7975/296/40].

105 JP (45) 262 (final), 30 September 1945, F.O.371/46552 [F7976/296/40].

106 COS(45) 240th, 3 October 1945, *ibid.*; CAB 79/40.

107 FE (O) 7th, 5 October 1945, and minute thereon, F.O.371/46329 [F8080/149/61]. Telegram, s.d., No.10111, F.O.371/46551 [F7505/296/40].

108 Telegram, 13 October 1945, No.10305, F.O.371/46549 [F8232/1349/40].

got at the Siamese.' Seni, moreover, was said to have reported that the agreement would be limited to three points, and concern was also expressed that Britain's allies were not parties to the agreement. Dening sent the Siamese a strong message¹⁰⁹. This seemed to bring them up 'with a sharp jerk (which it was meant to do)', and the delegation agreed to depart at once¹¹⁰. If there had ever been any hope of a real agreement with the Thais, it had been damaged, not so much by the rats, as by Mountbatten's proceedings. Now they were reluctant to negotiate. Dening attributed their reluctance to OSS; but such a view was on a par with his belief that they were ready to be patronized by the British. In fact they were more ready to take initiatives than he thought. His equestrian metaphor was perhaps significant.

Then there was the question of the French. The Regent and Seni said they would be delighted if the delegation met the French representatives unofficially, but could authorize no negotiation, since there was no state of war with France. 'The more we take the French and their claims under our wing', wrote Adams, 'the harder it is going to be to come to a prompt and satisfactory agreement with the Siamese.' They would resist the French, possibly with 'moral encouragement' from the Americans. Bennett, as ever, was willing to make some gesture to the French, but anxious that it should not damage British chances in the negotiation. Dening was told that 'Hector', the Force 136 leader in Bangkok, should tell the Regent that his attitude to the French was 'ill judged', and would affect the British attitude to Siam. Francfort was told that it would be better not to demand the Emerald Buddha¹¹¹. It was, however, in the French terms¹¹². The inflexibility of the French would mean difficult negotiations for them and for the British, Adams commented. 'The Siamese regard the French as a beaten nation that has the good fortune to have winning Allies.' Bevin spoke to Bidault about the Buddha¹¹³.

Not only were the Thais unresponsive: the Americans were difficult to shake off. Wheeler, Mountbatten's American deputy, approached SAC in order to prevent Dening's signing an agreement before the State Department and the Foreign Office were in agreement, and asked Dening to see Yost, a State Department officer due in Kandy. As Wilson-Young pointed out, the State Department had not sought to stop British negotiations: it had made suggestions, which were being considered. Dening could hardly delay giving the Siamese the terms, Bennett thought, having fetched them to Kandy. 'And we cannot accept the position that our negotiations with Siam for the liquidation of our state of war with her are dependent on the consent of a state which is not at war with her'¹¹⁴. In fact, on his arrival, Yost—who was destined for Bangkok—said that the State Department expected certain differences resolved before Dening approached the delegation. Dening said that the Department had, in commenting, avoided restricting the British right to negotiate with Siam. 'Mr Yost hastened to say that the United States naturally did not wish to restrict right of His Majesty's Government to

109 Telegram, 19 September 1945, No.509, F.O.371/46550 [F7152/296/40].

110 Telegram, 21 September 1945, No.517, F.O.371/46550 [F7209/296/40].

111 Telegram, 19 September 1945, No.502, minutes, and reply, 21 September, No.577, F.O.371/46550 [F7164/296/40]. Minute, 21 September, F.O.371/46550 [F7209/296/40].

112 Telegrams, 21, 27 September 1945, Nos.520, 543, F.O.371/46551 [F7323, F7551/296/40].

113 Minute, 28 September 1945; Duff Cooper to Dixon, 4 October, F.O.371/46551 [F7612/296/40].

114 Telegram, 23 September 1945, No.522, and minutes, F.O.371/46551 [F7329/296/40].

conduct negotiations direct with Siam but contradicted himself by going on to say by virtue of the fact that this was an Allied Command it was impossible for United States not to interfere in any solution which we might reach with Siam nor were United States prepared to admit mere technicality that we were at war with Siam while they were not made any real difference. . . . Denning pointed to the distinction between the military agreement SAC had signed, and the British agreement which he was to conclude. Yost was 'extremely persistent', and finally indicated that if Denning began to negotiate 'he would feel obliged to see Siamese and to tell them that United States Government did not agree to certain items in the agreement which we were putting before Siam. . . .'. Maintaining his equestrian metaphor, Denning feared the Americans would encourage the Thais to 'dig in their toes'¹¹⁵.

In Washington Moffat asked Sansom for a delay, 'arguing that we have already got so close that it would be unfortunate if State Department were now put into a position where they would feel obliged however reluctantly, to inform Thailand that, although United States Government are aware of text of agreement, they do not fully concur with all its provisions. . . .'. The United States was told that Britain was considering any modifications it could introduce before the agreement were concluded. But the Foreign Office suggested that Sansom should say 'that we find it difficult to believe that the State Department contemplate direct intervention in bilateral negotiations intended to bring to an end a state of war between the United Kingdom and Siam. . . .'¹¹⁶ A similar statement was made in reply to representations from the U.S. embassy in London covering the same ground as Yost. Bennett told Allison that the negotiations to end the war between Britain and Siam could not depend on prior agreement with the U.S.; he also suggested that the reference to unilateral action came 'somewhat oddly' in view of recent action over Japan. Allison took his letter away¹¹⁷. Denning had told Yost much the same. The 'plain speaking' seemed to clear the air¹¹⁸. The State Department had stressed to Sansom that Yost must tell the Thais that the U.S. did not entirely approve the terms, because Denning had told them that the Americans had seen them and they might assume it had approved them¹¹⁹. Later, however, the State Department declared it had no desire to interfere in bilateral negotiations. Denning, it was understood, had told the Siamese that the Americans were 'not in complete accord'¹²⁰. Bennett thought his conversation with Allison has produced some effect¹²¹. The U.S. had been shaken off for a while.

Denning had met the delegation on 25 September. He made a speech indicating that the British government was prepared in the circumstances to replace the usual treaty of peace by a document terminating the war. He mentioned the rice levy, indicating that the clause had been inserted before the British knew of the intention to make 'a voluntary offer'. Prince

115 Telegram, 24 September 1945, No.527, F.O.371/46551 [F7438/296/40].

116 Telegram, 24 September 1945, No.6397, and reply, 25 September, No.9726, F.O.371/46551 [F7439/296/40].

117 Minute, 26 September 1945, F.O.371/46552 [F7952/296/40].

118 Telegram, 25 September 1945, No.532, and minute, F.O.371/46551 [F7481/296/40].

119 Telegram, 26 September 1945, No.6442, F.O.371/46551 [F7504/296/40].

120 Telegram, 27 September 1945, No.6495, F.O.371/46551 [F7629/296/40].

121 Minute, 30 September 1945, F.O.371/46551 [F7563/296/40].

Viwat, leading the delegation, confirmed that the Siamese government was willing to make 'a free gift of rice'¹²². Denning handed the agreement to the Thais. He told them that a French delegation was in Kandy, desirous of making an agreement too, and the Prince said he would meet it informally. Denning also insisted that this was a bilateral negotiation to which the U.S. was not a party, though it had seen the terms and Yost might indicate it did not agree with all of them. Some 'friendly conversation' followed. Denning had 'little doubt that, were the Americans not to interfere, the Siamese would sign the agreement but I must confess that I find American conduct in this matter very hard to accept. . . .'¹²³

Next day the Prince saw Denning alone. He wanted the Kra canal clause linked with the clause on postwar security, rather than a separate undertaking. Neither he nor Denning were clear over the purpose of the military mission proposed in clause 13 of the annex. The Prince was 'staggered' by article 15, but Denning said it was not designed to destroy Siam's trade, merely to control vital commodities¹²⁴. The Prince also wondered why the word 'Allied' was used in the annex if it were a British agreement. The terms, Denning explained, were what Britain considered a minimum requirement to end the state of war; but the command was an Allied one. What was to prevent another Ally—say, China—demanding another military agreement? Nothing, Denning thought; but Siam was in the SEAC theatre. 'I tried to indicate to the Prince that by signing the agreement with us Siam would be in a stronger and not a weaker position. . . .'. The Siamese were afraid of the Chinese; Siam, as a member of the United Nations, could express its views. 'British interests and problems as regards the overseas Chinese are the same as Siam's, practically speaking', Adams commented. 'This is sufficient reason, apart from other considerations, for the Siamese to go a long way—spontaneously—to meet us now. . . .'¹²⁵

On 27 September Denning was given a Siamese redraft. This included a new version of Section C of the Heads of Agreement, which included a phrase indicating that Britain would sponsor Siam's entry into the United Nations that Denning thought could not be part of the agreement. It also linked the undertaking over Kra to the other clauses so that it applied only to the period before Siam entered the United Nations. The Thais also wanted some reassurance in the preamble to the annex indicating that prolonged occupation was not intended; and this Denning recommended¹²⁶. At the plenary session the following day the issue of compensation for damage to British property was also raised: damage had been caused by British bombing prompted by the presence of the Japanese, and the latter should pay. The parties discussed clause 13 on the military mission, which Prince Viwat thought had no *raison d'être* following the Japanese surrender, and Denning said that a redraft would be considered. 'It was agreed that the deletion of clause 16(A) [the rice delivery] would depend upon a voluntary offer being made by the Siamese Government in the required terms, as to which the Prince was

122 Minutes, 25 September 1945, F.O.371/46552 [F7986/296/40].

123 Telegram, 25 September 1945, No.531, F.O.371/46551 [F7480/296/40].

124 Telegram, 26 September 1945, No.537, F.O.371/46551 [F7503/296/40].

125 Telegram, 26 September 1945, No.538, and minute, *ibid.*

126 Telegram, 27 September 1945, No.542, F.O.371/46551 [F7550/296/40].

awaiting instructions...'¹²⁷ Dening felt 'that Siamese are, for internal reasons, anxious to save face as far as possible, and in so far as this is compatible with our requirements, I recommend that it should be allowed. On the other hand while they are naturally anxious to get off as lightly as possible and will use their ingenuity (which appears considerable) to accomplish this, there is no evidence that heads of agreement have aroused, at any rate amongst delegation, any marked reaction.' Seni, however, seemed to think 'that next to nothing is required to get Siam out of her predicament. In this he may be encouraged by O.S.S. whose general conduct seems to conform very little with official American policy....' Dening had urged discretion on the French¹²⁸. In a private talk he advised the Prince to talk to them. He also stressed the importance of an offer of rice. The minor offer made in Bangkok would not suffice¹²⁹. That offer was of 240,000 tons as a gift 'for the benefit of UN' at 20,000 tons per month¹³⁰.

The Foreign Office, after consulting Sanderson, agreed that this was indeed unsatisfactory. Dening was to press for 1.5 million tons; 'but we would accept a firm offer of one million tons, plus obligation to supply after yield of current crop ascertained, any further quantity up to half a million tons which by joint assessment rice unit and Siamese Government may be agreed to be surplus to internal needs....'¹³¹ The Thais had made an offer, no doubt as part of a bargaining process. In some sense the Foreign Office accepted it as such. But it did not go far itself: it declined any amendment on compensation or postwar cooperation, though Dening was permitted to declare that, in due course, i.e. after termination of war with Britain, the Commonwealth countries and France, the United Kingdom would support a Siamese application for membership of the United Nations. A change in the preamble to the annex was disallowed: but attention was drawn to clause 11, which placed Siamese facilities at the disposal of the Allies for so long as was necessary to conclude 'all matters of military concern to the Allies arising out of the settlement of the war with Japan'¹³².

Meanwhile Dening and the Prince had discussed the question of credentials. The Siamese delegation had full powers, but they appeared to be qualified by the pledge of the Regent to approve what it accepted 'if agreeable'. Dening could not accept that if he signed he committed his government, while the Prince, when signing, did not commit the Regent. But 'Prince Viwat who is a bland gentleman said he was sure the Regent had no such intention'. Some days passed, as Dening reported on 3 October; 'nothing has happened'. He was ignoring the delegation, the more readily since he had no instructions from London or indication of the progress of the discussions with the U.S. Yet 'the longer the delay the more the Siamese will be encouraged to think that they can get off even more lightly than heads of agreement suggest'. It was 'open gossip' in Bangkok that the U.S. had prevented the signature of Mountbatten's second military agreement. 'This I am told has encouraged the Siamese to believe that if they hold out they can count upon American support. Even more are they likely to hold out on

127 Telegram, 29 September 1945, No.552, F.O.371/46551 [F7630/296/40].

128 Telegram, 29 September 1945, No.551, *ibid.* See also Minutes, F.O. 371/46552 [F8127/296/40].

129 Telegram, 30 September 1945, No.556, F.O.371/46552 [F7671/296/40].

130 Telegram, 30 September 1945, No.554, F.O.371/46569 [F7626/1349/40].

131 Telegram, 3 October 1945, No.645, F.O.371/46569 [F7698/1349/40].

132 Telegram, 7 October 1945, No.671, F.O.371/46551 [F7630/296/40].

negotiations with the French'. When he received instructions, Denning planned to tell the delegation he would break off negotiations unless he received satisfaction over the matter of credentials within a stated time. 'But obviously I cannot bully the Siamese in this way unless I know that if they continue to prove intransigent, you are prepared [to] adopt some kind of sanction. Otherwise we shall merely make ourselves ridiculous...'¹³³ Were the Thais using delaying tactics? he wondered; or was it a question of their disposition to 'infinite leisure'¹³⁴?

According to Hector, the Regent could not grant full powers. Adams thought that Hector 'having practised as a lawyer in Siam for many years, probably knows what he is talking about, ...'. It appeared that the kind of treaty involved required the approval of the Assembly. W.W. Coultas, another old hand, also doubted if it were a matter of 'delaying tactics'. The best course was for Denning to 'recognise the constitutional difficulty', and so win the goodwill of the mission: 'if tactfully handled, the Siamese delegates will not be found too difficult or scheming'. But 'if handled not so tactfully', they would 'simply dig in their toes, sulk and play for time'. The Siamese, too, would expect Britain, 'as the Protector *par excellence* of democratic government', to respect their constitutional principles. This advice was adopted. Denning was told that constitutional forms should be completed before actual signature. That might mean that the eventual formal agreement, 'conclusion of which alone will terminate the state of war', would have to be initialled and then submitted to the Assembly before signature¹³⁵. Denning's patience was wearing thin, maybe, and the old hands at the Foreign Office had little sympathy with him. They wanted the treaty concluded—as he did—but believed it would be more effectively secured by a concession on the constitutional issue. Yet in a way this was a diversion from the main issue, the terms for recognition.

Denning had become more impatient in the meantime. Prince Viwat wrote him a letter, proposing modifications in the Heads of Agreement to cover the compensation, security and Kra clauses. This Denning sent home by air¹³⁶, but replied to himself. He was, he said, unable to accept more modifications, and the letter 'suggests to me that you have either not thought fit or have been unable to bring your Government to a realisation of the attitude of the Government of the United Kingdom in this matter...'. No clear reply had been received over credentials, over the French negotiation, over rice. Either Denning had failed to make the facts clear, or the Siamese were trying to evade them. Adams was impatient with Denning's impatience. 'Firm handling' might succeed, but 'it will not pay to *shew* impatience; once the Siamese turn sulky it is impossible to gain any degree of willing cooperation. And the latter is the very thing to obtain which we have framed relatively easy conditions for acceptance by the Siamese Government. Siamese "*face*" is being saved in that we press for no formal Armistice or Peace Treaty. This is all to the good. We risk losing the goodwill thus obtained, however, if we lapse into the role of the conquering enemy...' Coultas agreed

133 Telegram, 3 October 1945, No.565, F.O.371/46552 [F7852/296/40].

134 Telegram, 6 October 1945, No.576, F.O.371/46552 [F7969/296/40].

135 Minutes, 5, 7 October 1945, and telegram, 12 October, No.710, F.O.371/46552 [F7852/296/40].

136 Denning to Foreign Office, received 23 October 1945, F.O.371/46552 [F8752/296/40].

that Siamese 'procrastination' had to be scotched; but he hoped that a concession on the constitutional issue might remove the cause of 'delaying tactics'¹³⁷.

Dening's impatience was perhaps the greater because he was negotiating terms he did not fully agree with; and he now made a more positive suggestion. In Bangkok Bird, the Consul-General designate, had seen Prime Minister Seni on the 9th. He said he would call the Cabinet and try to get the agreement through the Assembly; but he might fail since 1.5 million tons of rice would cost 700 to 800 million ticals. He referred to inflation. Seni was friendly, Bird added, 'but I am not yet sure of his complete sincerity'¹³⁸. Dening took up the reference to inflation. 'You are aware of views which I have always held on the subject of free rice offer. At the moment it can only seem to Siamese that we British intend to increase their inflation just as the Japanese did. It would be useful to me to have some indication how we intend to help them to solve their financial difficulties if and when they decide to be good, together with discretion to use this information should I consider it necessary.' It would help Dening 'over the somewhat sticky stage now reached', Adams wrote, if he could tell Viwat 'something encouraging about the help we can give in financial matters'. But the idea got nowhere. Wilson-Young said the Thais needed, not a sterling loan, but a good financial adviser. A once-for-all rice contribution bore no comparison with Japanese exactions: and 1.5 million tons was a modest demand¹³⁹.

Meanwhile Dening had reported both advances and a setback. The words 'if agreeable' were to be dropped from the Thai credentials, though Dening noted that, in view of the Foreign Office's later instructions, that would in practice make little difference. Dening had also heard—though not from the Prince—that the Siamese government would offer 1.5 million tons of rice to His Majesty's Government for the benefit of the United Nations, but that as this would cost 740 million ticals, it would seek credit for which goods might be purchased in the U.K. or U.S.¹⁴⁰ In fact Seni put the rice delivery through the Assembly despite 'nationalist' opposition, on condition that Thailand's wishes on other matters were considered¹⁴¹. The Assembly was, however, dissolved on 15 October. The Regent could not get rid of the nominated members, and was planning a plebiscite, for which he wanted the young King brought back from Switzerland. The Regent also declared that he foresaw difficulty in getting any Assembly to sign the agreement as it stood 'because Pibul's followers had already accused free Siamese and Resistance Movement of selling Siam to foreign countries'. He wanted Britain to agree to three points put forward by Seni: that Siamese currency supplied to Allied military authorities be repayable; that compensation for losses be 'equitable and just'; and that compensation be paid by the Thais only to the extent that it would not be paid by the Japanese. Dening thought these amendments 'impertinent', 'trivial'; the last had already been rejected. The lack of an Assembly, he thought, was the real problem. The Siamese 'now appear to have got themselves into a thorough mess'¹⁴². Possibly Dening was mistaken in regarding the

137 Telegram, 10 October 1945, No.598, with minutes, F.O.371/46552 [F8179/296/40].

138 Telegram, 12 October 1945, No.600, F.O.371/46552 [F8237/296/40].

139 Telegram, 13 October 1945, No.604, and reply, 27 October, No.881, F.O.371/46552 [F8322/296/40].

140 Telegram, 16 October 1945, No.624, F.O.371/46552 [F8503/296/40].

141 Direck, p.232.

142 Telegram, 16 October 1945, No.625, F.O.371/46552 [F8503/296/40].

amendments as trivial. Seni wanted a face-saving device; and perhaps the compensation proposal was more than that, an issue of economic importance if rice were to be delivered free. With these changes, in any case, it seems an agreement might have been reached. But the Foreign Office concentrated on the constitutional issue: now there might be a long delay between initialling and ratification.

Maybe, Adams wondered, a different means for terminating the state of war would be required; otherwise the impasse might be of indefinite duration. It was not clear how the return of the King would help, but 'on balance it seems desirable to offer facilities if we can'. The Regent faced opposition from Pibul's followers.

Support from the U.S. and publicity for the Resistance Movement's aid to the Allies have combined apparently to produce in Siam a conviction that the country has been a staunch ally of the United Nations throughout the war, with a resulting disinclination to accept terms of any kind but the most reciprocal and friendly. The Regent, Prince Viwat, and the politically-educated few are aware of the true position and of the need for an act of atonement. But there is a risk of precipitating internal trouble on a large scale if we do not give the Regent (whom we have trusted in the prolonged period of clandestine operations and contacts) all the support we can. . .

Some attempt should be made to shift part of the responsibility for compensation to Japan. 'We need not only a well-disposed Siam, but a good customer with money to spend.' Coultas agreed: the dissolution was 'most annoying'; but it might be the only way of getting a majority. Bennett endorsed the idea of facilitating the King's return. Bird was to tell the Regent of the gesture, made in the hope that it would help him to make possible the resumption of friendly relations by concluding the Kandy agreement. If the dissolution meant a great delay, the Regent should be asked for suggestions for validating the agreement. He might also be reminded that the terms were minimal and would be interpreted reasonably. Siam would have been treated very differently, he could point out, if the British had been dealing with Pibul¹⁴³.

The concession over compensation, urged by Adams, was not made. The Foreign Office was prepared to help Pridi, but not by making concessions over the treaty, which was what was really needed. Perhaps the best opportunity of a deal thus passed, partly obscured by the interest of the British in the constitutional issues. That induced them to make concessions, but not in fact those that might have been of most help to civilian government. Yet time was not on their side, as Denning saw. The need for rice outside Thailand was becoming more pressing. Inside Thailand it would become more of a political and not merely an economic issue; while the poor prospects of the 1945 crop made the Government alarmed for its surpluses in subsequent years.

The French question threatened the negotiations, as the Foreign Office had seen, but does not seem to have been decisive. On 6 October Francfort had told Bennett that the French government hoped the British would not sign their agreement until their own conversations had at least begun. Bennett replied that the Thais' delay might relate to the Emerald Buddha clause. It was dropped, but not before the demand had embittered the Thais, said Adams,

143 Minutes and telegram, 23 October 1945, No.801, *ibid*.

and made them 'look askance at us for supporting the French': it was just as well that the French did not still want the British agreement suspended till theirs was concluded¹⁴⁴. Maybe, however, Denning would get some credit for the dropping of the clause. As he put it, it should lead the Siamese to 'stop their nonsense' and negotiate with the French¹⁴⁵. He asked for instructions in case the Siamese continued 'obdurate'¹⁴⁶. The Foreign Office enquired whether he had made the reservation that he might include a French clause in the British treaty¹⁴⁷. Denning said he had spoken only to the Prince about this 'because it did not seem to me at that stage desirable to introduce this element in a more formal manner unless it became clear that the Thais would refuse to negotiate with the French'. He had now written to Viwat, and had also suggested that Bird might hint to Seni that, if the Thais were too 'intransigent', France might oppose their admission into the United Nations '(this thought was put into my head by Mr Yost)'. Adams thought the State Department's influence should itself be brought to bear¹⁴⁸. If this was a proposal to involve the Americans in exerting pressure, it was also true that Britain was being subjected to pressure from the Americans.

Two telegrams had gone to Washington, one of late September dealing especially with rice, one of early October, dealing especially with the strategic clauses. The State Department dealt with the former in an aide-mémoire prepared before the latter was received. Rice was the first topic. It now said that it did not wish the Rice Commission actually to purchase rice, but to be an administrative agency. It adhered to its earlier views on payment and allocation, 'subject of course to such modifications as may be required in connexion with any free rice', and declared that it would prefer to make its own payments promptly and not place them in a suspense account. It sought clarification of the proposal that British authorities take 'unilateral action' in certain circumstances. A draft of the tripartite agreement would shortly be offered, and it should be concluded at the earliest possible moment. The State Department again dealt with clause 14 and objected to D4 and the proposed commercial treaty: 'no independent and sovereign country should be subjected to unilateral control by another Government over its power to determine conditions relating to its economy and trade...'¹⁴⁹

The reply suggested that there was no call for separate American procurement of rice. The Siamese government would fix prices in agreement with the Rice Commission, and the U.S. would acquire it in accordance with CFB allocations. The rice unit, already set up, was

144 Minutes, 6, 9 October 1945, F.O. 371/46552 [F7585/296/40].

145 Telegram, 8 October 1945, No.585, and minute, F.O.371/46552 [F8022/296/40].

146 Telegram, 8 October 1945, No.586, F.O.371/46552 [F8067/296/40].

147 Telegram, 13 October 1945, No.724, F.O.371/46552 [F7986/296/40].

148 Telegram, 16 October 1945, No.618, and minute, F.O.371/46552 [F8482/296/40].

149 Telegram, 10 October 1945, No.6763, F.O.371/46569 [F8232/1349/40]. For the draft rice agreement, see Sansom to Bennett, 17 October, *ibid.* [F8622/1349/40].

working efficiently, and it should not be disturbed. The U.S. appeared to contemplate an administrative body, the British contemplated a procurement one. The reference to 'unilateral action' covered only the minor administrative tasks associated with the latter role. Only recipients of free rice need pay into a suspense account, and the U.S. could pay the Siamese government directly if it wished. The Foreign Office also dealt with D4. The intention was to base the new treaties of commerce and navigation not on unilateral control but on reciprocity. Additional words would make this clear¹⁵⁰.

In a further memorandum, dealing with the despatch of early October, the State Department^t agreed that the rice agreement might be extended to 1 September 1947. But it raised the whole question of the rice levy. This, it seemed, the British still intended to impose to the extent of 1.5 million tons. The State Department declared that it had understood from the British aide-mémoire of early September that the levy was to be on wartime stocks. But those stocks were less than 800,000 tons, and this year's crop would be small. The levy would absorb the accumulated stocks, all the surplus for 1945, and 'a substantial part' of that for 1946. The U.S. urged that the levy be set at 780,000 tons, or that it be left to the determination of the Rice Commission. The U.S. also raised a related issue. 'It is settled American policy that no country, not even the major aggressor nations, should be compelled to pay reparations which, either in amount or kind, will impair its ability to provide for the essential peaceful requirements of its civilian economy without external financial assistance....' It was doubtful whether Siam could pay compensation for all the claims. Allied governments might advance and meet the rice levy. 'Although the claims of the United States will be relatively small, this Government is directly concerned in the preservation for the Siamese people of an adequate standard of living and of an opportunity for economic progress without dependence upon immediate or future financial aid from any other Government.' The stabilizing of the Siamese economy was an essential element in maintaining southeast Asian peace and stability. An Allied Claims Commission should be set up to deal with compensation under the Heads of Agreement and annex, and to determine Siamese capacity to pay. 'Because the rice surplus accumulated during the war may constitute a major portion of such resources as may be available for meeting external claims, this Government believes that it should be recognised as constituting reparations in kind, and that its allocation should be determined by the Allied Claims Commission'¹⁵¹. Sansom at once objected 'that it is not general for neutral governments to be associated in determining capacity of our enemies to pay reparations and in the equitable settlement of claims'¹⁵². The Americans did not want Siam, stripped of assets, joining the queue for loans¹⁵³.

The American aide-mémoire made a 'disagreeable impression' on the Foreign Office. The latest suggestions seemed obstructive rather than constructive, and showed 'an exaggerated concern for Siamese economy to the exclusion of other considerations'. The British government had no 'ulterior motives': the aim was a just settlement. Rice was 'urgently needed'¹⁵⁴.

150 Telegram, 26 October 1945, No.10791, F.O.371/46569 [F8232/1349/40].

151 Telegram, 26 October 1945, No.7168, F.O.371/46553 [F9034/296/40].

152 Telegram, 27 October 1945, No.7169, F.O.371/46553 [F9079/296/40].

153 Christelow to N.E. Young, 20 October 1945, F.O.371/46569 [F9045/1349/40].

154 Telegram, 7 November 1945, No.11213, F.O.371/46570 [F9461/1349/40].

It was the intention 'from the outset. . . . that the amount of the free contribution of rice should be limited to that of the accumulated stocks. . . . ' Seni, it was declared, had said 1.5 million tons were in the hands of the Siamese government. The Rice Unit had more recently suggested there was a surplus of 2.5 million tons of paddy, equivalent to 1.7 million tons of milled rice. The figure of 800,000 tons could be attained only by providing for Siamese needs in 1946 both from stocks and from the growing crop which would in fact supply them. The British government would be content with 1.5 million tons, and not the surplus determined by the Commission which might be more¹⁵⁵. Here the Foreign Office was being too smart. In fact its levy had always proposed to take something out of current production. As originally estimated, 1.3 million tons would have been available, and so 200,000 tons would have been needed. When in September the stocks were reported to be 780,000 tons, Adams envisaged taking more from current production unless more stocks were revealed¹⁵⁶. Now a much larger estimate had been received, and the Foreign Office was tempted to say that was all it wanted, and even to try to score a point. But even if this was a more accurate estimate, it was not an estimate of stock solely in Government hands (it was not really clear that Seni's estimate was either). To obtain the rice economic inducements would be needed, as well as the cooperation of the Siamese government; and the latter had become more problematical, as rice had become a political issue, and its economic importance had increased. W.M. Doll, the future financial adviser, suggested that maintaining the free rice demand as a first call on the surplus would threaten Siam's economic recovery. Low crops were expected in the coming years. Insistence on the full demand at this point would thus deprive the friendly government of Luang Pradit of 'any substantial working capital with which to co-operate in the re-establishment of normal conditions in this part of the world'. The demand should be limited to 900,000 tons, the remaining 600,000 to be sought when experts considered they were 'fairly and justly available'. Adams supported Doll¹⁵⁷. The Treasury rejected the idea¹⁵⁸. British needs were growing; the means of satisfying them diminishing. But, pressed by other departments, the Foreign Office adhered to its course.

The Foreign Office reply also played down the effect on the Thai economy. It stated that the British government did not agree that levy plus compensation would jeopardize its stability. Substantial holdings of gold and sterling assets enabled Siam to handle the loss of exchange; and compensation would mostly be paid in Siamese currency. His Majesty's Government could not accept the American proposal. Nor would it regard the contribution as reparations: but as a measure of reconciliation to countries which had suffered in the war through the absence of the exports. The Foreign Office repeated Sansom's point: a nation not at war could not be associated with determining the capacity to pay and allocating compensation. The claims of those at war came first¹⁵⁹.

The State Department were also 'still perturbed' about C1, committing the Thais to recognizing the importance of Siam to the security of southeast Asia: it was described 'as language

155 Telegram, 7 November 1945, No.11214, *ibid*.

156 Telegram, 11 September 1945, No.6146, and minute, F.O.371/46569 [F6759/1349/40].

157 Telegram, 2 November 1945, No.690, and minute, F.O.371/46553 [F9366/296/40].

158 Resumé, 31 October 1945ff., F.O.371/46570 [F9367/1347/40].

159. As note 155.

of treaties with protectorates'. Perhaps C1 could be linked with the redrafted C2 with the word 'and'¹⁶⁰—which in effect was a repetition of the earlier American suggestion. The Vice-Chiefs of Staff could not agree on an answer. Vice-Admiral Sir R. McGregor thought the clauses should remain separate. 'The Siamese had still got a part to play irrespective of whether the Security Council functioned effectively or not and it therefore seemed desirable that we should not weaken the document in the way suggested by the Americans.' The others thought the link a small price to pay for American acceptance¹⁶¹. The matter went to the Chiefs of Staff. The amendment, Lord Cunningham pointed out, would link the strategic importance of Siam entirely to international security arrangements under the world organization. But if there were a delay in establishing the organization or working out collective security arrangements, 'we must be able to seek our own security by bilateral agreement. Why should the State Department feel called upon to criticise so narrowly our interest in our own post-war security, when they had not hesitated themselves to seek security arrangements with Iceland, and proposed to do the same in the Azores?' It could be argued, Lord Portal said, that the link would not matter: the recognition in the first clause would not be invalidated by any failure to establish the organization referred to in the second. But that was a legal point¹⁶². Adams wondered if COS were quite consistent, given their reasons for retaining the first clause when its original *raison d'être*, the military mission, had been struck out. COS were warned of the inconsistency, but the British government stuck to its guns, as Wilson-Young put it, with the Americans¹⁶³.

The State Department had added to its pressure by asking about the resumption of relations. Early in October Moffat seemed to have the end of the month in mind. Bennett told Sansom of the delays in Kandy, and added: 'We have the impression... that Siamese feel that in procrastinating they can rely on United States support and that they can play off the United States and the United Kingdom against each other. Anything which can be done to disabuse them of this idea may help a speedy solution.'¹⁶⁴ At the end of the month the State Department said it would appoint a chargé early in November. OSS and Seni, Bennett commented, have encouraged the Thais to think that they could count on American support, and the State Department had shown 'extraordinary solicitude' for Siam: 'the extent to which they have intervened in the negotiations in order to protect their concept of Siamese interests give[s] us a clear right to expect that they should not proceed yet to formal resumption of relations'. The U.S., Washington was told, had delayed the conclusion of the negotiations, and that suggested they should delay making appointments¹⁶⁵. The State Department responded, even

160 Telegram, 19 October 1945, No.6966, F.O.371/46552 [F8688/296/40].

161 COS (45) 259th, 25 October 1945, CAB79/40.

162 COS (45) 260th, CAB79/40; F.O.371/46553 [F9233/296/40].

163 Minute, 7 November 1945; telegram, 18 November, No. 11603, F.O.371/46553 [F9044/296/40]. COS (45) 272nd, 16 November, *ibid.*; CAB79/41.

164 Telegram, 2 October 1945, No.6563, and reply 12 October, No.10251, F.O.371/46578 [F5391/5181/40].

165 Telegram, 26 October 1945, No.7136, minute, and reply, 30 October, No.10896, F.O.371/46552 [F8967/296/40].

before the formal representations, by saying that it would raise the matter in a month¹⁶⁶.

The negotiations had been suspended when Denning departed for an even tougher task in Indonesia¹⁶⁷. Prince Viwat sought to return to Bangkok to report. The Foreign Office agreed, but told Brain, Denning's assistant, to speak to him about Siamese procrastination and to urge him to press on the Regent the importance of a free rice offer¹⁶⁸. Viwat explained that the Heads of Agreement had to be translated, and pointed out that lawyers in the Assembly scrutinized every word. Brain said that a continued desire for amendments indicated a 'displeasing' suspicion of the British government, and in other circumstances the lawyers might have had 'a very unpleasant document to scrutinise'. As for rice, the Prince said he had been awaiting the third plenary session to offer 1.5 million tons, 'and to discuss method and timing of delivery (as it would be impossible to deliver it all within one year)'. The impatience the Siamese had aroused in Denning, repeated in his deputy, stirred the old hands at the Foreign Office. 'I cannot think that any useful purpose is served', wrote Adams, 'by the use of tart language as the Siamese do not respond to it. On the contrary they become mulish. This does not mean that they will not accept firm treatment, however, provided "face" is safeguarded adequately.' Coultas felt there had been 'too much tartness altogether'. Men like Prince Viwat—a close friend of the Regent—should not carry away 'unhappy memories' of their treatment. Perhaps a 'better atmosphere' would prevail when negotiations were resumed in Singapore. A free rice offer—'the chief difficulty to speedy acceptance'—was assured. 'The Siamese certainly seem to have the sympathy of all those who have worked in the country', Bennett commented. Doll, he thought, carried it to extremes¹⁶⁹.

The constitutional problem remained. As instructed by the Foreign Office, Bird told Luang Pradit that two months were a long while to wait¹⁷⁰. A week later he reported that the Prime Minister was ready to sign if the agreement were modified by the three points earlier mentioned, 'and that he will consider such signature was approved by the late Assembly and therefore valid constitutionally'. Bird thought this 'blackmail' resulted from the British request that the Regent seek means of avoiding a delay until the new Assembly met. No doubt the 'terms' could be reduced by bargaining, but presumably His Majesty's Government had no intention of doing that. Indeed, even the old hands did not like this. Adams again thought that some concession on compensation might be possible: the Siamese could be made responsible in the first instance, but allowed to enter claims against Japan. But he thought the French

166 Telegram, 31 October 1945, No.7280, F.O.371/46553 [F9281/296/40].

167 Telegram, 3 November 1945, No.702, F.O.371/46553 [F9439/296/40].

168 Telegram, 7 November 1945, No.719, and reply, 8 November, No. 970, F.O.371/46553 [F9634/296/40].

169 Telegram, 11 November 1945, No.741, and minutes, F.O.371/46553 [F9926/296/40].

170 Telegram, 3 November 1945, No.698, F.O.371/46553 [F9448/296/40].

negotiations should be started before the British were concluded; he agreed that the new proposal was a kind of blackmail; and he did not believe that the signature would be valid constitutionally in any case. Coultas agreed. 'Now that we have waited so long, there is no point in jeopardising the future simply because we are tired of waiting. In dealing with Orientals of the easy-going type like the Siamese it is fatal to show impatience, but this need not prevent a display of firmness on our part. Mr Dening will not be the first person to discover how very cleverly the Siamese are able to exploit their nuisance value.'¹⁷¹ Scruples over the constitutional issue helped the Foreign Office again to miss an opportunity. Seni was no doubt basing himself on the old Assembly's readiness to offer rice if certain other matters were considered. The Thais wanted a bargain; the British (if one may apply the equine metaphor to them too) shied away from it, believing that the agreement might not be valid anyway. But they were also intrinsically unwilling to change the agreement. They now saw attempts to bargain as blackmail, though at the outset they had themselves envisaged a bargain.

The Foreign Secretary himself was concerned at the delay. 'Can this now be brought to a final head—it is delayed too long.' Bennett asked for a list of outstanding points¹⁷². A memorandum summarized those that concerned the Americans and those that concerned the Thais. Compensation was the subject on which the British still had to agree with both. The other main issue was the French. Seni had stated that his government would accept the French terms if asked to do so by the British and American governments or by the United Nations. The U.S. should be asked to reply to the last British telegram on the rice delivery; to indicate 'on what points' it believed that 'further reconciliation of our views is possible'; and to consider joint action to ensure the opening of direct Siamese-French negotiations¹⁷³. Francfort approached Bennett two days later. He suspected that the return of the King might be a Siamese manoeuvre to delay or complicate the negotiations. Bennett said he was not satisfied with the course of the negotiations, but he asked Francfort to keep an open mind. Some of the delay was due to Dening's absence and to the need for discussions with the Americans. The Siamese attitude could be judged only when negotiations were resumed¹⁷⁴.

Soon after the Americans in fact replied to the British. The State Department accepted the position on the commercial treaty, though its aide-mémoire did not cover the difficult article D4. C1 and C2, the security clauses, were described as the only ones outstanding: on these the Embassy had received the Foreign Office's comment. The American aide-mémoire concentrated on the amount of the rice delivery. It noted that the British wanted to levy only on the wartime surplus. Yost, it said, had indicated that the surplus available for export up to November 1946, including the coming crop, would be less than 800,000 tons. The proposed Rice Commission should determine the surplus accumulated in the war, placing a limit of 1.5 million tons if the British thought that this mode of proceeding would otherwise prejudice

171 Telegram, 11 November 1945, No.742, and minutes, F.O.371/46553 [F9927/296/40].

172 Minutes, F.O.371/46553 [F9926/296/40].

173 Memorandum, 21 November 1945, F.O.371/46552 [F8517/296/40].

174 Conversation, 23 November 1945, F.O.371/46554 [F10483/296/40].

the Siamese economy¹⁷⁵. The Commission, the State Department again said, should not be a purchasing agent, nor engage in procuring bags or checking weights and quality¹⁷⁶.

A further memorandum followed on 29 November, delivered to Halifax in person by Secretary of State Acheson. The U.S., it said, had tried hard to accommodate itself to the British position. It had withdrawn its proposal that Siam should be eligible for UNRRA aid; it had 'so far' not replied to Siamese requests for comments on the proposed Siamese-British agreement; it had deferred resuming diplomatic relations; it had refrained from pressing objections to 'unduly harsh' clauses. But it could not accept the British view that the U.S. might not be associated with the British government in determining Siamese capacity to pay, and that United States claims must be subordinated to those of countries at war. 'This position it is felt would be sound if the British state of war with Siam were unrelated to the war with Japan or if the United States had been a neutral in that war...' The United States government could not agree that because of 'the different technical status' of its relationship with Siam, it was not concerned with the issue. The argument that rice was not reparation, but a measure of reconciliation and aid to countries deprived in the war could be applied against other countries, like Indochina; and Siam had itself been deprived of imports. 'The effect of the rice levy is thus to require Siam to contribute huge sums to the Governments of the neighbouring colonial areas as a penalty for not suffering as did those areas for the briefness of Siamese resistance to Japan and for the declaration of war by the Pibul Administration.' It would affect Siam's economy and ability to pay Allied claims, and some or all of the levy should be applied to that. Maybe Siam could meet both levy and claims and still have exchange assets. But it was not certain, and the United States must have a share in determining the matter on equal terms with its allies at war with Siam. Nor was it clear that Siam should be penalised because it had gold and foreign exchange: other countries more at fault might suffer less.

The State Department indicated that it wished promptly to resume diplomatic relations, but would wait a few days for a reply to the latest memoranda. It also suggested that the delay in the negotiations might be attributed to Siamese knowledge that the U.S. objected to some of the terms. If His Majesty's Government could meet the American points, an early conclusion might be prompted by Denning's indicating that the U.S. had no further comments. At the same time he could convey to the Siamese the same assurance as to 'application and intent' as made to the U.S.¹⁷⁷

Denning had also telegraphed urging a modification of the rice demand. The amount should not be reduced, but the period of delivery should be extended: half the monthly tonnage available should be free, the Siamese government paid for the other half.

We are not in a strong position. There is a crying need for rice to avert famine and we are not getting it. American attitude tends to encourage Siamese to employ delaying tactics. We are presumably not prepared to apply sanctions and our forces now in Siam are needed elsewhere. We have many other preoccupations in the Far East and the whole of the Far East is aware of them. Our pound of flesh may in the end cost us too much¹⁷⁸.

175 Telegram, 24 November 1945, No.7882A, F.O.371/46570 [F10489/1349/40].

176 Telegram, 27 November 1945, No.7926, F.O.371/40570 [F10759/1349/40].

177 Telegrams, 30 November 1945, Nos.8008, 8009, F.O.371/46554 [F10983/296/40].

178 Telegram, 29 November 1945, No.808, F.O.371/46570 [F10780/296/40].

A SACSEA investigating committee indicated that the chief cause of delay in the provision of rice by the Siamese government was financial. The demand represented a year's exports and would cost 750 million ticals, which the Siamese could not finance without great inflation. It would lead to reduced import demands, and together with the payment of compensation produce serious financial strain. Already there was a flight from the tical, and unwillingness to sell for a currency in which there was little faith. There was no surplus available from the crop due to be harvested. The tical must be stabilized and the farmer induced to plant. The British terms were represented as harsh, and 'certain of our allies' made capital out of this. The arrival of two American representatives to buy rice in the open market for CFB allocation to the Philippines might lead the Siamese to withhold supplies from the Rice Unit. 'The terms of our demands are incompatible with the urgency of our needs.'¹⁷⁹ Only force or payment could secure rice, Doll insisted: the Siamese government could not get merchants to disgorge stocks even with the best will in the world¹⁸⁰.

Dening took stock of the negotiations before their expected resumption. Some factors had weighed against Britain from the outset: the fact that the terms were not presented until after the war with Japan had ended; the attitude of the U.S.; 'the fact that our forces had to enter Siam before agreement was reached and the necessity to treat the Siamese for military purposes as a friendly power'; the intervention of the Americans against the military agreement; and the appointment of Seni as Prime Minister. This meant that the delegation came to bargain and not to accept minimum terms; and if Dening had disabused the delegation of the idea, he doubted if the Siamese government had accepted the view, which he thought it would have done before the end of the war, that it should perform an act of expiation. A delay had resulted first from Siamese procrastination and second from the fact that Dening could not be in two places at once; and it had strengthened the belief of the Siamese that they could hold out for better terms. The terms had become known and were regarded as 'unduly harsh', an attitude presumably encouraged by the Americans in Bangkok; and there was now no certainty that a government that accepted them *in toto* could escape 'internal political repercussions', as it probably would have done earlier. Three months after the Japanese surrender British armed strength no longer seemed so 'mighty' and 'majestic', and, like the rest of south-east Asia, Siam realized that Britain had 'many preoccupations and many commitments. An intelligent Siamese might well ask himself what we should do if Siam should hold out for modifications of the heads of agreement which she has put forward.' With the lapse of time, too, the Siamese had become aware of the need for rice and the strength of their position. 'If the Siamese were to encourage the strikes and non-delivery' already affecting the trade, 'we could not successfully counter such tactics. Failure on our part on the other hand to relieve the distress would affect our entire position in South East Asia. . . . [T]he prospects are not what they were'¹⁸¹.

At the Foreign Office C.M. Anderson had suggested that the SACSEA report supported the case for revising the free rice policy¹⁸². Coultas thought that, in view of Dening's 'some-

179 Telegram, 29 November 1945, F.O.371/46570 [F10990/1349/40].

180 Telegram, 3 December 1945, No.832, F.O.371/46570 [F11157/1349/40].

181 Telegram, 30 November 1945, No.815, F.O.371/46554 [F10929/296/40].

182 Minute, 1 December, F.O.371/46570 [F10990/1349/40].

what gloomy picture', Britain should make the concessions proposed by the State Department in return for its help—'for what it is worth'—in expediting the negotiations. He believed that, to set against the retreat, there might be advantages in associating the U.S. with an Allied Claims Commission: the American representatives would have to 'consider realities' and be held responsible for representing American interests. The Siamese government might also undertake to open negotiations with France¹⁸³.

In telegrams to Washington, the Foreign Office deprecated the veiled suggestion of a time limit for replying to the State Department memoranda¹⁸⁴. The State Department was also asked to defer the separate procurement of rice¹⁸⁵. The purpose of the Rice Commission, the British now suggested, was to ensure that the rice agreement was carried out and to offer advice to the Siamese and Allied governments. It would have authority over an executive body responsible for procurement, which would be 'composed of a consortium of the European firms formerly engaged in the Siamese rice trade'¹⁸⁶. The British accepted American participation in an Allied Claims Commission. They also agreed that, if Siam could not meet both claims to compensation and the rice levy, they would reconsider the matter in consultation with the U.S. But they did not accept that the free rice should be available to settle the claims to be considered by the Commission. Rice should be allocated according to CFB decision; free quotas should be allocated by a conference of those of the United Nations claiming to participate in the scheme¹⁸⁷.

The rice question itself was taken to the Ministerial Committee. This had before it a memorandum from the Minister of Food, Sir Ben Smith. He referred to discussions at the Overseas Reconstruction Committee on 28 November. At this it had been reported that the exportable surpluses of rice in the Far East had fallen far short of the estimates on which CFB had made its allocations, amounting to 216,000 tons as against 470,000. *Pro rata* reduction had been envisaged, but this gave the SEAC area 63,000 tons less than the 153,000 tons regarded as the minimum required to avoid starvation conditions. Allusion was made to the rice in Siam, to transport difficulties, to the possibility of requesting the government to confiscate hoarded stocks. Bevin stressed the gravity of the situation, and it was decided to initiate measures to speed up exports from Siam; to ask the U.S. to divert supplies going to America to countries vitally concerned; and to ask CFB to revise its allocations so as to secure sufficient supplies in the SEAC area¹⁸⁸.

The Minister of Food reported to the Ministerial Committee that measures were taken along these lines; but, he added, advice from Siam indicated that they would be insufficient unless the policy on the 1.5 million tons of free rice were modified. The Rice Unit had been working efficiently. But the real problem was to induce local holders of stocks to sell them,

183 Minute, F.O.371/46554 [F10929/296/40].

184 Telegram, 5 December 1945, No.12214, F.O.371/46554 [F10983/296/40].

185 Telegram, 7 December 1945, No.12256, *ibid*.

186 Telegram, 7 December 1945, No.12257, *ibid*.

187 Telegram, 7 December 1945, No.12284, F.O.371/46570 [F10759/1349/40].

188 ORC (45) 10th, 28 November 1945, F.O.371/50906 [U9648/5342/70]. For a note on the rice crisis in Malaya, see M.Rudner, 'The Malayan post-War rice crisis', *Kajian Ekonomi Malaysia*, XII, 1(June1975),6-7.

and peasants to part with their paddy to replace them. There were 1.7 million tons estimated to exist, but in the absence of confidence in the tical, and of facilities for remitting abroad, stocks were not released. The lack of confidence was doubtless due to inflation in the Japanese phase and to a scarcity of consumer goods. In addition the Siamese government was not co-operating fully and had taken advantage of the attitude of the Americans. Its reluctance was increased by the poor prospects of existing and future crops, and the expectation of Allied claims, though Siam had £7 million gold in Bangkok, £14 million in the hands of the U.K. Custodian of Enemy Property, some dollar credits, and tin and rubber stocks. Opposition within Siam had increasingly focused on the rice issue, and the present government might not dare to sign the agreement. And the Regent's administration was 'probably the most friendly we are likely to see in power in Siam for some time'. The fundamental problem of inflation would remain if the free rice demand were modified; but modifying it would alleviate the problem and produce the rice. The alternatives were to commandeer stocks, though that was neither militarily practicable nor politically desirable and would destroy the hope of future surpluses; to maintain the demand; to modify it by reducing the tonnage or extending the period; or to withdraw it altogether¹⁸⁹.

At the ministerial meeting, the Treasury representative proposed that the British should not drop their demand, but that, when the agreement was signed, should sell the Siamese government, for eventual payment in sterling, one or two hundred thousand ounces of gold, to be used by Doll to induce Siamese holders of rice to part with it, the Siamese government putting up an equivalent amount in gold. Bevin was attracted by the idea. He also thought that the rice claim should not be abated, but that, if the Siamese government argued that the surplus was less than 1.5 million tons, the exact amount should be determined by the Rice Commission. Sir Ben Smith stated that abandoning the claim was the only sure way to produce rice, that the Americans would not approve the proposal, that it was anomalous to demand rice, but not tin or rubber. Bevin said that he had not at first favoured the demand, but was persuaded to agree in view of 'urgent pressure' from other departments. 'He added that he was in this difficulty that to give way on the rice issue might be interpreted as weakness and might destroy the prospects of coming to a satisfactory general agreement with Siam.' It was agreed that the Rice Unit might, as an interim measure, purchase rice for sterling. The situation in the next few weeks was critical: the rice ration in Malaya had been reduced, and this would lead to 'political troubles'¹⁹⁰.

The rice issue had been thrust forward as a major political issue in Thailand. The other political issues remained. Bird had reported that Seni had declared that no government could return the 1940 cessions on the request of the French alone and still survive. He reminded the Prime Minister that Denning had reserved the right to include a provision requiring the return of the territories in the British agreement. But he told the Foreign Office that to do this would damage Anglo-Siamese relations permanently¹⁹¹. Denning, about to receive the dele-

189 FE(M) (45) 16, 8 December 1945, F.O.371/46570 [F11584/1349/40].

190 FE(M) (45) 4th, 11 December 1945, CAB96/9.

191 Telegram, 7 December 1945, No.867, F.O.371/46554 [F11299/296/40].

gation at Singapore, noted not only the Siamese attitude to the French, but the reported intention still to 'prevaricate'. He wanted instructions on the French question and on rice¹⁹². Anderson had suggested that Denning should be instructed to do no more than express 'a pious declaration of hope' that Siam would soon negotiate with France¹⁹³. In fact he was told to maintain the right to include a clause in the agreement up to its signature. Actual inclusion in the agreement, however, would probably not be 'desirable or practicable'. Probably the key lay with the Americans, and if British policy on rice, currently being discussed by ministers, were modified so as to satisfy the State Department, possibly the U.S. might join the U.K. to advise Siam to return the territories and open negotiations on that basis. Denning might reopen the negotiations by inviting the Thais to report on the questions left open at Kandy¹⁹⁴.

These instructions Denning found quite unsatisfactory. Such a line would merely encourage the Siamese to go on 'procrastinating'. He deferred the talks till 11 December. 'Unless I hear from you to the contrary before then I propose to talk to the Siamese on their failure to sign. . . . I propose to point out that Heads of Agreement are not an instrument of negotiation but minimum terms which Great Britain considers Siam is under an inescapable obligation to accept. . . .' If, after any reference to Bangkok required, the Siamese do not sign the letters, 'I should propose to leave them here to rot and would hold no further discussions with them until they indicate a change of heart which might not be until the end of January or early February after the elections'. This approach was not approved at the Foreign Office. 'With famine threatening it is essential to avoid any action which might have the effect of hindering the flow of rice. . . .' Until the ministers had considered the free rice question, Denning was not to face the Siamese with an ultimatum based on the Heads. 'Moreover, at this stage of the negotiations, it seems possible that Siamese, knowing our urgent need of their rice, may not react in the desired sense to a brusque approach'. Soon after, the results of the ministerial meeting were telegraphed to Denning¹⁹⁵.

The reopening of the negotiation was surrounded by publicity. A newspaper article suggested that Britain was making 'new demands'. This was denied, but it was not felt that detail could be revealed¹⁹⁶. Another article in the Indian press suggested that the presence of Indian troops was associating India with the growing Siamese hatred of Britain¹⁹⁷. Denning wondered whether some publicity should be given to the British point of view¹⁹⁸. Coultas

192 Telegram, 8 December 1945, No.878, F.O.371/46555 [F11392/296/40].

193 Minute, F.O.371/46554 [F11299/296/40].

194 Telegram, 8 December 1945, No.1201, F.O.371/46555 [F11392/296/40].

195 Telegram, 10 December 1945, No.887, and replies, 10, 11 December, Nos.1206, 1225, F.O.371/46555 [F11463/296/40].

196 Telegram, 10 December 1945, No.857, and attachments, F.O.371/46555 [F11406/296/40].

197 Telegram, 10 December 1945, No.886, F.O.371/46555 [F11538/296/40].

198 Telegram, 8 December 1945, No.880, F.O.371/46555 [F11407/296/40].

urged that the Heads of Agreement and annex be purged of clauses now superfluous. If this were done promptly, they could be published after the exchange of letters. This would make a virtue of necessity—since secrecy could not be maintained anyway—and possibly ‘reap some benefit’ by showing that the terms were not harsh. D6, over tin and rubber, might be cut out, also most of E, and some clauses in the annex dealing with cooperation against the Japanese¹⁹⁹.

A United Press despatch from Stanley Rich in Bangkok, apparently prompted by Seni²⁰⁰, also attracted editorial comment in the U.S., denouncing an alleged British attempt to make Siam a colony. Halifax urged a statement, even though the terms of the agreement could not yet be divulged. ‘Unless this is done very shortly we may expect a growing torrent of abuse in the American press for our “imperialistic oppression of Asiatics”.’²⁰¹ A guidance telegram was issued²⁰². But correspondents felt that statements that British requirements were ‘not in the British view harsh’ were ‘insufficient to kill the suspicions created by Bangkok’. Some Congressmen were suggesting that, if the British were behaving like this, they should not receive a loan²⁰³. The kind of statement Denning proposed—setting out Britain’s position, and denying it was that of ‘a brutal domineering and imperialistic nation’—was unlikely to help²⁰⁴.

Late on 14 December, Moffat saw Sansom while he was in bed with grippe, and ‘not very clear as to what he was driving at. He said that State Department were much distressed to learn that Denning had issued an “ultimatum” to the Siamese while our talks with United States were still proceeding.’²⁰⁵ This Denning denied. He was following the instructions of September. He had not been told, he observed, that the conclusion of the agreement depended on American consent: ‘had I received such instructions I would long since have made it clear to Siamese that I was acting under American and not British instruction. . . .’ The Americans were once more trying to prevent signature: their conduct, not his, required explanation²⁰⁶.

In fact, as the bedridden Sansom had been told, the press campaign against the U.K. was threatening to make the U.S. government’s position difficult, and Winant was being told to discuss the situation at the highest level. Allison and Gallman, the counsellor, duly called at the Foreign Office on 18 December. The State Department, it was clear, was ‘extremely concerned’ as to the effect which British terms, as reported in the press, would have on Anglo-American relations and was under heavy pressure to state what it was doing to protect American interests and secure fair treatment for Siam. The two emissaries communicated a document,

199 Minute, 11 December 1945, F.O.371/46555 [F11538/296/40].

200 Ray, pp.166-8.

201 Telegram, 11 December 1945, F.O.371/46555 [F11558/296/40].

202 Telegram, 14 December 1945, No.12523, F.O.371/46556 [F11915/296/40].

203 Note by R.F. Scott, 14 December 1945, F.O.371/46555 [F11710/296/40].

204 Telegram, 14 December 1945, No.920, *ibid*.

205 Telegram, 15 December 1945, No.8366, F.O.371/46555 [F11774/296/40].

206 Telegram, 17 December 1945, No.938, F.O.371/46556 [F11867/296/40].

which stated that the U.S. would urge the Siamese, through Yost in Bangkok, not to sign. One issue was the rice levy. On this the U.S., while disapproving, had tried to meet British views, but now it urged the British to reconsider their position. The proposed levy and the uncertainty over the effect of British demands were detrimental to the basic objective of increasing the availability and production of rice, since they weakened the Siamese government and destroyed their will to cooperate. The British should be content with the offer of 240,000 tons. The statement declared that the U.S. would defer resuming diplomatic relations for a few days in order to receive the British reply; but if the British could not meet its views, it would resume relations at once, and feel free to comment, probably in public, on the proposed agreement. Gallman was told that this was a 'virtual ultimatum'. He asked for 'a final effort to bridge the remaining gap'. He was told that the annex was to be pruned, and the free rice clause modified so that the amount would be determined by the appropriate authorities with a ceiling of 1.5 million tons. A copy of the revised text of the annex was given to him, and he thought it met the State Department's views²⁰⁷.

The conversation also covered the security clauses. On these Allison had already seen Wilson-Young. If C1 were designed to facilitate the negotiation of a regional defence scheme, he had said, a link with C2 seemed unobjectionable. There was, however, 'a tendency in some American quarters to suspect that Clause C1, for the very reason that standing by itself it appeared to impose no practical obligation of any kind on the Siamese Government, was in reality designed to secure for H.M. Government, if not a Protectorate over Siam, then at least some special military position or rights'. Wilson-Young had regretted that such suspicions persisted, despite all the British had done and were doing to modify the agreement. The aim was not to create a special military position for the British in Siam, but to provide for the period before the United Nations was set up. He had suggested sending a written statement to this effect²⁰⁸, and with COS agreement²⁰⁹, this had been done²¹⁰. Gallman was now told that the British government were disappointed that the State Department were still dissatisfied. He asked for a further expression of British views. COS were told of the Americans' 'ultimatum', 'a most surprising and unusual development'²¹¹. Lord Portal still wanted C1 and 2 separate, but COS agreed to include the word 'and'²¹².

The State Department now accepted all the British points, though they wondered whether further explanations might not clear up what seemed genuine misunderstandings on the part

207 Telegrams, 18 December 1945, Nos. 12685, 12686, F.O.371/46555 [F11774/296/40].

208 Minute, 8 December 1945, and Wilson-Young to Stapleton, 10 December, F.O.371/46555 [F11582/296/40].

209 COS (45) 284th, 14 December 1945, F.O.371/46556 [F11870/296/40]; CAB79/42.

210 Telegram, 14 December 1945, No.12528, F.O.371/46570 [F11547/1349/40].

211 Wilson-Young to Price, 19 December 1945, F.O.371/46557 [F12158/296/40]. COS (45) 286th, CAB79/42.

212 COS (45) 287th, 21 December 1945, CAB79/41. Telegram, s.d., No.12835, F.O.371/46555 [F11774/296/40].

of the Siamese²¹³. New instructions were issued to Yost²¹⁴, and a press release indicated that the Anglo-American conversations had concluded²¹⁵.

The discussions, renewed in Singapore, had begun with an offer of 1.5 million tons of free rice, coupled with a memorandum indicating the difficulties in the way of fulfilling it. The prewar exports were 1,368,345 tons p.a., of which 67.72% was sound white rice. In the war, productive capacity and transport were damaged, and the rice yield for 1945 was estimated at 2,594,000 as compared with 3,552,000 prewar. Internal consumption was estimated at 2,168,000. The exportable surplus was only 426,000, of which sound white rice would constitute only 239,000 tons. The value of 1.5 million tons would be 740 million baht, three times the revenue. A heavy burden would be placed on the taxpayers, and Siam would lose foreign exchange, necessary for reconstruction even of the rice industry itself. The Foreign Office instructed Denning to accept the offer, and agreed to include a proportion of broken rice. But it pointed out that the wartime surplus—which Seni had said amounted to 1.5 million tons—was not mentioned, and that the Unit had estimated that 1.7 million tons were available from rice already harvested²¹⁶.

Prince Viwat was authorized to sign²¹⁷. He said that the Siamese government had decided to accept the terms as the minimum Britain would offer, though, owing to the dissolution of the Assembly, it could implement only such of the Heads as did not involve legislative action. Denning spoke of omitting the rice clause and covering the offer by an exchange of letters, but the Prince objected. It was apparent, Denning thought, that the Siamese government had taken the plunge only by putting 'the blame on us. The Prince has told me that there was a considerable argument in the Cabinet, and that the only way round the Assembly decision was to say that as terms were not subject to negotiation, the question of modification did not arise.' An 'outburst of anti-British feeling' might ensue. 'Given tactful and sympathetic handling I am advised that the harm done will not necessarily be permanent.' But unless the British were careful over the rice question, 'we may do irreparable damage to our relations with Siam, in which case America and perhaps also China, will not be slow to take advantage of our error. I think we should be wise to bear in mind that it is to our advantage to have Siam as a good neighbour and not as a resentful one seeking other friends in order to act to our detriment'²¹⁸.

Denning had made the reservation over the Indochinese territories. He asked what he

213 Telegram, 21 December 1945, No.8494, F.O.371/46556 [F12148/296/40].

214 Telegram, 22 December 1945, No.8524, F.O.371/46557 [F12168/296/40].

215 Telegram, 22 December 1945, No.8525, F.O.371/46557 [F12173/296/40].

216 Telegram, 12 December 1945, No.899, and reply, 13 December, No. 1234, F.O. 371/46571 [F11608/1349/40].

217 Telegram, 14 December 1945, No.923, F.O.371/46555 [F11682/296/40].

218 Telegram, 15 December 1945, Nos.926-927, F.O.371/46556 [F11778/296/40].

should now do about the French, and was initially told he need not do more than maintain the reservation orally²¹⁹. After a suggestion from Denning and representations from the French themselves, it was agreed to exchange notes with the Siamese after the main exchange of letters, recording British nonrecognition of the 1941 transfers²²⁰.

The problem of the French had perhaps not greatly interfered with the Anglo-Thai negotiations after all. The issues of recognition had. Initially there had been some prospect of an early bargain, rice for recognition, despite the economic problems the Thais foresaw. The British, though ready for a deal, did not wish to appear to yield, and an early settlement was impeded by the Mountbatten agreement. A satisfactory settlement was still possible in October. But the same obstacle still presented itself, though the British were prepared to make concessions on the constitutional issue. By this time, however, there were growing political pressures within Thailand. The rice question became a political issue, too, not simply an economic one. At the same time, the delay pointed up the economic and financial factors involved: for Thailand, the poor crop of 1945-6 and the instability of the tical; for Britain, the approach of famine in southeast Asia. Various schemes for modifying the rice demand emerged, but the British government—in particular the Treasury—was reluctant to accept them. The result was the conclusion of a treaty in which the rice delivery was included as a demand, to which the Thais had unwillingly assented. As a result, they were not likely to be keen to carry it out, even apart from the economic difficulties involved.

The British got the worst of both worlds, neither rice, nor reconciliation. Some were inclined to blame this on American intervention. Perhaps it should rather be blamed on Britain's own tactics. But Britain's secrecy—and even its obstinacy—were a counterpart of U.S. distrust. The Americans put more effort into undermining than into understanding. They believed they were not only sustaining America's interests, but promoting the creation of a friendly Thai government. The total effect of the policy of the Allies was, however, to weaken Pridi. There was no MacArthur in Thailand; there was a kind of Weimar. That was because the U.S., while declining to stop Great Britain, did not support it either. Instead of a joint and moderate Allied demand which Pridi might have safely met, a long Anglo-American and Anglo-Thai wrangle ensued. The British government did not obtain what it wanted. But civilian government in Siam was the ultimate victim.

The constitutional question had again come up. The British envisaged that the final agreement should be effective from the day of signature. Because the Assembly's approval was required for the retrocession of territory, the agreement could not be signed until it had met and approved, though it might be initialled²²¹. The long delay involved owing to the dissolution of the Assembly had concerned the Foreign Office, though it was unwilling, not only to make concessions, but to risk infringing the constitution. Denning now advanced reasons for avoiding a prolonged gap between the preliminary exchange of letters and signature of

219 Telegram, 15 December 1945, No.928, and reply, 16 December, No.1262, F.O.371/46556 [F117799/296/40].

220 Telegram, 17 December 1945, No.933, F.O.371/46556 [F11841/296/40]. Telegram, 22 December, No.1330, F.O.371/46556 [F11868/296/40].

221 Telegram, 20 December 1945, No.1316, F.O.371/46556 [F11839/296/40].

the agreement: a once-for-all decision was best. It would be difficult to explain why Siam and Britain were still at war after the letters had been exchanged. The continued state of war might also be linked with a failure to secure rice²²². Other arguments also led the Foreign Office to shift its view. For one thing, the question of publicity for the agreement—which the Thais were likely to leak, but which would not normally be officially published till concluded—would be solved. The U.S. were impatient to resume relations with Siam²²³. It was best, the Foreign Office concluded, to take the small risk of repudiation by the Assembly when it met²²⁴. The agreement was signed on 1 January 1946.

222 Telegram, 26 December 1945, No.989, F.O.371/46557 [F12220/296/40].

223 Telegram, 27 December 1945, No.8591, F.O.371/46557 [F12315/296/40].

224 Telegram, 28 December 1945, No.1370, F.O.371/46557 [F12303/296/40].