

**Speech by H.E. Pisan Manawapat, Ambassador of Thailand to the United States
Royal Thai Armed Forces Day Reception**

Fort Myer, Virginia

9 February 2017

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Patrick Murphy,

**Major General Bradley Becker, Brigadier General Stephen Sklenka, Brigadier
General Kevin Wulfhorst,**

Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of my military attaches, Senior Colonel Phisit, Captain Chaiyong and Group Captain Nattapon, my wife and I would like to thank each one of you, and welcome you all to the Royal Thai Armed Forces Day reception.

I am grateful to my ASEAN colleagues, especially Ambassador Mai Sayavongs of Lao PDR, Ambassador Dato Serbini of Brunei Darussalam, Ambassador Aung Lynn of Myanmar, and Ambassador Tan Sri Zulhasnan of Malaysia for their gracious presence.

This is not quite an occasion for celebration as in previous years. Rather, it is an evening for solemn reflection and remembrance of His Majesty late King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, who passed away last October.

We honor him for his extraordinary 70-year reign. From birth, he began a special connection with the United States. Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the late King paid a State Visit to the United States twice, and had fond memories of this great nation. He was a staunch supporter of the Thai-US alliance throughout his reign. Without him, the alliance would not be as strong and enduring as it is today.

I also wish to pay tribute to men and women in uniform of our two countries who have forged, since the Korean War, an indelible bond of camaraderie that will endure any test and challenge. They have stood by each other. They bled together and had each other's back. In the air, at sea, and on the ground, they continue to train together on a regular basis. This spirit and history of mutual sacrifices and friendship are recorded as one of the richest chapters in our bilateral relations.

The new King, His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn, acceded to the throne last December. As a US-trained and experienced fighter pilot, he has good memories of the United States. I am confident that, under his reign, the Thai-US alliance would continue to advance and strengthen in the years to come.

Over the past year, no two people in the United States have done more than President Obama and Secretary Carter in strengthening the defense ties between the United States and ASEAN. From the Sunnylands Summit to the Hawaii Defense Ministerial meeting, where I was able to observe and attend, we have come a long way.

And here, I would also like to commend colleagues, men and women from the Department of Defense, for the hard work leading to and at the Hawaii meeting. Lovely Aloha weather and ambience aside, the meeting was serious, productive and a complete success.

The Defense Minister of Thailand had a good talk with Secretary Carter. I can tell that they had a good rapport, reflecting the depth of mutual goodwill between both sides. We want to build on this strong foundation with the new administration.

We are pleased that President Trump, Secretary Mattis, Secretary Tillerson and General Flynn have been very clear that they value and will work to strengthen the ties with allies. The United States can rest assured that she will find a willing partner in Thailand, as we work to further strengthen our alliance for peace and stability of the Asia Pacific.

I believe that we are off to a good start. Next Tuesday, February 14 – the Valentine’s Day, the 36th Cobra Gold exercise led by Thai and American armed forces will begin in Thailand. This is the largest annual military exercise in the entire Indo-Asia-Pacific region, with 29 countries participating.

We look forward to welcoming the Pacific Commander Admiral Harris, who will be there at the opening ceremony, with several thousands U.S. personnel taking part in this exercise.

Thank you again for being a part of this evening to honor our late King Bhumibol, to reflect on his extraordinary life and contributions, and, together, to reaffirm the same message of friendship, mutual goodwill and close cooperation between our two nations and peoples that he conveyed to the American people during his address to a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress in June 1960.

Thank you and have a good evening.
