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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

July 1994
This thesis is entirely the result of my own work

Julaporn Euarukskul
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Abstract

This thesis is a study of Thailand's foreign policy towards Vietnam in the period following Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia through to the settlement of the Cambodian conflict under the terms of the Paris Agreement on Cambodia in October 1991. Among other things, the study examines the evolution of Thai policy towards Vietnam in the context of the Cambodian conflict, the major issue dominating the relationship between the two countries during this period. In particular, it focuses upon two different policies pursued by the Thai government: the decision to cooperate with China against Vietnam and the subsequent transformation of that policy under the Chatchai Choonhavan Administration.

The central argument of the thesis is that, despite socio-economic changes taking place in Thailand during the 1980s and the concomitant emergence of participatory institutions in Thai politics, the Thai military continued to play a dominant role in formulating Thailand's policy towards Vietnam. It will be shown that the policy was largely formulated in terms of the military's perceptions of internal and external changes, its military-oriented attitude and its corporate and personal interest.
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Chapter I

Introduction

This thesis is a study of Thailand's foreign policy towards Vietnam in the period from Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 to the settlement of the Cambodian conflict under the Paris Agreement on Cambodia in October 1991. The study examines the evolution of Thai policy towards Vietnam in the context of the Cambodian conflict, the major issue dominating the relationship between the two countries during this period. More specifically, it is a two-fold effort to account for the evolution of the covert Sino-Thai alignment against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia during the Prem Administration (March 1980-August 1988), and the subsequent transformation of that policy under the Chatchai Choonhavan Administration (August 1988-February 1991) to one which emphasised the building of commercial relations with Indochina.

Background of the study

Studies of Thailand's foreign policy in the post-Second World War period have focused mainly on the roles and influence of bureaucrats, particularly the military who occupied most of top positions responsible for foreign policy formulation. During this period, Thailand was held to be governed by a "bureaucratic polity",¹ the bureaucracy itself constituting the main arena of politics. It has been argued that only a few non-bureaucratic institutions had any real influence in policy making and policy implementation during this period. David Wilson, for example, has explained that in the competition between bureaucratic cliques, the army became the most influential group, as it was the best organised and most powerful branch of the bureaucracy.²

During the 1950s and 1960s when Thailand was under military rule, military leaders largely controlled Thai foreign relations, with all other institutions playing only subsidiary roles. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, was determined by the close personal relations of the Minister and top army leaders.³ Thus, Thai foreign policy of this time reflected the aims and interests of the armed forces.

¹ This was described by Fred W. Riggs, Thailand: The Modernisation of the Bureaucratic Polity, (Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, 1966).


³ While this relationship did enhance aspects of the Ministry's role, army leaders were free to bypass the Ministry on major foreign security-related issues. This is evident from Thanat Khoman's prominent role as Foreign Minister under successive military regimes from 1958 to 1971. However, Thanat was bypassed on security issues, notably the agreements concerning American bases in Thailand. See Bhansoon Ladavalya, Thailand's Foreign Policy Under Kukrit Pramoj: A Study in Decision-Making, Ph.D Thesis, Northern Illinios University, 1980, pp. 25-42.
For much of the period, Thailand supported the American containment policy in the region. Although ideologically "anti-communist", Thai military leaders also made use of American aid to maintain and strengthen the domestic position of the military. Aid was used by successive military regimes to suppress potential political rivals.

Following the overthrow of military rule in October 1973, the army suffered a severe psychological shock and was briefly obliged to adopt a low profile in politics. The event came at a time when there was a drastic change in regional politics, and the Thai military had lost its American patron. In the period after October 1973, the formulation of foreign policy shifted from the military to civilian leaders for the first time in decades. However, the civilian governments which held power during this time were ultimately unable to exert control over politics in general and over security-related policies in particular.

The period under study is a complicated one with regard to political developments in Thailand. Throughout the period, the Thai economy grew at a remarkable rate. The country also experienced an unprecedented period in which the military was unable to carry out a successful coup. The longevity of the parliamentary system thus provided a rare opportunity for the emergence and development of political parties. In consequence, the period witnessed a greater direct participation in politics of people such as the educated class and business persons.

As a result, the 1980s have seen an intensive debate as to whether Thailand can still be considered a "bureaucratic polity". It has been suggested that the rapid change weakened the bureaucratic domination of the polity, and that Thailand has been transformed into a bourgeois polity where capitalists control the power structure. Studies in the area of economics have suggested that the role of non-bureaucratic forces in the formulating of public policy have become more pronounced, and that bureaucrats no longer monopolise policy formulation.4

Political scientists still disagree as to whether the "bureaucratic polity" has been transformed. On the one hand, recent studies by Pisan and Guyot suggest that there have been fundamental changes in the political system since the successful 1977 coup,

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4 See, for example, Anek Laothamatas, Business Association and the New Political Economy of Thailand: From Bureaucratic Polity to Liberal Corporatism, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); and Chaisan Samudavanija and Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Liberalization without Democracy", in James W. Morley (ed), Driven by Growth: Political Change in the Asia-Pacific Region (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993). A study by Anek on the role of business associations concludes that Thailand has ceased to be a bureaucratic polity, at least in the realm of economics, because organised business have emerged as autonomous and effective non-bureaucratic groups and the policy of the government has no longer been solely determined by the bureaucratic elite.
which could be called the "institutionalisation of democracy." Ramsay also poses the same view, that the non-bureaucratic forces in the 1980s have been able to exert themselves in government decision-making and thus the polity in the 1980s was predominantly a compromise between civilian and military power. On the other hand, Thai political scientists such as Chai-anan, Suchit and Sukhumbhand contend that the military maintained a dominant role in politics, without imposing a military regime. Moreover, they argue that although participatory institutions have played a greater role, there has still been the absence of institutionalised rules and practices which would allow the development of greater long-term political participation.

This study will show that the role of the military was still pronounced in the formulation of Thailand's Vietnam policy. Despite the enhanced role of participatory political institutions, the influence of politicians and political parties was still limited in the issues relating to "national security".

**Background of the policy**

On 25 December 1978, Vietnamese troops launched an offensive into the Democratic Kampuchea (DK). The Khmer Rouge regime was subsequently overthrown and the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) created in Phnom Penh on 8 January 1979. Thus began a decade of Vietnamese occupation which, at its peak, saw some 200,000 Vietnamese troops stationed in the PRK.

The invasion was largely a consequence of the triangular conflict between Vietnam, the Democratic Kampuchea, and China. Relations between the communist leadership of Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge had been troubled since the war years. In the post-liberation period, the Democratic Kampuchea regime not only rejected the Vietnamese emphasis on close ties between the three Indochinese countries, but further established close relations with China at the time of growing Sino-Vietnamese hostility. As the

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5 Pisan and Guyot consider the two failed coups of 1981 and 1985 to indicate that the Thai "bureaucratic polity" has been transformed by the rise of non-bureaucratic forces. See Pisan Suriyamongkon and James Guyot, *The Bureaucratic Polity at Bay*, (Bangkok: Graduate School of Public Administration, 1986); and *Between Two Coups: The Continuing Institutionalisation of Democracy in Thailand*, (The Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1989).


Sino-Soviet confrontation intensified in the mid-1970s, pro-Soviet Vietnam was perceived by China as a potential threat to its security. Conversely, Democratic Kampuchea received military assistance from China, causing Vietnam's leadership to believe that the Democratic Kampuchea might become a springboard for Chinese attack on Vietnam.

Nevertheless, Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia provoked a serious conflict between Thailand and Vietnam which lasted for most of the next decade. Thai leaders believed their country's security was seriously threatened by the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia and they adopted a range of measures designed to end Vietnam's occupation. It will be argued below that the most important measure was the Thai leaders' decision to covertly cooperate with China in assisting the deposed Khmer Rouge forces, both militarily and economically.

The Thai decision to ally with China against Vietnam was one of the more dramatic developments to occur in Thai foreign policy during the 1980s. Following the disengagement of U.S. military forces from mainland Southeast Asia, in 1973, Thailand launched a process of foreign policy adjustment, distancing itself from its long-standing relationship with the U.S. and adopting a policy of "equidistance" between great powers. Throughout this period, Thailand's relationship with communist Vietnam remained problematic. The Thai security establishment felt that "peaceful co-existence" with Vietnam—a country long perceived by the military as a threat to Thai national security—was impossible. In the post-Second World War period, the two countries had disagreed sharply over Thailand's support for U.S. policy in the Vietnam war, while the Thais had accused the Vietnamese of supporting the Thai communist insurgents.

Following the communist take-over in mainland China, China was perceived by Thailand as its principal enemy. It continued to be viewed so until Vietnam invaded Cambodia. Successive military regimes which ruled Thailand during most of this period saw Thailand as threatened by communist China's "expansionist policies", in particular by China's support for the insurgent movement of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Since its creation, the CPT had followed the Maoist line and received assistance from China. Its clandestine radio station—"Voice of the People of Thailand" which declared its policy of armed struggle against the Thai government in 1965 - was located in southern China. Until the end of the 1960s, Thai military leaders believed that Chinese support was the main factor accounting for the growth of the communist-led insurgency in Thailand. Speaking to the UN General Assembly in 1968, the Thai representative to the UN declared that:

Since its establishment, mainland China has relentlessly and conscientiously sought to impose its hegemony on neighbouring countries by various means, including naked armed aggression, insidious aggression under the label of "war of liberation", subversion
and infiltration... It is single-mindedly dedicated to the overthrow of legitimate authorities of neighbouring states... Chinese communist leadership has in effect declared a guerilla war on Thailand...8

Thus the establishment of diplomatic relations with China by a civilian government in 1975 caused severe conflict between civilian leaders and the security establishment—whose leaders argued that China had never renounced its support to the CPT. The question of China's support for Thai insurgents remained a contentious issue between the two countries up until early 1978 since China maintained its traditional position that state-to-state relations were independent of traditional ties between communist parties.

Thailand's support for the Khmer Rouge in the aftermath of the Vietnamese invasion was remarkable. There is little doubt that the Khmer Rouge rule was a saga of atrocity with tragic consequences for the Cambodian people.9 Relations between Thailand and the Khmer Rouge were strained. In 1976-77, there were daily reports of Thai villagers being looted, kidnapped and even killed by Khmer Rouge soldiers. In early 1977, for example, Thai Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chamanand publicly declared that the Thai army would move in retaliation against the Khmer Rouge and "cut out [the Cambodian town of] Battambang" if more Thai civilians were killed.10

The Khmer Rouge regime also provided massive support to Thailand's communist insurgents. CPT guerillas were provided with base-camps inside Cambodia and manpower backup on request.11 Between December 1976 and December 1978, the area along the Thai-Cambodian border was described as the "hottest place" in Thailand. In 1978, it accounted for about half guerilla-initiated military incidents in Thailand.12


9 As Chandler has pointed out, Khmer Rouge rule had been "a disaster with few beneficiaries and millions of victims... its brutal methods had come close to destroying the country." The number of Cambodians that died as a result of the regime's policies between 1975 and 1979 is estimated between 800,000, or 1 in 10, and 1 million, or 1 in 8. See David P. Chandler, Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 168. See also Ben Kiernan, "The Genocide in Cambodia, 1975-79", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1990.


Despite this, covert Sino-Thai cooperation in assisting the Khmer Rouge remained one of Thailand's principal strategies in opposing the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia for most of the period in the 1980s. Moreover, Sino-Thai cooperation subsequently expanded to other security issues, most notably, China's assistance in strengthening Thai defence capacity.

During the Prem Administration (March 1980-August 1988), a broad-based consensus appears to have emerged within Thai political circles regarding the value of a two-pronged policy—covert military cooperation with China in assisting the Khmer Rouge-dominated resistance coalition, and diplomatic cooperation with ASEAN and the United Nations in order to isolate Vietnam—politically and economically. These two policies were the cornerstone of Thailand's Vietnam policy until August 1988 when the newly-elected Prime Minister Chatchai Choonhavan announced his intention to transform "the Indochina battlefield into a marketplace." During the course of the subsequent months, Chatchai openly encouraged the Thai business community to re-establish economic links with the communist countries of the region; proposed a number of infrastructure development programs in the northeast of Thailand with the aim of turning the region into a centre for Thai/IndoChinese economic relations; and finally entered into a direct dialogue with the long-isolated Vietnamese-backed Phnom Penh regime. From the outset, however, there was considerable domestic opposition to the Chatchai initiative. The Foreign Ministry immediately reiterated its opposition to any change of policy towards Vietnam, until such a time as the Vietnamese had completely withdrawn from Cambodia. This position was also taken by elements within the military.

Studies of Thai policy towards Vietnam in the 1978-91 period

Most of the academic literature put forward to explain Thai policy towards Vietnam between 1978 and 1991 has focused upon the period of the Prem Administration. Much of the literature consists of short articles of restricted analysis. Little has been published on the Chatchai effort to reformulate policy in the period after August 1988. Studies of Thailand's Vietnam policy during the Prem period fall into three broad categories. The first examines the Thai government's policy towards Vietnam within the broader context of relations between ASEAN and Indochinese countries, paying particular attention to how the Thai-Vietnamese conflict over Cambodia affected ASEAN's development in the 1980s.\(^{13}\) The second emphasises the regional security environment

at the time of the Vietnamese invasion and explains the impact which the invasion had upon Thai national security. A central feature of this second category of study has been the effort to identify specific obstacles to improve relations between Thailand and Vietnam, and much has been made of the long-standing adversarial relations between the two countries.\textsuperscript{14} In addition, one attempt has been made to explain Thailand's Vietnam policy within the context of contemporary Thai politics and foreign policy. In this later study, the main argument is that the "Vietnam issue" enhanced the role of the bureaucracy, in particular, the army in policy formulation process. The "Vietnam issue" is also said to have enabled the military to play a decisive role on various issues of domestic politics, notably, monopolising all channels of information concerning border security and concomitantly implementing measures without the knowledge of other government agencies. Moreover, the "Vietnam issue" had revived the "security syndrome" in Thailand as had been evident from the high priority given to Thailand's security relations with the U.S. and China.\textsuperscript{15}

The two studies on Sino-Thai relations which deserve particular mention here are Sukhumbhand Paribatra, \textit{From Enmity to Alignment: Thailand's Evolving Relations with China}, 1987, and Tawanchai N. Xoomsai, \textit{China's Role in Thai-Vietnamese Tensions}, 1987. These studies examine the early period of Sino-Thai cooperation against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia within the context of broader relations between Thailand and China. Both studies argue that Chinese support was the dominant factor in determining Thailand's "hard-line" policy towards Vietnam. Sukhumbhand suggests that the "Sino-Thai partnership" took place because of "an informal exchange of quid pro quo" concerning the CPT and Chinese supplies to the Khmer Rouge. In the succeeding period, this informal agreement contributed to the strengthening of the Khmer resistance forces, the decline of the CPT, and the strengthening of Thailand's military capabilities. China's commitment to Thai security thus restored Thai self-


confidence and "made the structure of the [Cambodian] conflict less amenable to resolution through compromise."¹⁶

Tawanchai suggests that Thailand's anti-Vietnam policy—in the aftermath of the invasion—was largely due to "Chinese pressure" which was "exerted on the Thais very early." Despite the Thai government's initial desire to maintain neutrality in the Cambodian conflict, it adopted a "hard-line" policy towards Vietnam after China used the CPT as a bargaining chip in its attempt to obtain Thailand's cooperation. In the subsequent period, he argues that the Chinese "left no stone unturned in their diplomacy to keep Thai foreign policy supportive of their hard-line strategy towards Vietnam," and asserts that "the steadfastness of China's commitment to defend Thailand against Vietnam" was the "dominant factor" that prevented Thailand from "re-appraising" its policy towards Vietnam on the Cambodian conflict.¹⁷

Despite the detailed nature of both studies, the materials used by the two authors are somewhat limited. Until recently, Sino-Thai cooperation was treated by Thai leaders as a forbidden subject. As such, only a few documents were available on the Thai side (see discussion of this issue below). In recent years, however, new information on Sino-Thai cooperation has emerged to light. This study thus hopes to provide a more detailed and complete account of Thailand's alignment with China during the Cambodian conflict.

**Aims of the study**

This study aims to provide an analysis both of the process by which Thailand's policy towards Vietnam was formulated following the invasion of Cambodia and the subsequent effort to reshape the policy during the Chatchai period. The central argument of the thesis is that, despite socio-economic changes taking place in Thailand during the 1980s, the military continued to play a dominant role in Thailand's policy towards Vietnam. In this respect, the policy was largely formulated in terms of the military's perception of internal and external changes, its military-oriented attitude and its corporate and personal interest.

In particular, this study focuses on the following issues.

1. The decision-making process which underpinned Thailand's decision to cooperate with China against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. I will trace the origin of the covert anti-Vietnam agreement between Thailand and China and the persistence of the

¹⁶ Sukhumbhand, *From Enmity to Alignment: Thailand's Evolving Relations with China*, pp. 16-31.

Sino-Thai alignment during the Prem period. It has generally been assumed that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia posed a serious threat to the security of Thailand, and that this factor determined Thailand's hostile policy towards Vietnam, but little effort has been made to examine thoroughly the origins of the Sino-Thai alignment. I will examine the perceptions of the "Vietnamese threat" held by the then Thai military leaders and ask whether they really believed that the Vietnamese military would use Cambodia as a base for aggression against Thailand. Above all I shall seek to explain why the Thai military chose to set aside its 'traditional' concerns about Chinese regional hegemony and ignore the threat posed by armed Khmer Rouge fighters operating from bases on Thai soil, when formulating its post-invasion policy on Vietnam.

To fully understand Thailand's policy towards Vietnam on the Cambodian issue during the Prem period, it is also necessary to look at the individuals who played crucial parts in formulating policy. While the military was the principal force behind Thailand's policy towards Vietnam, there was a strong consensus among key policy-makers in the other two foreign policy-making institutions: the Foreign Ministry and the National Security Council. This was one of the rare occasions in which there was unity among the key foreign policy-makers.

It should be noted that Sino-Thai cooperation in general was treated by Thai policy-makers as confidential throughout the Cambodian conflict. In particular, two issues were forbidden for official discussion—even in the period after the Cambodian conflict 'officially' ended in late 1991. One was the *quid pro quo* between Thailand and China in the aftermath of the invasion concerning the Chinese use of Thai route to supply the deposed Khmer Rouge forces in return for a reduction of Chinese aid to the Communist Party of Thailand. The other was the nature of Sino-Thai support to the Khmer resistance groups. The government has made no public reference to the two issues. Moreover, in the author's discussion and interviews in 1992 with a number of Thai policy-makers who were involved in formulating the Vietnam policy, many remained reluctant to touch upon these issues, or asked that their comments be off-the-record.

The reason for such secrecy is unclear. One possible reason is that the military's role in politics was partly derived from its anti-communism and the fear of the threat from China. It was thus difficult to reverse the policy without harming its legitimacy. Moreover, the fact that the collapse of the CPT in the early 1980s was largely due to the reduction of Chinese support and the change of Chinese policy towards the Party could easily have been an embarrassment for military leaders as well.

In any case, this secrecy greatly limited early studies of Thailand's Vietnam policy. More importantly for purposes of this thesis, the author was able to interview key Thai policy makers who were involved in formulating the policy. This study therefore provides information which has not appeared in earlier studies.
2. I examine Prime Minister Chatthai's effort to reformulate Thailand's Indochinese policy during August 1988 - February 1991 period. As noted above, the Chatthai policy caused considerable domestic political controversy, and the process of implementation was not unproblematic. When the Prime Minister undertook to pursue a policy of reconciliation with Thailand's Indochinese neighbours, the Foreign Ministry refused to depart from its longstanding hard-line policy. The military's position was ambiguous. Some key military leaders appeared to support, and participate in, Chatthai's Indochinese policy, particularly on the Cambodian question while other elements in the military did not support Chatthai. As a result, Thailand pursued conflicting policies on many issues concerning its relations with Indochina.

By studying these dramatic changes in Thailand's policy towards Vietnam, this study shows how two different concerns motivated Thailand's Indochina policy in the Prem and Chatthai periods. In the first security issues were most relevant while in the second economic issues were predominant. In addition, this study also looks at the continuing relationship between the Thai military and the Khmer Rouge in the period after the Paris Agreement on Cambodia in 1991. It argues that while Thai support to the Khmer Rouge might have been the result of personal and corporate interests, it was also a reflection of conflicting approaches within the Thai government towards Vietnam. The thesis will thus emphasis the importance of political rivalries in formulating foreign policy. While International Relations theorists talk in terms of "national interest", such interest are invariably perceived in different ways by domestic political actors.

**Methodology**

There are two ways of approaching the subject matter as outlined above. The first is to begin with a "general theory" and then see how far the particular case conforms or does not conform with the larger theoretical proposition. For example, the theory might suggest that small and medium-sized countries facing an unfriendly or hostile neighbour would seek the help of a large external power, especially when the large power also has a quarrel with the hostile neighbour. The case of Thailand seeking the aid of China could then be seen as illustrating the theory. The theory would "explain" the practice.

Alternatively, we could approach the problem from the case itself. In reality, particular case are often much more complex than envisaged in theory and do not always fit expectations derived from theory. In practice, the ways in which a small country might deal with a hostile neighbour vary enormously from case to case. The country's approach will be affected by a wide range of factors, both external and domestic. Thus, the focus of the second approach is on the case itself and aims to bring out the richness and complexity of the issues which it raises. The approach is essentially historical and narrative but does not ignore theoretical insights where relevant. But it does not hope to
find a theoretical "key" to understanding the problem in its entirety. It is hoped nevertheless that case studies of this sort will suggest ways in which theory can be modified in order to take account of a broader range of possibilities. In this approach, the "practice" also helps to explain the "theory".

It is the latter approach that has been adopted in this thesis.

The preparation of this study combines research of published and unpublished literature, both in Thai and in English, and the author's interviews with key Thai policymakers who were involved in formulating the Vietnam policy. Most of the interviews were conducted during the first half of 1992. In utilising these interviews, the author has tried to cross-check with other sources wherever possible.

Outline of the study

Chapter II provides a background to Thai foreign policy in the post-Second World War period to 1978.

Chapter III gives a background to Thai-Vietnamese relations from the period when traditional Thai and Vietnamese states were engaged in rivalry over the trans-Mekong area to the period prior to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978.

Chapter IV focuses on the origin of the secret Sino-Thai agreement against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. It analyses the insurgent movement of the CPT, which confronted the Thai government and the origin of the agreement which was built in relations to the CPT. In addition, the chapter looks at the Thai government's attempts, through ASEAN, to mobilise international opposition to Vietnam and to gain U.S. security commitment to Thai security.

Chapter V examines Thailand's security interest in Cambodia and Thai policy-makers' perception of the "Vietnamese threat". The policies of other major actors in the Cambodian conflict, namely Vietnam, China and the Soviet Union, are also analysed.

Chapter VI looks at the factors which contributed to the persistence of the Sino-Thai alignment under the Prem Administration, in particular, the "June 1980 incident"; the two-countries' cooperation in strengthening the Cambodian resistance forces; China's assistance to the Thai defence capacity; the collapse of the CPT; and Thai policymakers' perception of alignment.

Chapter VII examines Prime Minister Chatchai Choonhavan's policy of turning Indochina from "a battlefield into a marketplace." The chapter provides a background to the policy by looking at external development of the Cambodian conflict; Thailand's internal development during the Prem Administration, politically and economically; and
the roles of key-policy makers and perceptions of Thailand's relations with Indochina. Two of Chatchai's initiatives are discussed: his economic policy towards Indochina, and his policy towards the Cambodian conflict.

The final chapter examines Thailand's policy towards Vietnam and Indochina from the period following the coming to power of the Anand Panyarachun Government in February 1991 to the settlement of the Cambodian conflict under the Paris Agreement on Cambodia in October 1991. It also examines the continuing relationship between elements of the Thai military and the Khmer Rouge in the period after the Cambodian settlement.
Chapter II

Thai Foreign Policy

This chapter aims to provide a background to Thai foreign policy in the post-Second World War period to 1978. It thereby sets the scene for an analysis of Thailand's policy towards Vietnam in the period under study.

Foreign policy under the military rule

The period between the 1950s to the end of the 1960s witnessed the converging of interests of successive Thai military regimes and the U.S. As a part of a broader Asian policy, the U.S. policy towards Thailand went through four overlapping phases: it viewed Thailand as a "free world bastion"; a "domino"; a case for counterinsurgency; and the backup for the Indochina war.¹ For successive Thai military regimes which ruled Thailand during this period, the U.S. alliance was deemed beneficial for maintaining the regime against internal subversion and protecting the country from external threat. Military leaders were convinced, in line with the converging U.S. policy, of the communist threat emanating from China and the Chinese-backed North Vietnam. This period thus saw intense Thai involvement in Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia. At the same time, Thailand received massive American economic and military assistance which constituted a crucial part of the U.S. alliance.

Origin of the Thai-American alliance

The close Thai-American alliance was a result of a U.S. concern over Chinese expansion following the emergence of communist China in 1949. The participation of Chinese troops in the Korean war in 1950 led to the U.S.'s anticipation of outright intervention by China in Southeast Asia, particularly in the "hot-spot" of Indochina. In early 1950, the U.S. decided that it was necessary to prevent "further communist expansion" in Southeast Asia.² Under Field Marshal Phibun Songkram regime (1948-57), the alliance was deemed necessary both because of the military leaders' perception of the Chinese threat and their desire for American aid. This led to two foreign policy initiatives in line with U.S. policy. One was the recognition of the French-American backed Bao Dai regime of South Vietnam in February 1950. The other was the dispatch of Thai troops—to join the United Nations forces—in the Korean war in June.


² Ibid., pp. 232, 234.
The Thai fear of China at this stage can be best explained in terms of the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. The country hosted a large population of ethnic Chinese, and its rapid growth, combined with the increasing difficulty in its assimilation into Thai society, was a matter of concern to successive Thai governments from the late nineteenth century. Thus, it was believed that events in China could have a subversive effect on the Chinese community in Thailand.

The Phibun regime's pro-American policy was also born of a desire for material assistance from the U.S. After Thai troops joined the Korean war, the first U.S. military and educational assistance to Thailand followed. Thailand was also the first Southeast Asian country to receive a loan from the World Bank. During 1951-1954, Thailand enjoyed the U.S. aid, totalling at $31.2 million, which was mostly devoted to economic development.

The Thai-American security alliance was formalised by the creation of SEATO in September 1954. Thai leaders justified Thailand's membership by pointing to the threat from China and North Vietnam. In January 1953, China announced the inauguration of a "Thai Nationality Autonomous Area" in southern Yunnan province. Although the creation of this political unit could be seen as an administrative move which was mainly aimed at gaining better control of internal ethnic minorities, it was perceived by Thai leaders as a Chinese attempt to instigate a "Pan-Thai" movement in Thailand's northern provinces.

The events which most alarmed Thai leaders at this time, however, were the inroads made by the Viet Minh in Laos and Cambodia in 1953-1954. As a result, some 5,000

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6 The operation was the Viet Minh's strategy against French troops. During the battle with the French, the Viet Minh saw certain parts of Laos and Cambodia as areas of strategic importance to them. In a major military offensive to divert the French troops from Dien Bien Phu (near the border of northern Laos), the Viet Minh moved forces into the mountainous areas of northeastern, central and southern Laos. In April 1953, they captured the provinces of Sam Neua and parts of Phong Saly, well back from the Thai border, as well as other areas on the frontier of Vietnam. The troops subsequently advanced to within twelve miles of the royal capital of Luang Prabang, but withdrew the same year. Later in December, the Viet Minh forces again advanced to Laos and briefly captured the central Mekong River town of Thakhet, just across the river from the Thai border. They invaded Luang Prabang, in early 1954, and Cambodia in April of the same year. See William J. Duiker, The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 157-160.
Vietnamese inhabitants of Laos and Cambodia were driven into Thailand. In response, the Thai government declared a state of emergency in the nine northeastern provinces. On the one hand, there was concern that some 50,000 ethnic Vietnamese residing in Thailand would become involved in the conflict. On the other hand, it was felt that residents of the northeast region—who were ethnically Lao—would be influenced by events in that country.\(^7\)

Thai anxiety regarding the threat emanating from Laos needs to be understood in terms of the general significance of Laos in relation to Thai security. Until the French colonisation of Indochina in the mid-nineteenth century, a large part of the Kingdom of Laos was under Thai domination. In essence, the area served as the Thai’s buffer area against Vietnam. The perception of Laos as a buffer remained in the 1950s and right through to the 1970s. Geographically, Laos shares approximately eight hundred miles of common border with Thailand, and four hundred miles with Vietnam. China, which borders Laos to the north, is about ninety miles away from Thailand. Moreover, the Thai-Lao border comprised mainly the Mekong River, which was easily crossed. Another source of concern for the Bangkok government was the fact that the population in the northeast of Thailand was largely of ethnic Lao origin and thus was ethnically and culturally closer to the lowland Lao than to the central Thais. In addition, as a result of being neglected by the central administration, the northeastern Thais also showed a sense of alienation and hostility towards the Bangkok government.\(^8\) For all these reasons, Laos was perceived to be of great importance to Thai security.

During the Viet Minh invasion of Laos, U.S. officials shared the concerns of the Thai leaders. Washington gave a high priority to military assistance to Thailand and announced in mid-July 1954 that it would provide weapons, equipment and training assistance to support the increase in Thai officers and technicians. Military aid also rose from $12 million, in 1952, to $55.8 million, in 1953. This latter amount was 2.46 times

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\(^7\) In addition, the Thai government requested the United Nations Security Council to send an observation team, under the Peace Observation Commission, to the areas which had been invaded by the Viet Minh. The government claimed that the communist forces would threaten Thai security. The request, however, was vetoed by the Soviet Union on the grounds that the Indochina issue was being discussed at the Geneva Conference and that any discussion about the issue at the United Nations might impede the Conference’s solution. See Owat Suthiwatnarueput, "Kankhaopen phaki khong pratheithai nai sonthisaya kanpongkan ruankan asiatawanochangai" (Thailand’s membership in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation), in Chantima Ongsurag (ed), Nayobuy tangpratheithai bonthangphrang, [Thai foreign policy at the crossroads], (Bangkok: Rongphim mahawithayalai thammasat, 1990), p. 92 (in Thai).

higher than total Thai military expenditure in that year. The Thai army expanded from 45,000, in 1952, to 80,000, by the end of 1954.9

At this time, the main American concern was the deteriorating situation in Indochina. The election of Dwight Eisenhower as President in late 1952 resulted in a hardening of the American position in Indochina. Eisenhower believed that the previous Truman Administration was responsible for the "loss" of China and he was determined not to allow a similar "loss" in Indochina. Moreover, American leaders believed that the communists were succeeding in Vietnam. France's position in its colony had steadily deteriorated, and had eventually resulted in its defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu on the eve of the Geneva Conference in May 1954. When the Conference opened, the Viet Minh already dominated more than three-quarters of Vietnam and was poised to take control of the rest.10 Furthermore, the agreement from the Conference in July authorised the Viet Minh to administer the northern part of Vietnam. This was tantamount to an endorsement of a communist state.11

In this context, the improvement of Thailand's defence capacity was seen as a matter of urgency, both because the country was perceived to be under an immediate threat and because of its strategic importance to the U.S.'s policy in the region.12 Thus, on 8 September 1954, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) was created in order to provide the basis for American involvement in this region. Apart from Thailand, the organisation also included Laos, Cambodia and "the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam" into the "treaty area" where the provision of the article applied. However, the security commitments of SEATO were unclear, for it only stated that the members would immediately consult with others in the event of armed attack to any members.


11 In July 1954, the Geneva Conference reached two major decisions on Vietnam. First, a "provisional military demarcation line" at the seventeenth parallel would be established, and the Viet Minh would be regrouped to the north, while the French Union Forces would be sent to the south. Second, an International Commission for Supervision and Control would be set up to supervise national elections within two years. The agreements, in effect, authorised the Viet Minh to administer the northern part of the demarcation line which was tantamount to an endorsement of a communist state. Given the Viet Minh's strong position prior to the Conference, the elections would have facilitated further expansion by the DRV, the U.S. recognising this and declined to endorse the Final Declaration. It also viewed the Geneva settlement as a "disaster" that might lead to the loss of Southeast Asia to communism. See Randolph, The United and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics 1950-1985, p. 18.

12 The NSC Policy Statement, of 20 August, 1954, stated that U.S. policy would "concentrate efforts on developing Thailand as a support of U.S. objectives in the area and as the focal point of U.S. covert and psychological operations in Southeast Asia." See Ibid., p. 19.
In his official report to Parliament, Prime Minister Phibun explained the decision to join SEATO on the grounds that Thailand had become the target for aggression by communist China and North Vietnam.\(^{13}\) Under his leadership, Thailand was the most enthusiastic member of SEATO.\(^{14}\) However, the new alliance created concern among the communist countries in the region. China complained that SEATO was "chiefly directed against China" and "designed for war." Moreover, insomuch as SEATO's headquarters were in Bangkok, Thailand was perceived to be "a base for U.S. war preparation."\(^{15}\)

The extent to which Thai leaders feared the Chinese at this time is unclear. During the Phibun regime, a number of covert contacts with China took place with top officials approval.\(^{16}\) Although there was a certain extent of Thai fear over external communist threat, the Thai decision to ally with the U.S. was also motivated by military leaders' desire for U.S. assistance. During 1951-57, Thai politics were marked by conflicts between Army Chief Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat and Police Chief General Phao Sriyanond, with Phibun acting as a balancer. During the period, the regime adopted the policy of anti-communism internally and externally.\(^{17}\) The policy was used both as a pretext to suppress opponents of the regime and to gain further U.S. aid.\(^{18}\)

American aid at this time largely went to security area. Total U.S. military assistance rose from $4.5 million—or 35.16 % of the Thai defence budget—in 1951, to $40.8 million—or 150.33 % of Thai defence budget—in 1955. As a result, the Army rapidly

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\(^{13}\) Owat, "Kankanopen phaki khong prathetthai nai sonthisanya kanpongkan ruamkan asiatawanongchangtai", p. 96.

\(^{14}\) The Thai government proposed the formation of joint SEATO forces, to be located in Thailand. But a military advisory committee for military cooperation was all that was established. The first SEATO combined military exercise, "Firmlink", was initiated by Phibun and took place in Thailand in 1956. See Colbert, *Southeast Asia in International Politics 1941-1956*, p. 330.


\(^{16}\) It was later revealed that Police Chief General Phao Sriyanond was behind these covert contacts with China. In 1956, Sang Pathanothai, adviser to Phibun, signed a people-to-people agreement with the Chinese Ambassador to Burma in Rangoon. Phibun apparently secretly endorsed the agreement because, despite his government's pro-U.S. policy, "he did not want China to be a foe of Thailand." See Bhansoon Ladavalaya, *Thailand's Foreign Policy Under Kukrit Pramoj: A Study in Decision-Making*, Ph.D. Thesis, Northern Illinois University, 1980, pp. 270-271 (emphasis added).

\(^{17}\) Under the anti-communist law of 1952, the regime was empowered to act in the broadest terms against "those who incite, advise, coerce others to act as communists or propagate communism, associate or rally, or are accomplices of communists, or prepare to do something communist..." See Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, p. 110.

\(^{18}\) In November 1951, the ruling clique staged a coup and justified its seizure of absolute power in terms of preventing "communist aggression" domestically and internationally. Its promise to more severely suppress communism was also intended to impress the U.S. See Surachart, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule 1947-1977*, p. 53.
developed. The U.S. aid also went to the police from 1951. With assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the police at its height in 1955-56 numbered about 48,000 men and was armed with heavy weapons. In actual fact, the police force was notoriously brutal and corrupt, and was used "mainly for political suppression and [Phao's] personal gains." American aid therefore contributed to the existence of the authoritarian Phibun regime.

The American alliance remained vital for the regime of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-63). The regime needed both the U.S. security protection against the perceived external threat to the country and continued American military and economic aid. Sarit asserted after staging a coup in September 1957 that in order to ensure further American aid, Thailand needed a stable anti-communist government. The U.S. in turn was satisfied by Sarit's promise of a continued pro-Western policy.

**Thai-U.S. security collaboration in Laos**

Thailand's main security concern in the period after the formation of SEATO was the perceived threat from Laos. Political turmoil in that country brought about a security collaboration between Thailand and the U.S. for the first time.

Under the 1954 Geneva agreement, Laos was designated a neutral country, although the communist Pathet Lao movement was allowed to remain in the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly until the 1955 national election. Following the Viet Minh inroads into Laos during 1953-1954, Thai leaders grew increasingly concerned that the Viet Minh threat would come from Laos because the country was too weak to be a "buffer state" against communist Vietnam and China. Therefore, the aim of Thai defence strategy during this period was to prevent Laos from falling under hostile control. The result was Sarit's policy of supporting a pro-Thai government in Laos.

Thailand's policy towards Laos during the mid 1950s coincided with the U.S. perception of Laos as a forward battle area in the struggle to contain communism in Southeast Asia. Both Thailand and the U.S. regarded the Pathet Lao as being under the control of communist Vietnam which in turn was held to be under "international

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19 Ibid., p. 195.


communism." Thus, in the period after the formation of SEATO, the U.S. began to support pro-West elements in Laotian politics. Much of the U.S. aid to the right-wing Laotian government came from the American assistance programs in Thailand and thus closely linked Thailand to Laos.

In the period after the Geneva settlement, Hanoi reformed its interest in having the Laotian provinces on its border remain in friendly hands. It thus encouraged and supported the Pathet Lao's continued occupation of the provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly. This enabled the Pathet Lao to consolidate and expand their forces outside their strongholds.

Thus, Laotian politics after 1954 went through a period of turbulent struggle between two main factions: one with Thai-American support; the other with Viet Minh support. This external involvement in domestic politics contributed to severe political conflict in Laos which finally erupted into fighting. Of particular concern for Thailand was the Pathet Lao's turn to guerrilla tactics, with assistance not only from North Vietnam but also from China and the Soviet Union. Prime Minister Sarit therefore called for SEATO intervention in Laos, but other SEATO members disagreed. Sarit subsequently declared that Thailand would defend itself "not only within [Thai] territory" because a communist-controlled Laos would pose a serious threat to Thailand. This policy subsequently led to Thai "volunteers" fighting for the right-wing Laotian government.

In early 1962, the so-called Nam Tha crisis erupted in Laos when the Pathet Lao began to drive the Thai-American backed Phuomi's force from the town of Nam Tha in the northern Laos. In May, Phuomi's force abandoned its stronghold and fled across the Thai border. The events were considered critical to Thai security because Nam Tha was less than 70 kilometres from the Thai border. During the crisis, Sarit claimed that the fall of Nam Tha would give China "an easy route for entry to Thailand... They can just walk into [Thailand's northern] Nan province." The crisis brought about an American "public assurance" of Thai security which Thai leaders had long sought for. On 6 March, 1962, a bilateral security agreement with the U.S.—the Thanat-Rusk Communiqué—was signed. In this document, the U.S. regarded Thailand's independence "as vital to the national interests of the United States." From the

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26 Dhanasarit, Thai-American Alliance During the Laotian Crisis, 1959-1962..., p. 159.
American viewpoint, the agreement was only a reiteration of the existing American obligation to Thailand, the only new aspect being that such obligation was made public. Nevertheless, it was greatly appreciated in Bangkok. The fact that the agreement was made public was considered crucial "for internal purposes." As Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman said to U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk: "the main thing is that [American assurances] could be published in Thailand." By doing so, presumably it would enhance the prestige and the ability of the Thai government, in the eyes of the Thai people, in coping with the external threat.

In response to the crisis situation in Laos, the Thai government agreed for the first time to a brief stationing of U.S. troops in Thailand in mid-1962. The U.S. had been using the Thai air base in Udon to provide military supplies to the Laotian government from early 1961 to mid-1962. In 1963, Bangkok was used for reconnaissance activities over Laos. Thai "technicians" were also involved in American-supported paramilitary activity inside Laos as well. In addition, as a result of the deteriorating situation in Laos and an anticipation of a major military campaign in Vietnam, the U.S. provided assistance to the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) in expanding and improving air facilities. All the air bases under the U.S. assistance program and the build-up of military power at this time were to play a role in the subsequent American war in Vietnam.

**Thai-U.S. military collaboration in Vietnam**

From the late 1950s, the political stability of the South Vietnamese regime had steadily deteriorated. In January 1958, communists began guerilla activities in South Vietnam, capitalising on the weaknesses of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. Aided by communist elements inside the country, they increased terrorism and sabotage against the regime. On 20 December, 1960, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the Viet Cong, was established and the DRV immediately declared its support for this organisation. As a result, the insurgency in South Vietnam was greatly expanded. There was a military coup attempt against President Diem in November 1961. Political turmoil occurred constantly and reached a critical stage in 1963. In May, the mounting crisis between Diem and the Buddhist opposition erupted, leading to self-immolation by militant monks, student demonstrations and martial law imposed nationwide. Eventually, Diem was overthrown in the November 1963 military coup.

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27 Ibid., pp. 163, 310-311.

28 Ibid., p. 298.

The indications that South Vietnam was on the verge of collapse caused grave concern within the new Johnson Administration. Immediately after the November 1964 election, Johnson ordered a review of American policy options in Vietnam. As a result, he obtained a consensus for a two-phase expansion of the war: one anticipated an intensification of air strikes in Laos and covert actions against North Vietnam; the other foresaw a sustained, escalated air campaign against targets in North Vietnam. The first clandestine warfare plan against North Vietnam—Operation Plan 34A—was approved on 1 February, 1964. Under the plan, Thai pilots were involved in an air operation flying T-28 fighter-bombers. This covert war plan became public knowledge on 18 August, 1964 when a T-28 was shot down in a reconnaissance mission over North Vietnam and a Thai pilot was captured. The DRV asserted that T-28's violated its territory and bombed its villages. While this plan was underway, American leaders were also considering air strikes against North Vietnam. In January 1965, top military leaders suggested a "bolder action" to cope with the continued political instability in South Vietnam.

For the purpose of conducting warfare in Indochina, Thailand was assigned a supporting role in the U.S. war effort. Thailand's strategic value lay in its proximity to Vietnam and its relatively safe and stable position. This was considered crucial for security reasons and lower operational costs. Thus, during the course of the American involvement in the Vietnam war, the U.S. sought and obtained three main services from Thailand: base rights; intelligence posts; and Rest and Recuperation (R&R) centres.

In February 1964, the Thai government allowed the deployment of American troops to Thailand under the 1963 Special Logistics Agreement Thailand (SLAT). The number of ground troops under SLAT, which numbered 3,300 at the end of 1964, reached a peak of 11,494, in 1968. The U.S. air power build-up in Thailand also began in February 1964. As the war intensified in Vietnam, the number of USAF personnel rose from 3,000, in 1964, to 33,500, in 1969. USAF aircraft rose from 75, in 1964, to 600, in 1969. Meanwhile, seven Thai air bases were turned over to American use—Korat, Nakhon Phanom, Takhli, Ubon, Udon, U-tapao, and Bangkok.

In January 1965, the Thai-based U.S. air force aircraft started heavy bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trails—the DRV infiltration routes through northern Laos. The bombing of

30 Ibid., p. 50.
North Vietnam from Thai bases started after the Viet Cong attacked the American outpost near Pleiku in South Vietnam on 7 February. While no official figures are available as to sortie levels originating from Thai bases, journalistic reports estimated the figures from 875 to 1,500 sorties weekly in 1966. During the three years prior to the 1 November, 1968 unilateral bombing halt, F-105 fighter-bombers from Korat and Takhli delivered 90,000 tons, or 75% of all ordnance dropped north of Vietnam's demilitarised zone. Approximately 80% of all bombing over North Vietnam during this period came from Thailand.34

The intensification of the Vietnam war led to a deeper involvement by Thailand. In late 1966, the U.S. approached the Thai government to dispatch Thai troops to South Vietnam. At that time, the Johnson Administration faced increasing difficulties from opponents of the war both in the Congress and the public. As such, it was not possible to increase the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam. The U.S. also wanted to share the burden of the war with its allies and demonstrate that the war was a joint endeavour, at least among SEATO members.

The Thai government was initially unwilling to send troops to Vietnam. This was in contrast to the case of sending Thai troops to Laos, for political developments in Laos were seen as having an immediate effect on Thai security—more than events in any other neighbouring countries. During 1965-66, military leaders asserted that the expansion of the Vietnam war made it necessary for the troops to remain in the country.35 Thanom was also concerned that in cooperating with the American war, Thailand would run the risk of retaliatory air attacks from North Vietnam. In the end, the Thai decision to agree to the American request was due to two main factors, one being the U.S. pressure. As noted in a report of the Symington Committee in 1971, the United States "pressed the Thais to send troops to Vietnam."36

The other was a quid pro quo that the Thai government obtained from the U.S. in return. On 3 July, 1967, a request for 20,000 Thai troops to be sent to Vietnam was made by President Johnson in a meeting with King Bhumiphol. According to the Pentagon Papers, the king approved Johnson's request, but mentioned three problems:

34 Ibid., p. 59.
35 John Funston, Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, 1989, p. 238.
36 Surachart, United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule 1947-1977, p. 137. Graham Martin, former U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, later stated that: "The Thai sent the troops to Vietnam because they were requested by the Government of Vietnam and by the United States. I think they made that decision in full realisation that it was increasingly uncomfortable for the United States to have the massive deployment of U.S. troops with far less than contingents from other partners in the SEATO alliance. I do not believe that there was a firm conviction that the troops were actually all that important except for those reasons." See Symington Hearings, Part 3 - Kingdom of Thailand in Randolph, The United and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics 1950-1985, p. 78.
the quality of recruits; their training; and the equipment for the additional troops and the antiquated equipment of the forces left behind in Thailand. The king also mentioned that since Thailand lacked modern military equipment, it was difficult for the Thai military to send well-equipped troops to south Vietnam. The U.S. responded to the Thai concern by increasing the Military Assistance Program from $60 million in the 1968 fiscal year (FY) to $75 million in the 1969 FY. In response to the Thai concern about air attacks from North Vietnam, the U.S. agreed to deploy HAWK anti-aircraft batteries in Thailand and train the requisite personnel. Finally, the U.S. agreed to bear the cost of Thai troops in Vietnam.

In September 1967, the first contingent of 2,207 "Royal Thai Army Volunteers" were dispatched to Vietnam and a second followed in January-February 1969. At its peak, the total number of the troops was well over 11,000. In reality, however, the troops were a token force which engaged in little real combat. More than anything else, it demonstrated a show of support from so-called Free World Military Forces headquartered in Saigon.

The Thai decision to cooperate with the U.S. in the Vietnam war was made by three individuals who occupied key positions in the government and the military: Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, Supreme Commander and from December 1972-October 1973, Foreign Minister), Field Marshal Praphat Charusathien (Deputy Prime Minister, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Minister of Interior, and Director of Communist Suppression Operations Command), and Air Chief Marshal Tawee Chullasap (Deputy Minister of Defence, Deputy Supreme Commander and Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force). All agreements concerning the issue took place between the three generals and the Americans. In this respect, it was the military leaders' perception and interests that were taken into account.

On the one hand, Thanom—like Prime Minister Sarit before him—strongly believed in a communist threat emanating from China and North Vietnam. He was of the opinion that communism must be pushed as far as possible from the Thai frontier and thus he continued the Sarit policy of sending Thai troops to fight in Laos. The decision to send

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39 Thanom recalled that most of the agreements concerning the use of Thai bases and the dispatch of American troops to Thailand were made by him and the American leaders. Interview with Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn by the author, 9 September, 1985, cited in Julaporn Euaruksul, Kansuksa wikitakan mayaques [The Mayaques Incident: a study of crisis decision-making], M.A. Thesis, Department of International Relations, Chulalongkorn University, 1986 (in Thai).
troops to Vietnam was also explained on the basis of forward defence for the country's security.\textsuperscript{40}

Moreover, the North Vietnamese threat also related to Hanoi's alleged support to the communist-led armed insurgency in Thailand. Ignoring indigenous causes of unrest, the Thanom government blamed external subversion from China and North Vietnam for the insurgency. Throughout the 1966-67 period, North Vietnam's direct involvement in Thailand's insurgency problem was frequently emphasised by military leaders. In December 1966, for example, the government claimed that a school for training members of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) had been set up in Hoa Binh—a town 30 miles from Hanoi—and cited the development as "evidence of North Vietnam's plan to destroy Thailand."\textsuperscript{41} A year later, an official source claimed that between 400 to 500 Thai insurgents had been trained in North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{42}

On the other hand, support for the U.S. policy in Vietnam contributed to the stability of the Thai military regime. Most of the U.S. aid was for security purposes and thus directly contributed to the strengthening of the Thai military. Moreover, as the U.S. had invested heavily in war facilities in Thailand, the need for the U.S. to help maintaining the stability of the regime was also deemed necessary. Former U.S. Ambassador Leonard Unger underlined this point in 1971 when he stated that the U.S. had been trying to help the Thai government to maintain its independence "from either external attack or today, much more pertinent—indeed, from a subversion, an insurgency effort to take over the country."\textsuperscript{43}

It is no less significant that certain military figures benefited from the U.S. engagement in Vietnam since most U.S. aid went to various organisations within the Thai military. As noted in one report:

> The Thai army has developed a vested interest in a continuing American presence in their country, not only of the equipment and other hardware the Pentagon supplies, but also because some high-ranking Thai officers are directors of companies with contracts to supply and transport the U.S. forces.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{40} Funston, \textit{Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni}, p. 239.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{The Bangkok World}, 20 December, 1966, quoted in Ibid., p. 259.

\textsuperscript{42} General Saiyud Kerdphol, \textit{The Struggle for Thailand: Counter-insurgency 1965-1985}, (Bangkok: S. Research Centre Co., Ltd., 1986), p. 35. On North Vietnam's support to the CPT, see discussion below in this chapter.


\textsuperscript{44} Denzil Peiris, "Thailand enter the general", \textit{FEER}, 14 February, 1975, p. 10.
ACM Tawee Chullasap, who served as a main negotiator for various Thai-U.S. agreements, for example, also served as the 'principal conduit' through which American military funds flowed to that organisations.45

Moreover, given all pressure groups were suppressed, the policy of collaboration with the U.S. in the war did not face real public opposition. In fact, the dispatch of Thai troops to Vietnam was praised by the media, and even Khuang Aphaiwong, leader of one of the biggest political parties - the Democrat, suggested Thailand should send a division, instead of a battalion, to Vietnam.46

Having committed themselves to U.S. policy, military leaders realised that Thailand's security and the regime's survival depended on the U.S. commitment to the Vietnam war. The Thai government consequently took a hawkish position, urging the U.S. to a more intensive use of military power in Vietnam. In 1968, when Johnson ordered a total suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam, both Thanom and Praphat voiced their strong objection, the latter bluntly urging that: "the bombing must not be suspended, but increased."47 Perhaps it was due to the U.S.'s repeated confirmation of its commitment towards Thailand, that as late as in 1972, Thanom reconfirmed that Thailand would continue to provide military facilities to the U.S. Consequently, to meet President Nixon's plan of withdrawal from Vietnam, Thailand again in the spring of 1972 was hosting as many as 45,000 American troops. The redeployment and the increase of American air power was justified as necessary to respond to the DRV's large-scale offensive in South Vietnam. More significantly, it was aimed at forcing the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table. Thus, heavy bombardment of North Vietnam was stepped up throughout the spring and summer of 1972.

Thai-Cambodian relations

Thai-Cambodian relations were particular strained during the Sarit regime because of a number of underlying problems between the two countries. In late 1958, relations reached a low point when Cambodia temporarily suspended its diplomatic relations with Bangkok following a series of protracted conflicts. The principle areas of dispute between the two countries were border demarcation and Thai support for anti-Sihanouk Cambodian groups.

In the pre-colonial era, some Cambodian provinces were under direct Bangkok rule. When Cambodia fell to French rule in the late eighteenth century, however, the Thais

46 Funston, Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni, p. 239 and footnote 50, p. 277.
47 FEER, June 12, 1969, p. 609.
were forced to yield their claims over Cambodian territory. During the Phibun regime (1938-44), an irredentist movement arose to recover Indochinese territory lost to France, but Thailand managed to regain only a small part of the territory (see more discussion in Chapter III). The area which remained at issue after Cambodia regained its independence in 1953 was the border temple of Phra Viharn. Initially, both sides sent troops to proclaim ownership. In 1959, Cambodia took the dispute to the International Court of Justice and finally gained control of the temple. The Sarit regime remained resentful of the judgement and expressed reservations over returning the temple to Cambodian authorities.

The continued territorial dispute greatly contributed to Cambodian distrust over Thais. Until his overthrow in 1970, Cambodian leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk's precondition for a resumption of Thai-Cambodian relations was that Thailand accept the existing borders between the two countries. Throughout the 1960s, border clashes between Thai and Cambodian troops occasionally took place.

Relations between the two countries were further strained by Thai leaders' resentment over Sihanouk's independent foreign policy stance. Since the Viet Minh inroads into Cambodia in 1954, there was concern among Thai leaders that communist infiltration into Cambodia could pose a threat to Thailand as well. Thailand thus wanted Cambodia to cooperate with SEATO's anti-communist activities. However, Sihanouk not only refused any involvement with SEATO but also established relations with communist countries. Following Sihanouk's refusal to cooperate with SEATO in early 1956, Thailand commenced an economic blockade on Cambodia. In 1962, Thai leaders claimed that Sihanouk was providing assistance to the Viet Cong by allowing them to use bases inside Cambodian territory. As a result, Bangkok threatened to destroy Viet Cong bases inside Cambodia. Sihanouk ignored the threat and moved even closer to China and North Vietnam.

Conflicts with Sihanouk led Thai leaders to support his opponents—the Free Khmer. This issue caused major conflict between Phnom Penh and Bangkok during the late 1950s to early 1960s when Sihanouk periodically took the matter—together with border incidents—to the UN. The 1970 coup by General Lon Nol, which overthrew Sihanouk,

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48 In 1965, Sihanouk admitted that the Viet Cong had been providing medicines. Funston, *Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni*, p. 304.

49 The Free Khmer, or the Khmer Issara (or from 1959, the Khmer Serei) was established with Japanese support during WW II. It opposed the Sihanouk leadership, and from the early 1950s, became a violent underground movement. After the war, it was allowed to set up an anti-French government in Bangkok. During the Phibun regime (1947-56), assistance to the movement continued, but was reduced. General Phao Sriyanond was in charge of U.S. covert assistance to the Free Khmer. In the mid-1960s, it was reported that there were some 1,000 armed Free Khmer forces in Thailand. The forces were trained by Thai and American officers. See Ibid., pp. 289-290, 300. See also Milton Osborne, *Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness*, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994), pp. 95, 107-108.
was allegedly supported by the U.S., in cooperation with Thailand.\textsuperscript{50} Thai-Cambodian relations consequently improved substantially during the Lon Nol period.

Having taken power, the Lon Nol regime requested military assistance from Thailand as it faced serious local communist-led insurgency and the increased use of Cambodian territory by the Viet Cong. It was reported that the U.S. also urged Thai military intervention in Cambodia, in cooperation with the U.S. and South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{51} Thai leaders, especially Prime Minister Thanom and Deputy Prime Minister Prapat, were eager to send Thai troops to Cambodia. Prapat asserted that this would "serve as a protective and self-defence measure" for Thai security.\textsuperscript{52} The U.S. was to initially finance a dispatch of Thai troops to Cambodia, but the move was opposed by the U.S. Congress. This prompted the Thai government to drop the plan, presumably because it did not want to act unilaterally in the move which might provoke communist countries in the region to send their troops to Cambodia as well. It nonetheless helped, in less publicised moves, to stabilise the Phnom Penh regime which was increasingly weakened by the intensified communist insurgency. In late 1970, Thailand became directly involved in Cambodia, sending a contingent of Border Patrol Police to stay indefinitely around the Phra Viharn temple and leading interdiction raids, against North Vietnam and Viet Cong forces, on the periphery of Phnom Penh. During mid-1971 to March 1973, Thailand provided military training to some 5,800 Phnom Penh forces and facilitated U.S. military assistance and material aid to Cambodia.\textsuperscript{53}

**The communist movement in Thailand**

It is important, at this stage, to look at the issue of the communist movement in Thailand which emerged as a political challenge to the Thai government in the early 1960s. Up until the early 1980s, the movement remained a major threat to the government and had repercussion for Thailand's relations with China and North Vietnam.

The communist movement in Thailand originated from ethnic Chinese, and to a lesser extent, Vietnamese. The first communist organisation, the Chinese Communist Party of Thailand, was set up in the 1920s by members of the Chinese Communist Party, who had been sent to work among the Chinese community in Thailand. In 1930, Ho Chi


\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p. 311.

\textsuperscript{52} Funston, *Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni*, p. 312.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., pp. 313-315.
Minh, representative of the Comintern, also worked among ethnic Vietnamese in northeast Thailand. The communist movement in its early stages involved mainly Chinese, and a few Vietnamese. When the first Congress of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was held in 1942, most party members were still ethnic Chinese.\(^{54}\)

The Communist Party's shift to armed struggle in the rural area took place in 1950. Its activities at this time were primarily in the northeast region. In 1952, the Phibun regime issued the Anti-communist Law and the CPT was declared illegal. Communist suspects were suppressed throughout the regimes of Phibun and Sarit. During most of the 1950s, the Party was forced underground and mainly concentrated on building up its cadres and infrastructure in the northeast region. Up to this period, the communist-inspired insurgency was small in scale and posed no serious threat to the government.

From 1961, the party's subversive activities in northeast Thailand intensified. In March 1962, a clandestine radio station, calling itself "The Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT)", began broadcasting. Furthermore, the formation of a "Thailand Independence Movement" was announced in 1964 and the "Thai Patriotic Front" was formed in 1965. Finally, overt armed struggle began on 7 August 1965 when government forces in the northeastern province of Nakhon Phanom were attacked by communist agents.

Up until the end of the 1960s, the Thai government maintained that the communist-led insurgency was a movement directed by foreign countries, mainly China and to a lesser extent, North Vietnam and Laos, which found no support among ethnic Thais.\(^{55}\) Since it was a foreign creation, General Saiyud Kerdphol, for many years Director of Operations of the Internal Security Operation Command, stated in 1968 that: "the use of military force to destroy guerrilla bands... is both appropriate and legitimate."\(^{56}\) Accordingly, the military took a leading role in the area of counter-insurgency.

Thailand and the U.S. cooperated closely on counter-insurgency programs. In fact, the American concern over communist insurgency was greater than that of the Thai government. Following the outbreak of armed struggle, the U.S. even perceived the

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\(^{54}\) According to Morell and Chai-anan, there were various reasons why communism attracted very few ethnic Thais in its formative years. Apart from its foreign image, Marxist ideology was said to be a complete contrast to traditional values, notably loyalty to the monarchy and Buddhism in Thai society. Furthermore, severe economic hardship, particularly in rural areas, was largely absent and the economy was not dominated by foreign capitalism. See David Morell and Chai-anan Samudavanija, *Political Conflict in Thailand: Reform, Reaction and Revolution*, (Cambridge: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, Publishers, Inc., 1980), pp. 77-84.

\(^{55}\) General Saiyud Kerdphol stated in 1968 that: "The insurgency in Thailand remained in its initial phase with command and control from abroad - that is to say China, in cooperation with North Vietnam and Laos... Social and political conditions in this country are such that communism has no real appeal." See Saiyud, *The Struggle for Thailand...*, p. 35.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 39.
possibility of an outright invasion of Thailand. Apart from the perception of a communist advance in Southeast Asia, such concern related to the fact that, by the mid-1960s, the U.S. had invested heavily in a war infrastructure in Thailand. The need to defend Thailand and to increase Thailand's defence capacity against the overt armed insurgency was thus seen as a matter of U.S. security. Accordingly, U.S. military and economic assistance to Thailand increased substantially.

Despite all such effort and resources, the insurgency steadily increased. Armed clashes between the government and the communists rose from 154, in 1966, to 680, in 1972. During the same period, the number of government personnel losses rose from 87 to 592, while communist losses increased from 99 to 309. In December 1967, martial law was proclaimed in several provinces. Certain districts in thirty-five provinces—out of a total seventy-one—were announced as "communist-infested sensitive areas" in 1969.

The growth of the insurgency was due to a number of factors. The tough repression of the insurgency movement by the Phibun and Sarit regimes also had broadened the CPT's power base. The anti-communist law was used by the ruling clique to pursue narrow political interests. One study concludes that: "Communism and suspicion of communist sympathies had been convenient excuses for the Sarit regime as well as earlier governments to crackdown on political opposition." Thai receptivity to the appeals of communism was also evident. The fact that the communists first found their stronghold in the northeast region suggests the importance of socio-economic conditions. The region was the country's most impoverished—an arid environment which had received little attention from the central administration. It also had a long history of opposition to the central government's indifference and neglect. In the 1960s, when the insurgency spread throughout the country, a study by an American counter-

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57 In his testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee in 1966, the U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara stated the need for increased military assistance in Thailand as follows: "[Thailand] faced an immediate and growing threat of subversion and insurgency, sponsored by Hanoi and Peking... By virtue of its geographical position, [it] is also exposed to the danger of attack from conventional military forces, and the threat of seizure by enemy forces of strategic areas in Laos along the Thai border." See Randolph, The United and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics 1950-1985, p. 91.

58 Increased U.S. military assistance to Thailand during this period was also due to the escalating Vietnam war as noted earlier. Military assistance included American specialists on counter-insurgency who provided advice to the Thai government and training to the Thai armed forces. In 1966, the number of U.S. "advisers" reached some six hundred. Meanwhile, economic development assistance programs were set up to "build the bridge between people and government" of Thailand. See Ibid, pp. 91, 96.

59 Saiyud, The Struggle for Thailand..., p. 186.

60 Morell and Chai-anan, Political Conflict in Thailand, p. 83.

61 Thak, Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism, p. 202. During the Sarit regime, hundreds of citizens were imprisoned on charges of communism and four among them were executed by Sarit's order. Some of those arrested, joined the CPT after their release. See Ibid., pp. 84-85.
insurgent expert pointed out that the insurgents in the northeast were predominantly Thais, while the cadres in the west central and mid south were all Thais, and in the north were Thais or Sino-Thais.  

The growth of insurgency was also seen as involving the role of the U.S. in Thailand. It was suggested that one of the reasons for the Chinese support of the Thai insurgents was to counter the U.S.'s containment policy. One study suggests that North Vietnam's military training, material and political support for Thai insurgents was a retaliation against Thailand's cooperation with the U.S. war in Indochina and was aimed at "weakening the U.S. political-military posture in the region." In 1969, former American Ambassador to Thailand, Graham Martin, stated his belief that: "a direct causal relationship existed between the development of American air bases and the launching of the northeastern insurgency."  

Finally, there is the question of to what extent and in what forms the CPT relied on external support, namely from China and North Vietnam. Because of a paucity of materials, knowledge on this issue is limited. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that material support to the CPT was never large, although some support was given. In the first place, the CPT followed the Maoist lines of thinking and there was little doubt of its close link with China. The party's armed struggle in August 1965 followed a warning from Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi in January that Thailand would be the battleground for the next "war of national liberation." A great deal of Chinese support was by way of propaganda campaigns—mostly radio. The Thai government indicated that the VOPT clandestine-radio station was in China's Yunnan province. Other forms of Chinese support included safe havens for some of the CPT leadership, and the


65 Graham Martin's testification before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1969, quoted Randolph, The United and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics 1950-1985, p. 85. The U.S assistance to counter-insurgency programs through the hands of corrupt officials produced the opposite outcome. As Morell and Chai-anan point out: "In general, U.S. assistance programs worsened rather than improved [the insurgency] situation. By supporting a series of corrupt, self-serving military governments, U.S. aid allowed even more extension of government into the countryside, and therefore directly stimulated negative interaction between officials and villagers. U.S. aid built roads into the villages, into which the police could now drive in their USOM-provided jeeps, carrying U.S. weapons. The army was given arms and ammunition to use, often indiscriminately, against terrorists." See Morell and Chai-anan, Political Conflict in Thailand, p. 91

66 According to Girling: "The activities of the insurgent in Thailand arise almost entirely out of local needs and resources. External support was at no time very great..." See Girling, Thailand: Society and Politics, p. 268.
provision of explosive devices, weapons, financial aid and medical equipment to the CPT.\textsuperscript{67}

Insurgency training for Thais is thought to have been conducted in China, Laos and North Vietnam. It is estimated that some 2,500 Thais were trained in these three countries from the 1950s.\textsuperscript{68} The Thai government claimed that North Vietnam in the early 1960s acted as China's "principal agent" in assisting CPT activities. A cadre training school—near North Vietnam's town of Hoa Binh—was opened in 1962 and provided training courses for Thai guerrillas. Meanwhile, Laotian communists facilitated the transit of Thai recruits through Laos to Vietnam for training, and transporting arms and equipment.\textsuperscript{69} Laos also provided sanctuary to the guerillas and this made the Thai-Lao border near the Mekong River one of the most active areas of CPT activities.\textsuperscript{70} At the time when the Thanom regime collapsed in 1973, the CPT-led armed insurgency had posed a considerable threat against the Thai government. The threat from the CPT would further see in the period after 1973.

**Policy adjustment**

The year 1973 was a turning point for Thai politics and foreign policy. On 14 October, the Thanom regime was overthrown by the student-led uprising. The events led to a crucial change in Thai politics. After more than two decades as a supreme political force, the military found itself obliged, for a time, to adopt a low profile in politics. After the overthrow of the Thanom-Prapat clique, the armed forces were marked by factionalism and there was no single group powerful enough to assume a leadership role. Nevertheless, the fact that the military system did not undergo any basic structural changes after 1973 was crucial for subsequent political development, for the military's physical capacity to play a dominant role in politics was not in any way affected.\textsuperscript{71} This left the armed forces potentially powerful even when they were in disarray. Civilian governments during this time were unable to exert control over military affairs. Neither civilian governments nor the parliament had real control over the annual budget of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item[] \textsuperscript{68} Tanham, *Trial in Thailand*, p. 95.
  \item[] \textsuperscript{69} Saiyud, *The Struggle for Thailand...*, p. 32.
  \item[] \textsuperscript{70} Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, p. 260.
  \item[] \textsuperscript{71} Even today, the key army units and organisations continue to be deployed around Bangkok, the political nerve-centre. The ability to control Bangkok has been decisive for most coups.
\end{itemize}
Ministry of Defence and the Defence portfolio was reserved for serving or retired military officers.

Meanwhile, civilian governments were operating under difficult circumstances. Both the coalition governments of Kukrit Pramoj (March 1975-January 1976) and Seni Pramoj (April-October 1976) comprised a large number of political parties—the former, seventeen and the latter, four. In this respect, a great deal of time and effort was spent on keeping the coalitions alive. Moreover, this period witnessed an emergence of extra-bureaucratic forces which had previously been suppressed. Within three years, 264 NGO groups were formally created. Since these groups were not represented in either the government or political parties, they chose to go on the streets so that their demands would be heard. Thus, this period saw 322 demonstrations and 1,333 strikes.  

The situation was exacerbated by the unprecedented polarisation of politics after mid-1975, with the left calling for all-out reform and the right opposed to change of the status quo. Consequently, the use of violence between the two wings became common. Added to this, was an uneasy accommodation between civilian governments and the military. Prime Minister Kukrit felt constantly under threat of a coup d'etat while his successor, Seni, managed to stay for only five months before the October 1976 coup. 

Parallel with the leadership change in Thailand was a complete disengagement of the U.S. military from mainland Southeast Asia following the Paris Agreement on Vietnam in January 1973. The victory of communist forces in Indochina at that moment was also clearly visible. Undoubtedly, Thailand was the non-communist state in the region most affected by the changes, as Girling succinctly points out: "the Thais were left stranded with a militant anti-communist commitment but deprived of the backing to fulfil it." The need to adjust foreign policy direction was thus felt among new Thai leaders, as the caretaker Sanya government announced: Thailand's future relations with the U.S. will have to be modified and adapted to changing circumstances. During the past decade one characteristic of our relations with the United States has been an over-emphasis on military cooperation. This needs to be adjusted in order to achieve a more truly balanced relationship.

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72 Chai-anan Samudavanija and Suchit Bunbongkan, "Thailand", in Zakaria H. Ahmad and Harold Crouch (eds), Military-Civilian Relations in Southeast Asia, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 89.

73 Former Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj recalled that: "Almost every day, my government was threatened by rumour that the military would 'exercise' their power by staging a coup. I found myself caught between [the parliament and the military], and had to make use of every tactic available to protect the democratic system from military coup." Sara Likitkun, Kuikit, chiwit lae ngan, [Kukrit, his work and life], (Bangkok: F.G. Publishing, 1984), p. 21 (in Thai).

74 Girling, Thailand: Society and Politics, p. 239.

In early 1974, Thailand and the U.S. agreed to a reduction of American aircraft and U.S. military personnel in Thailand, as well as the closing of Takhli and Ubon air bases. The Sanya government also paved the way for better relations with China by allowing informal contacts with that country and, in December 1974, abolishing the trade prohibitions decree with China—imposed by Sarit since 1958. Steps towards rapprochement with the Indochinese countries also took place.

An important step of policy adjustment was carried out when the elected government of Kukrit took office in March 1975. For the first time in decades, the formulation of foreign policy shifted from the military to civilian leaders. Prime Minister Kukrit and Foreign Minister Chatchai Choonhavan in particular took a leading role in foreign relations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs which had been responsible mainly for routine matters during the military rule, was now given a prominent role. This period also saw the NGO public groups' growing interest in foreign policy, with the liberals and intellectuals calling for an independent foreign policy. In addition, the Thai-American alliance originating from the military rule, came under attack by student activists who claimed that it was designed by, and for, the interest of the military clique. Kukrit's policy gained support from these groups.

It was agreed among the civilian leaders that in the new environment, "equidistance" from the great powers best served the country's interests. In this respect, it was felt that the Thai-American security alliance should be transformed to a more balanced one and Thailand could no longer ignored diplomatic relations with the other great power in the region—China. Furthermore, rapprochement with the new regimes in Indochina was seen as crucial in reducing the existing conflict, particularly between Thailand and Vietnam. Therefore, three major policies were immediately announced: a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Thailand within one year; normalisation of relations with China and Indochina; and strengthening ties with members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

With regard to the U.S., the declining role of the U.S. in Vietnam had already led to the reduction of American troops in Thailand. U.S. military assistance to Thailand also declined from $122.7 million in 1972, to $42.5, in 1975. 76 However, the process of U.S. troop withdrawal had been taking place slowly. In March 1975, 25,000 U.S. troops and 350 aircraft were still in Thailand. Kukrit's one-year deadline for the complete withdrawal of U.S. military personnel and war facilities was thus designed to speed up the process which had already begun. U.S. troops stationed in Thailand was seen as an obstacle to rapprochement with Indochinese countries. Thailand was increasingly sensitive to the need for more military independence. As Kukrit noted in late 1975:

Although the American pullout brought about great shock, helplessness and desperation to people in the region, it is no longer necessary to talk about the disappointment or the uncertainty. We must realise that no countries, either rich or poor, should ask timelessly for military assistance from other countries... We should not forget that it is us who have to fight for our own survival.\textsuperscript{77}

The pace of adjusting Thai-American relations was accelerated by the "Mayaguez incident" in May 1975. In an operation to rescue the American merchant ship, the Mayaguez, which had been captured by the Khmer Rouge, the U.S. ignored the Thai government's warning and used the U-tapao air base.\textsuperscript{78} The incident caused a large demonstration against the U.S. and led to the government's protest against the U.S. over a "violation of Thai sovereignty." Moreover, since the incident arose from ambiguity about the right of the U.S. to use military facilities in Thailand, the government set up a committee to review the existing Thai-U.S. agreements. The aim was to place the future relations on an equal basis.\textsuperscript{79}

The military resented the government's new attitude towards the U.S. In the first place, the policy-making now rested with civilian leaders. During the period of military rule, the U.S. bypassed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and dealt directly with the army leaders. Furthermore, in the eyes of some military officers and the conservative elements, the withdrawal of all Americans troops was a result of the government's policy and pressure from the left. Some military leaders called for the continued stationing of U.S. troops in Thailand. This demand was understandable considering that the Thai defence system had relied largely, if not entirely, on the U.S. The lack of an arms industry also meant that Thailand acquired most of its weapons from the U.S. The Army Commander, in 1976, claimed that the Thai military would be helpless without continued U.S. assistance.\textsuperscript{80}

The situation in Indochina after the communist victory in 1975 was the other source of concern among military leaders. The immediate concern was the perceived threat from

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{The Nation Review}, 26 October, 1975, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{78} Prior to the operation, the U.S. had 'informed' General Kriangsak Chamanand, then Deputy Supreme Commander and chief point of contact between the U.S. Embassy and the Supreme Command, without Thai government knowledge. As a result, thousands of students demonstrated against the U.S. action. The government's strong protest to the U.S. over the incident, was the first in the history of Thai-American relations. See Julaporn, \textit{Kansuksa wikitakan mayaguez}.

\textsuperscript{79} Anand Panyarachun, a Foreign Ministry official who played an instrumental role in foreign policy formulation at this time, recalled that: "The patron-client relationship between Thailand and the U.S. should no longer exist. What we are trying to do now is to forge a new partnership with [the U.S.] on the basis of equality and on the basis of mutual interests." Interview with Anand Panyarachun by the author, Bangkok, 14 June, 1985, cited in ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Sarasin Viraphol, \textit{Direction of Thai Foreign Policy}, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), p. 51.
Lao. where 50,000 Vietnamese troops, 3,000 Russians and 1,500 Cubans were allegedly based. Relations between Thailand and the Pathet Lao government continued to deteriorate. In October and November 1975, there was a series of shooting exchanges between Thai patrol boats and Pathet Lao forces in the Mekong River. It was reported that the Vietnamese troops in Laos had positioned themselves along the Mekong. North Vietnam was believed to be behind Laos' "new tough anti-Thai policies." In addition, active sections of the CPT at this time were reportedly operating from bases in Laos with assistance from North Vietnam. The military argued that these factors meant that it was still necessary for U.S. troops to act as a bargaining chip until the Vietnamese pulled out of Laos and Hanoi ceased its support for the Thai communists. In September 1974, Deputy Defence Minister Bua Sirasap suggested that:

> It is a fact that for the sake of national security we want American forces to continue being stationed here. We do not want them to be completely withdrawn because it would be impossible for us to remain without friends. It is the fact that American military forces which are stationed in Thailand are no danger whatsoever to our country. What is of greatest importance is that the situation outside Thailand is not very trustworthy yet. Should American forces be completely withdrawn, there is no question but the danger would menace us.

The need to establish diplomatic relations with China was described by Kukrit: "we have to be friends with [China]. Make them friends not enemies. Thailand cannot afford to be enemies with 900 million people." China was also seen as a political counterweight to Vietnam, with which Thailand was encountering difficulties in normalising relations. There was disagreement among Thai leaders on the question of Chinese support for the Thai communists. On the one hand, Kukrit and his supporters believed that social and economic conditions were the main factors contributing to the growth of insurgency in the country. Once these conditions were ameliorated, the insurgency would fade away regardless of external support. On the other hand, the security establishment perceived that diplomatic relations would facilitate Chinese support for the Thai insurgent movement and would also undermine the morale of the soldiers who


84 Bhansoon, Thailand's Foreign Policy Under Kukrit Pramoj..., p. 300.

85 Anand Panyarachun, "Phukmit kab sauranarat prachachon chin" [Improving relations with the People's Republic of China], in Chantima (ed), Nayobuy tangprathetthai bonbangphrang, p. 139 (in Thai). See discussion on problems in the normalisation of Thai-Vietnamese relations after 1975 in Chapter III.
were fighting against the Chinese-supported insurgents. There were also questions about the loyalty of ethnic Chinese to Thailand.\textsuperscript{86}

Notwithstanding military opposition, Kukrit deliberately gave permission to Chatichai to pursue negotiations with China and bypassed the National Security Council until the last minute when the agreement was finalised.\textsuperscript{87} The establishment of diplomatic relations with China finally took place on 1 July, 1975. Largely because of its concern over the expansion of the Soviet Union and its deteriorating relations with North Vietnam, China ignored the issue of U.S. troops in Thailand. It also agreed to acknowledge the rights of overseas Chinese in Thailand, to choose their nationality and relinquish any Chinese claim over them. Nevertheless, on the issue of supporting the Thai communist movement, the Chinese leaders insisted that it was "their moral obligation to endorse revolutionary movements abroad but not to export revolution."\textsuperscript{88}

Problems between Thailand and the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) appeared soon after its formation. Armed clashes, on land and sea, between the two sides frequently occurred since late 1975. Several factors contributed to the troubled relationship between the two countries which continued throughout the existence of the Khmer Rouge regime. The DK accused Thai army of supporting Cambodian exiles in Thailand to carry out subversive activities in Cambodia whereas Thailand alleged that Thai insurgents were provided support and were operated from Cambodia. Added to this was the question of border demarcation, which had long existed between Thailand and Cambodia.\textsuperscript{89}

Despite these mutual suspicions, the resumption of Thai-Cambodian relations took place in 1975. China played a crucial role in the Thai-Cambodian reconciliation, mainly because it wanted to contain Vietnamese influence in the region. In October 1975, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary, through the good offices of China, visited Bangkok. Both countries agreed to exchange Ambassadors and set up liaison offices to deal with the problem of border demarcation and the settlement of Cambodian refugees. Thailand also offered aid to Cambodia.

Kukrit's visits to all ASEAN capitals in July 1975 eventually led to the first ASEAN summit conference at Bali, Indonesia on 23-25 February, 1976. The summit, the first


\textsuperscript{87} Anand, "Phukmit kab sataranarat prachachon chin", pp. 140, 143.

\textsuperscript{88} Bhansoon, \textit{Thailand's Foreign Policy Under Kukrit Pramoj...}, p. 296.

since the formation of ASEAN in 1967, reflected the concern among member states about the emergence of communist states in Indochina and the possibility of future communist expansion. With the exception of Thailand, which saw the possibility of an outright confrontation with Vietnam, most ASEAN countries perceived the threat to their respective countries more in the form of subversion through local communist movements than from cross border aggression. Thus, the solidarity of ASEAN was largely a result of the concern over communist expansion.\(^\text{90}\) The summit was the most substantial step to hasten the process of political cohesion among ASEAN, prior to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978.

The adjustment of foreign policy initiated by the Kukrit government was continued by the Seni government which took office in April 1976. The establishment of diplomatic relations with Indochinese countries was achieved. The withdrawal of U.S. troops and military facilities was also completed in 1976. While the civilian governments managed to carry out a great deal of change in foreign policy during this short period, acute political polarisation between the civilians and the military was the immediate result. The military sought to undermine the government's policy throughout this period.\(^\text{91}\) One report suggested that support for the rightist elements, among the Laotian and Cambodian refugees on the border, was used to sabotage both Bangkok's policy and those countries. This was regarded as a part of reason for Thailand's border incidents with Laos and Cambodia at this time and right through 1978.\(^\text{92}\) The military's resentment ultimately led to Kukrit's defeat, in the April 1976 general election, and the bloody coup of 6 October 1976, which overthrew the Seni government.

The Thanin regime, installed by the military after the October 1976 coup, not only ended the reform of foreign policy, but reversed it. Prime Minister Thanin believed that: "Thailand had been in immediate danger of a communist take-over on October 6", and that this take-over was "a joint internal and external plot" - a reference to the fact that

\(^{90}\) At the Bali summit, ASEAN states pledged to strengthen intra-ASEAN political solidarity by maintaining regular contacts and consultations with one another over international and regional matters, and by coordinating positions and where necessary, taking common actions. See Pranee Saipiroon, *ASEAN government's attitudes towards regional security 1975-1979*, (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1982), pp. 11-16.

\(^{91}\) Interview, Bichai Rattakun, Bangkok, 25 March, 1992.

the Thai insurgents had support from Vietnam.93 In order to cope with this perceived threat, Thanin stated that communist suppression and prevention was essential.94

This anti-communist stance also extended to the conduct of foreign policy, for communists outside and inside were seen as equally threatening to the country.95 Consequently, Thai policy towards communist countries was openly hostile and relations with Indochinese countries deteriorated. A series of border incidents occurred with Laos during early 1977. Laos also accused Thailand of supporting Laotian rebels.96 At the same time, the situation on the Thai-Cambodian border greatly deteriorated. In January 1977, three Thai border villages were attacked by the Cambodians, causing the deaths of thirty Thais. In subsequent months, several clashes occurred, including a battle in July which left seventeen Thai soldiers dead, and a massacre in August in which thirty-one Thai villagers were killed.97 The deterioration of relations between Thailand and the three Indochinese states was so great that one study noted that: "many feared the country faced the possibility of engaging in open conflicts with the communist regimes [in Indochina]."98

There were also various attempts to revive the Thai-American security alliance. The Thanin regime allowed the U.S. the use of a naval base in the south and an air base in the north. The U.S. also maintained some 270 military advisers in Thailand. Nevertheless, it was clear that the U.S. no longer had an intention to assume its security commitment to Thailand after the dismantling of SEATO in June 1977.99

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93 The Bangkok Post, 19 November, 1976, p. 1. Prime Minister Thanin and some of his cabinet ministers actively participated in the anti-communist crusade during the governments of Kukrit Pramoj and Seni Pramoj.

94 Foreign Broadcasts Information Service, Asia and the Pacific, (hereafter cited as FBIS), 27 December, 1976, p. 11. During the Thanin regime, government officials were banned from visiting communist countries and the private sector was prohibited from trading with socialist states. Severe suppression of communist suspects was also carried out.

95 Former Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj succinctly pointed out that Thanin "is so absorbed in fighting communism that he does not know what he is doing. He has mixed up foreign affairs and foreign relations with doctrinal struggle." See FEER, 4 November, 1977, p.12.


97 The causes of these incidents are unclear. The January massacre, it was reported, was caused by illegal border trading with involvement from Thai local officials and police. It has also been suggested that the unresolved border demarcation was the cause of the Khmer's attacks. See Nayan Chanda, "Battles along the border", FEER, 12 August, 1977, p. 16.


99 In accordance with the decision made on 24 September 1975, SEATO was formally disbanded on 20 June 1977, but the Manila Pact, on which it was based, still remained in force. The U.S. 's commitment to the Pact was ambiguous, as was evident from a remark of an official of the State Department: "the United States does stand by its commitments... the Carter Administration, I am sure, would make its own judgement depending upon the specific circumstances." After taking office, Thanin made quite inquiries
Ironically, Thanin's inept handling of the communist issue—either internally or externally—irritated at least one of the army leaders who had installed him in power. Supreme Commander General Kriangsak Chamanand. When Kriangsak became Prime Minister following the 20 October 1977 coup, the foreign policy once again went into reverse. Rapprochement with Indochinese countries immediately took place (see Chapter III). Nevertheless, while relations with Vietnam and Laos improved dramatically, Thai-Cambodian ties remained strained. Since 1975, continued raids across the Thai border from Khmer Rouge bases in Cambodia had claimed some 200 Thai lives.100 Thailand also alleged that there had been a constant increase in the activities of the Thai Communist Party (CPT) operating from bases in northern Cambodia.101

Kriangsak also moved to strengthen ties with China. His visit to Peking in April 1978 led to Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping's visit to Bangkok in November. A number of factors contributed to the improved relations between Thailand and China. At this time, China was engaged in an open conflict with Vietnam over the issue of ethnic Chinese in that country, and the future of its only ideological ally in the region—the Khmer Rouge—was in serious doubt (see Chapter V). Thailand and the other ASEAN countries were thus seen as potentially useful in China's escalating conflict with Vietnam and also in its long-term strategy against Vietnamese and Soviet influence in the region. Thailand and other ASEAN members, which adopted its neutral stance in the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, nonetheless perceived that: "the present foreign policy

about the possibility of SEATO being revived, "but it was too late." See Randolph, The United and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics 1950-1985, p. 205.

100 The causes of the incidents were numerous. Local commanders of Thai counter-insurgency operations were convinced that these attacks were initiated by the CPT, from bases inside Cambodia, with the Khmer Rouge forces playing only a subordinate and advisory role. (Richard Nations, "A nervous neighbour watches", FEER, 14 July, 1978, pp. 16-17.) Police Major General Chana Samudavanija, former Thai Ambassador to Phnom Penh, suggested that the "Free Khmer Movement" (Khmer Seraï), founded by the Khmer refugee in Thailand, secretly sneaked out of the camp and robbed people living in Cambodia, then returned to hide in Thai territory. Their actions caused Khmer Rouge forces to cross into Thailand in pursuit and led to the killing of Thai villagers. (Sayamrat, 8 February, 1978, pp. 1, 12, in Thai.) It was also reported that there was an attempt by some elements in the military to undermine Kriangsak's rapprochement with Indochina and that: "support to the Khmer Seraï is definitely not the policy of the Thai supreme Command's Internal Suppression Operations Command. But a disgruntled faction of younger colonels has joined hands with a group of ultra-rightist civilian organisations to find a channel for their policies." Richard Nations, "Busloads of trouble", FEER, 10 March, 1978, p.10.

101 Thai authorities believed that the Khmer Rouge gave sanctuary and support to more than 1,000 armed CPT cadres, based in 14 camps strung along roughly 300 kilometres of frontier bordering the southern provinces of Thailand's northeast region. (Richard Nations, " Fighting for a frontier formula", FEER, 28 July, 1978, p. 12.) According to a left-wing Thai Journal, Thai nikon, sometime in December 1977, the CPT and the Kampuchean Party Secretary of Oddar Meanchey Province (representing Pol Pot's Communist Party of Kampuchea) made an agreement that a joint force of the two sides would be set up to operate in the southern part of northeast Thailand. It also agreed that if appropriate, "the Kampuchean base unit will enter Thailand and strike against the base without the mixed forces having to become involved." See Ben Kiernan, "Pol Pot and the Kampuchean Communist Movement" in Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua (eds), Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981, (London: Zed Press, 1982), p. 237. See more discussion on this issue in Chapter IV.
stance of China and her relations with the United States are factors that may help maintain stability in East Asia and the Pacific."\textsuperscript{102}

Meanwhile, China retained its traditional dual position regarding its support for the CPT—its state-to-state relations were independent of fraternal party-to-party ties. While publicly maintaining its moral support for its communist movement allies, Deng reportedly promised Kriangsak, during his visit to Bangkok, that he would stop China's material support for the CPT. If China publicly ceased support for the CPT, Deng argued, the Soviet Union takeover would be inevitable and "this was in the interest of neither China nor ASEAN."\textsuperscript{103} It is unclear whether Thai leaders were convinced of Deng's promise. The Thai military nevertheless believed that it was in China's interest to maintain support for the CPT active enough to ensure the CPT's loyalty to Peking, but below the threshold that would threaten the Thai government. It was also seen that despite the fact that the CPT—led by the pro-Maoist faction—active sections operated with lines of supply and sanctuary in Vietnamese-controlled areas in Laos, and the younger generation was closer to Vietnamese and Soviet influence.\textsuperscript{104} China also reportedly tried to partially restrain the CPT and reduce somewhat its assistance to insurgents operating in the mountains of northern Thailand.\textsuperscript{105}

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a background to Thai foreign policy from the post- Second World War to 1978. It has shown the military leaders' perceptions and interests in Thai politics and foreign relations during much of the period. The next chapters will show that although Thai politics during the period under study had become more pluralistic, the military continued to play a dominant role in issues relating to "national security".

\textsuperscript{102} Michael Richardson, "How the five see Indochina", \textit{FEER}, 30 December, 1977. See discussion on Vietnam's attempts to pursue friendly relations with ASEAN in late 1978 in Chapter III.


\textsuperscript{105} The \textit{Bangkok Post}, 28 March, 1976, p. 6, cited in M. Ladd Thomas, "The Perceived Impact of Communist Indochina on Thailand's Security", in Clark D. Neher (ed), \textit{Modern Thai Politics From Village to Nation}, (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1979), p. 408. It has also been suggested that although Chinese broadcasts continued to voice support for communist parties in non-communist Southeast Asian countries, there was a reduction in the intensity of these expressions of revolutionary solidarity. The provision of aid, in the form of arms and training, also declined. See Thomas, p. 409.
Chapter III
Thai-Vietnamese Relations

Whether a country is a military threat to us depends on its potential and its past practice. For Vietnam which was historically rather aggressive and offensive, we cannot perceive it as a friend.... What the Vietnamese have done in the past must be taken into consideration: they occupied some parts of Cambodia and then went further into Laos. Now although that practice was claimed as a Socialist country's 'liberation' of another country, that still posed a threat to us [like in the past]...What the Vietnamese did in history tells us of what they will do in the future.

Thai Supreme Commander General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh
"The Concept on the Development of the Army", 1987.¹

History also records that since the 13th century, Siamese aggressor forces have annexed territory of and ruled practically every neighbouring country... Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia with ambitions of expansionism and hegemony, Thailand has sent forces to invade Laos, Cambodia, and other neighbouring countries on many occasions... The victory of Rach Gam-Xoai Mut exactly 200 years ago still holds lessons of major historical significance. While history never repeats itself, it does teach us that similar causes lead to similar results.

Van Tan
"The Victory of Rach Gam-Xoai Mut Exactly 200 Years Ago", 1985.²

During the conflict over Cambodia in the 1980s, it was common for both Thai and Vietnamese leaders to use past events as an analogy for contemporary ones. Although there were major differences in the two contexts, the conflict between Thailand and Vietnam over Cambodia was seen to have parallels with conflicts which had taken place more than two centuries before.

In answer to the question of how past events influence current perceptions, Robert Jervis suggests that there are two different lines of thinking. One is that historical events do not affect decision-makers, rather that: "men use the past to prop up their own prejudices." The other argues that: "what one has learnt from key events in international history is an important factor in determining the images that shape the interpretation of incoming information."³

This chapter gives a background of Thai-Viet relations from the period when the traditional states of Thais and Vietnamese were engaged in rivalry over the land area comprising present-day Cambodia and Laos to the period prior to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978. In particular, it focuses on the historical sources of conflict and cooperation between Thais and Vietnamese.

**Siamese-Vietnamese competition over Cambodia and Laos**

With both similar and different state interests, the Siamese [Thais]⁴ and the Vietnamese expanded into the trans-Mekong area comprising Cambodia and Laos.

The Siamese expansionist policy towards Cambodia commenced in the fourteenth century. Security was a principle factor. The kingdom of Ayudhya (capital, 1350-1767) was located along the Chao Phya basin comprising most of the present-day central and northern Thailand and easily accessible from the southeast—the western provinces of Cambodia—for it was geographically indistinguishable with no defensible frontiers. Ayudhya rulers thus consistently attempted to subjugate Cambodia.⁵ Control over Cambodia and Laos was also important for much of this period as Burma, in the west, remained a threat to the Kingdom. Thus, Ayudhya kings preferred Cambodia and Laos to be vassal states. They were also valued as a source of manpower to strengthen the Ayudya state. From the royal chronicles, Cambodia and Laos were seen as a Siamese

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⁴ 'Siam' was used until it was renamed 'Thailand' in 1939.

"sphere of influence" and acknowledgment of this superiority was expected by the Siamese court. In the middle of the fourteenth century, for example, King Uthong felt impelled to wage war against Cambodia because Khor prae phak or "the Cambodian have turned their faces away in the other direction" which implied that they were "no longer faithful." Similarly, attempts of Lao rulers to free their country were referred by Siamese rulers as "rebellions". King Taksin justified a 1778 war against Laos—which resulted in the Siamese control over northern Laos—in terms of the Lao ruler's "lese majeste".

Since the early seventeenth century, the Vietnamese had expanded their Kingdom towards the south. Vietnam's goals were to maintain the Kingdom's security and obtain agricultural land. The kingdom, long and narrow—could be easily cut in two by an invader. The relatively high population and land scarcity also drove the Vietnamese to expand from the Red River delta to the Mekong delta. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Vietnamese already had a firm foothold in the Mekong delta, at Cambodia's expense. Furthermore, they looked to this area and beyond "as the natural sphere" of their future action.

The expansionist tendencies of the traditional Thai and the Vietnamese states were bound to lead to conflict from the early eighteenth century, first in Cambodia and then in Laos. Both sides had troops stationed in the two Mekong Kingdoms in order to maintain their power. This frequently led to "proxy wars"—wars among various factions in the two unfortunate states. Neither side, however, could exert their authority over Laos and Cambodia for long, without a challenge from the other. Cultural differences between the two peoples—the Indianised Thais and the Chinese-influenced Vietnamese—also caused misunderstandings and exacerbated hostility among them. As noted by one historian of the period, in this rivalry "each found the civilisation, religion, language, and manners of the other alien if not barbaric. There was no reason for liking or trust between them..." Laotians and Cambodians sought to play one side off against the other and on occasion, openly recognised the suzerainty of both states at the same time.

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6 Chamrít, The Rise of Ayudhya..., pp. 122-123.

7 Tawesin Subwattana, "Kanrupru ruanglao nai phongsawadan lae baebrienthai", (The Kingdom of Laos as depicted in Thai historiography), Sangkomsat parithat, July-December, 1992, p. 106 (in Thai).

8 Eiland, Dragon and Elephant: Relations between Viet Nam and Siam 1782-1847, p. 13.


10 Ibid., p. 22. See also Thanom Anamwat, Phumlang khwamsamphan thai, khmen, yuan, [Relations between Siam, Cambodia and Vietnam], (Bangkok: Sangrung kanphim, 1980), pp. 76-78 (in Thai).
There was a brief period of friendship between the Thai and Vietnamese courts, however, following the unification of Vietnam under Emperor Gia Long (r.1802-20). Before reconquering his country from the Tay Son rebellion (1771-1802), Gia Long, then Prince Nguyen Anh and his family, from 1782-1786, took refuge at the court of King Rama I, founder of the Chakkri dynasty. In his various attempts to recapture the country, Nguyen Anh was provided with troops and supplies by the Chakkri court. It was not that Rama I changed his attitude towards his Vietnamese rival, but more likely that he perceived the Tay Son as more harmful to the Chakkri court's interests than the Nguyen. Moreover, by providing patronage to the Vietnamese court, he presumably hoped to gain recognition of the Chakkri's superiority.\(^{11}\)

However, after reuniting the Kingdom, the Vietnamese court challenged Bangkok's power in the Mekong area. It was evident that the Chakkri court perceived Cambodia and Laos as buffer states between Siam and Vietnam. A Commander of Siamese troops in the early Bangkok era clearly indicated the aim of the war in Cambodia when he stated:

> If we cannot occupy the Khmer territory, neither must it fall into the Yuan's [Vietnamese] hands... [As] your Majesty suggested to me, I should send the Khmer noblemen to look after those local Khmer chiefs who have their own troops and to invite those local chiefs to fight against the Yuan, to make Khmer and Yuan definitely antagonistic...\(^{12}\)

Competition between the two rivals over the trans-Mekong area intensified as Vietnam became more powerful. In response to an uprising by the Laotian ruler who received support from Vietnam during 1827-29, King Rama III brutally destroyed the area in Laos as "a defensive measure" against Vietnam. By emptying the country beyond the Mekong,

> Siam secured the river as a possible defence line for herself, denied it to Laotian rebels of the future and made the return of Vietnamese influence more difficult.\(^{13}\)

Over the issue of succession in Cambodia, the Siamese and the Vietnamese engaged in a number of inconclusive wars for fourteen years (1832-46). The result was a resumption of traditional dual suzerainty over the two Kingdoms by the Siamese and the Vietnamese.

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\(^{11}\) In 1986, in the midst of civil unrest, Tay Son leaders also sent troops to Battambang, the Cambodian town directly under Bangkok's administration. See Thanom, Phumlang khwamsamphan thai, khmen, yuan, pp. 42-43.


\(^{13}\) Toye, The Rise of Ayudhya..., p. 21.
This arrangement continued until French imperialism prevailed over Vietnam, ending the traditional rivalry between the two Kingdoms.

The relationship between the Siamese and the Vietnamese changed after the French colonisation of Vietnam. After annexing part of Vietnamese territory in the 1850s, France subsequently took control of the area in Laos and Cambodia, which hitherto had been claimed by the Siamese and the Vietnamese. Thus, as the French established what became known as their 'Indochina' empire during 1858-1907, the Siamese gradually yielded their claims over a large part of Laotian and Cambodian territories to France. The losses of vassal states by successive Siamese rulers, was a bitter experience which played a crucial part in Thai policy towards the Vietnamese anti-colonialists in the following period.

Siam and the Vietnamese anti-colonialists

During the period of French rule in Indochina, Thai leaders not only provided support to the Vietnamese resistance, but Siam became a stronghold for various Vietnamese resistance movements fighting against the French. This section looks at the factors which brought about the unprecedented relationship between the two traditional rivals.

For Vietnamese anti-colonialists, there were two factors which made Siam an attractive place during the period of French rule. First, there was Siam's strategic importance for the Vietnamese anti-colonialists. As a country close to Vietnam, which maintained its independence from Western imperialist powers, Siam was a source of weapon procurement and resistance activities. Its proximity to Vietnam also made it a sanctuary for those who escaped French suppression. As a result, by the end of the nineteenth century, Siam was already a sanctuary for a number of Vietnamese groups. Second, the ethnic Vietnamese residing in Siam were a crucial force for the Vietnamese resistance. In the early part of this century, ethnic Vietnamese living in Siam numbered between twenty to thirty thousand. Their migration to Siam occurred on several occasions since the seventeenth century. During the period of French rule in Indochina, there were two

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15 It should be noted that China was also important for the Vietnamese anti-colonial activities. However, China at that time was facing a formidable threat from Western imperialism and thus the Chinese court could not provide support to the Vietnamese. For details of Vietnamese anti-colonial activities in Thailand from the French colonisation of Indochina until the beginning of the Cold War era see Christopher E. Goscha, *Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French*, M.A. Thesis, Faculty of Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1991.
major influxes of Vietnamese refugees into Siam. They comprised of several thousand families and mainly established themselves in the northeastern provinces of Siam.\(^{16}\)

The policies of the Siamese court were the critical factor enabling Vietnamese anti-colonial activities to continue in Siam. However, these policies were not consistent. They depended on internal and external developments as will be seen below. Notwithstanding changes in court policy, the Vietnamese were still able to carry out their resistance activities in Siam without great disruption during this period.

From the earliest days of the Vietnamese struggle against French colonialism, Siam had been recognised as a place to obtain weapons and assistance. Numbers of Vietnamese nationalists had journeyed to Siam, among them, the famous scholar-patriot, Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) was provided with an opportunity to meet King Rama V (r.1868-1910) and other high-ranking officials. With the assistance of members of the royal family and the Siamese military, the Vietnamese resistance leaders managed to make several purchases of weapons from Siam. They were also able to travel to northeast Siam to expand their activities among the overseas Vietnamese residing in those provinces. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, the Thai government provided refuge to a number of Vietnamese activists by allowing them to live in self-sufficient farming camps outside Bangkok. These camps also served as centres for the Vietnamese anti-colonial work.\(^{17}\)

Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam prior to WW I were small and not without obstacle. Siamese policy towards the Vietnamese was ambiguous during this period. There appeared to be two main motives underpinning Thai policy on the Vietnam question. One was a hatred of the French. As noted above, for successive Thai leaders, the forced concessions of territory which the Thais made to France were bitterly resented. Thus, any activity which caused trouble for French rule would have pleased the Siamese.\(^{18}\) Moreover, Siamese rulers may also have felt a certain degree of sympathy

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\(^{18}\) It is useful to consider other incidents to support this argument. For example, there were instances when Thai officials secretly helped Vietnamese anti-colonialists escape from French power. (Ibid., pp. 20-21.) According to Vella, "the Thai kept close watch on the Northeast, and reports that Northeasterners resented the French and love the Thai, that the French were having continual trouble with deceits and were barely able to govern their Laos territories, undoubtedly heartened the Thai." See Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo*: *King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978), p. 82.
towards peoples fighting for their freedom. But Siam also needed to maintain a cordial relationship with France. The French were still perceived as posing a threat to Siam after the Kingdom had already been forced to make five territorial concessions. Prior to WW I, the French occasionally demanded the extradition of Vietnamese anti-colonialists from Siam. It was evident that the Thai authorities yielded to French demands in some cases and secretly helped the Vietnamese activities from the French power in some others. During WW I, because Siam was on the side of the Allies, it prohibited anti-colonialists from Indochina to enter the kingdom. The WW I years saw a reduction in Vietnamese resistance activities in Siam.

The post-WW I period saw the reestablishment of the Vietnamese anti-French movement in Siam, however. Vietnamese activists travelled into Siam again after the war, seeking to redevelop resistance activities in the Kingdom. The resistance gradually expanded among overseas Vietnamese in Siam, and thus paved the way for Ho Chi Minh's political movement in Siam. The increased importance of Siam for Vietnamese resistance activities became more evident with the arrival of Ho Chi Minh in mid-1928. Ho, who

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19 This may have derived, as Wyatt has suggested, "not least from the pride they took in having avoided colonialism themselves." (Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, p. 238.) The Vietnamese were not the only group using Siam as a base for their anti-colonial activities. During the 1920s, with all other countries in Southeast Asia under colonial rule, Siam became a safe haven for anti-colonialists in the region.

20 As Vella has noted: "The vituperative comments by French colonialists about Siam [during Rama V] are too numerous to quote," and thus, "fear of French acquisitiveness was particularly strong." The *Bangkok Times* of 24 February, 1904 quoted a French columnist as saying that: "...for the honour, for the prestige, for the peace of France and of French Indochina, Siam must be destroyed, it being impossible for her to play an imperial role at the same time as ourselves. Inevitably the day will come when this people - brigands, robbers of men and holders of slaves - will tire the patience of the English as well as our own." See Vella, *Chaiyoi: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, p. 81.


22 A royal order, issued in 1915, stipulated that Siam would not to allow anti-colonialists from Indochina to enter the Kingdom. Anyone managing to cross the border would be extradited. See Vella, *Chaiyoi: King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism*, Chapter 5, footnote 16, p. 290 and Goscha, *Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French*, p. 23.

23 By the early 1920s, a number of overseas Vietnamese hamlets were built in the northeastern area and the Vietnamese obtained permission to farm the land legally. In 1925, after the formation of the Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Society in China's southern province, Canton, Ho Chi Minh sent his activists to establish branches in Siam. A number of Vietnamese organisations were subsequently set up in the northeastern provinces of Siam. The aim was to expand anti-colonial activities and resistance training for the Vietnamese residing in Siam and those sent from Vietnam. By the late 1930s, these organisations were flourishing. The operation of one of these associations was, as one study points out, "an example of how Siam served as a safe sanctuary in which the Vietnamese resistance could administer revolutionary laboratories." (Goscha, *Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French*, pp. 23-29, 36.) The Vietnam Young Revolutionary Comrades Society (the *Hoi Vietnam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi*) was the first international anti-imperialist struggle group created by Ho. The group provided a basis for the Indochinese Communist Party and the present-day Vietnam's Lao Dong (Worker) Party. See E. Thadeus Flood, "The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand: Minority Manipulation in Counterinsurgency", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 9, No. 2, July-September, 1977, p. 32.
stayed for a year, spent his time training Vietnamese cadres for the coming revolution and generating revolutionary consciousness in the overseas Vietnamese living in the northeast provinces. Ho emphasised the importance of Siam in Vietnamese struggle for independence to Vietnamese in the northeast provinces, and encouraged Vietnamese activists to learn local language and custom. According to Vietnamese sources, when Ho Chi Minh came back to Siam again in March 1930—a month after the formation of the Vietnamese Communist Party—he was under instructions from the Comintern to help "the Siamese people make a revolution." On 20 April 1930 the Siamese Communist Party (SCP) was formed in a meeting among the Vietnamese and Chinese, and with Ho as a representative of the Comintern. No reference was made to any Thai representatives at that meeting.

It may legitimately be asked why these Vietnamese activities in Siam were tolerated. Studies have shown that Thai leaders' concern of socialism and communism had been evident since the reign of Rama V. During the early years of the reign of King Rama VII (r.1925-1932), a number of laws and measures were taken to control the expansion of communism and other activities which were perceived to be dangerous to the nation. There are reports that both Chinese and Vietnamese were arrested for disseminating left-wing ideology during this period. In this context, Vietnamese activities would seem to be possible only because the government of Rama VII distinguished between anti-French 'nationalists' who were regarded with a degree of sympathy, and 'communists' who were not. Rama VII and his high-ranking officials confronted something of a dilemma here. The King's personal attitude can be seen from his comment in late 1930, that:

24 Charles F. Keyes, *Isan: Regionalism in Northeastern Thailand*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Data Paper No. 65, 1967), p. 23. It is worth mentioning that in Siam, during this period, that Ho seems to work out, for the first time, "the classic rural organising techniques that would later carry his movement to power on a wave of revolutionary nationalism..." See Flood, "The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand...", p. 33.

25 Goscha, *Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French*, pp. 41-2. Vietnamese sources also mentioned that while the propaganda against the Bangkok government in the early 1930s was mostly conducted by the Vietnamese, a few Thais also joined in this task, but the number could be as few as five to seven. (Ibid., p. 43.) However, the origin of the SCP is still a matter of controversy. The Communist Party of Thailand mentioned that a Marxist group, founded in 1927 by Thais sent to China for education by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and composed of CCP and/or overseas Chinese in Siam, became the SCP in 1930. ("A Brief Introduction to the History of Communist Party of Thailand (1942-77)", *The Road to Victory: Documents from the Communist Party of Thailand*, (Chicago: Liberator Press, n.d.), p.4, cited in Kranok Wongtrangan, *Communist Revolutionary Process: A Study of the Communist Party of Thailand*, Ph.D. Thesis, The Johns Hopkins University, 1981, pp. 48-9.) According to Kranok, it is unclear if there were two communist parties in Siam at the time, i.e., the CCP-Siam branch and the SCP. According to Flood, the SCP was composed of non-Thai elements, until its disintegration in 1939-40 and later reorganised as the Thai Communist Party in December 1942. See Flood, "The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand...", p. 34.

As long as French rule continues in Vietnam it is a 'safeguard' for Siam. No matter how much we sympathise with the Vietnamese, when one thinks of the danger which might arise, one has to hope that the Vietnamese will not easily escape from the power of the French. Apart from the necessity of maintaining good relations with the French, I believe it is in the direct interest of Siam not to give protection to Vietnamese rebels or in any way to aid the Vietnamese in freeing themselves from French rule.  

However, Prince Damrong, member of the Supreme Council of State, held the view that the Vietnamese in Siam seeking independence should not be extradited, and that Siam should not let France use "communism" as an excuse for securing deportation. Ultimately, the official line of the government, as the king suggested, was that: "Siam should not be a 'refuge' for 'rebels', but that the government must be fair to the Vietnamese in Siam while still maintaining good relations with the French."  

However, in the aftermath of the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy, the Thai government adopted tough measures against communism. Following the promulgation of strict anti-communist legislation in April 1933, a large number of Vietnamese were arrested under this law, many of whom were key SCP figures. The Thai government's tough-line on communism thus caused a considerable slow down of the anti-French Vietnamese resistance in Siam.  

Another shift in Thai policy towards the Vietnamese anti-colonialists occurred during the first Phibun Songkram government (1938-44), which called for the independence of Indochina and assisted Indochinese anti-colonial movements. This policy shift needs to be understood in the context of Prime Minister Field Marshall Phibun's irredentist movement.  


28 Ibid., pp. 175-177. That this was in fact Siamese policy can be seen from the government's response to the French demands for the extradition of Vietnamese activists. The government separated 'nationalists' from 'communists' and handed the latter over to the French. Moreover, from available evidence, the arrests of Chinese and Vietnamese on charges of communism usually occurred in Bangkok, while the Vietnamese stronghold and most anti-French activity was largely restricted to the northeast. A report by Vietnamese cadres to Ho Chi Minh sometime before 1927, shows Vietnamese activities in the northeastern provinces were possible because the local authorities did not pay particular attention to their activities so they could carry on their work, more or less, without disruption. In any case, Siam was still an attractive place for the Vietnamese resistance, despite its anti-communist measures, for the punishment was usually limited to deportation, while it was execution in China, another stronghold of the Vietnamese anti-colonialists. See Ibid., p. 167 and Goscha, Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French, p. 36.
Under Phibun's leadership, the irredentist movement was a crucial part of Phibun's nationalist campaign. From the outset, one of this campaign's key objectives was to heighten "Thai" consciousness among the people. The campaign emphasised the great and glorious "land of the Thais" which existed before the arrival of the European powers which had resulted in the dispersion of ethnic Thais to various neighbouring countries, including French Indochina. The campaign was an overture to the government's attempt to recover "lost Thai" territories in Indochina.

In 1939, when war in Europe appeared increasingly likely, France proposed a non-aggression pact with Thailand. The Thai government took an opportunity to ask the French to make the Mekong River thalweg as a borderline. France agreed and the pact was signed in June 1940. A few days later, however, France fell to Germany and the new Vichy government reneged on the promise. As the French power declined, Japanese troops were making a formidable advance in Indochina. The Thai government, fearing that Japan would take over all of French Indochina, repeatedly asked the French to return its lost territories before Indochina succumbed to the Japanese. When France refused again in October, the stage was set for confrontation. In November, an armed conflict occurred along Thailand's northeastern border, marking the beginning of the 'Indochina War' between Thailand and France. In the end, Japan mediated the negotiation between the two countries in early 1941. Under the agreement, Thailand regained the territories it had lost to France under the 1904 treaty, as well as some provinces in Cambodia.

Phibun's sympathetic policy towards the Vietnamese was thus a result of his long desire to recover the territories from France. He was the first Thai leader to call for

29 Nationalism was used by Phibun as a means of mobilising popular support and maintaining political power. His assertiveness on the nationalist movement was seen in all aspects of the society and was imposed on all walks of life. See Charivat Santaputra, Thai Foreign Policy 1932-1946, (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, 1985), Chapters 4-5.

30 The loss of territories to Western powers decades earlier was to a certain extent, still remembered with bitterness among Thais. The aspiration to recover the territory remained in Thai society. After 1932, this idea had been taken up by the military, particularly the young officers. Until the Phibun government, however, there was no attempt by any government to recover the territory. See Sorasak Nagnkajonkulakit, Khabuankan seri thai kap kwamkatiang tangkanmuangthai rawang po so 2481-2492, [Seri Thai movement and political conflict in Thailand: 1938-1949], (Bangkok: Sataban asiasuksa, 1989), p. 55 (in Thai); Scott Barme, Luand Wichit Wathakan: Official Nationalism and Political Legitimacy Prior to World War II, M.A. Thesis, Faculty of Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1989, p. 112; Kokkua Suwannathat-Pean, Nayobay tangprathet khong rathaban phibunsongkram po so 2481-2487 [Foreign Policy of the Phibunsongkram government 1938-1944], (Bangkok: Sataban thaikhadisuksa, 1989), p. 39 (in Thai).


32 In 1937, Phibun, then Defence Minister, repeatedly suggested the government should encourage Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians who wanted to escape French suppression and take refuge in
Indochina's independence. In October 1940, when Phibun was obviously preparing for an armed resolution of the conflict with France, the national radio broadcast a speech by him, calling for Indochinese independence.33

During the conflict with France, the Thai government devoted great efforts to gain support from the Indochinese. In November 1940, the Department of Indochina Affairs was set up in the Ministry of Interior, with the aim of studying the situation in Indochina. Immigration laws regarding Indochinese refugees, were also relaxed. Vietnamese refugees were given a special concession, with regard to the alien registration fee. In pursuing this policy, the government hoped that the refugees would refrain from "any action that may benefit the French and be detrimental or dangerous to Thailand."34 Another interesting move came in January 1941, when the Thai High Command declared the formation of Free Indochina Army (FIA) which would work in collaboration with the Thai Armed Forces to regain Indochina's independence. It is estimated that a few hundred Vietnamese in Thailand and soldiers who had defected from the French colonial army joined in the FIA and even went into battle with the Thai Army in early 1941. However, the Indochina Communist Party (ICP) leadership was clearly concerned by Thai irredentist sentiment and displeased that Thailand regained Indochinese territory from France after the "Indochina war".35

Pridi Phanomyong, a liberal and socialist oriented politician, emerged as a dominant figure in the immediate post-war politics (1944-47). It was at this time that the Vietnamese independence movement received its greatest, and also last, support from Thailand. Pridi and his political allies—a few military officers and a group of northeastern politicians who occupied important cabinet portfolios—were instrumental in supporting the Vietnamese and other Indochinese independence movements working in

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33 Phibun broadcasted on the radio that: "With regard to our brethren in Yuan [Vietnam], they are under the French suppression... We would like to ask [France] that our brethren in Laos, Cambodia and Yuan be given freedom, independence and equality." (Direk, Thai kap songkhromlok khrangthisong, p. 54.) In December 1940, an official communiqué was read on the Thai Broadcasting Station: "We would like to see the entire Annamite [Vietnamese] people regained their independence soon. Now in Thailand we regard the Annamite as independent people in every way..." See Goscha, Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French, p. 68.

34 Statement of Ministry of Interior, see Ibid., pp. 67-68.

35 The "Declaration of the Viet Minh" noted that: "The French have given 70,000 square kilometres of Indochinese territory to the Siamese. They see us as a gift to be sold. Thus, our people have become the beasts of burden for the French... and the slaves of the Siamese." See Ibid., p. 70, see also pp. 68-69.
Thailand at the time. During the Pacific War, there was cooperation between Pridi's Khabuan kan Seri Thai or the Free Thai Movement and the Viet Minh. A Viet Minh source indicates that overseas Vietnamese joined with the Seri Thai in several guerilla battles and some Viet Minh members were also employed by the Seri Thai in the northeastern provinces for guerilla operations. When the war ended, Pridi gave a portion of Seri Thai weapons to the Viet Minh and Ho Chi Minh later set up two battalions named "The Battalions of Siam".

For Pridi, support for the Viet Minh was the result of his desire to see an end to colonialism in the region. Bangkok thus undertook to accommodate representatives of independence movements from all Indochinese states in 1946. For the Viet Minh, Thailand again emerged as a strategically important location, especially following the outbreak of war between the Viet Minh and the French in December 1946. When the Viet Minh declared the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on 2 September 1945, the new government faced a formidable threat from the French—who sought to reclaim their former colonies in Indochina immediately after WW II. When war finally broke out, the Viet Minh occupied the northern part of the country. The presence of the French troops in southern Vietnam and Cambodia forced the Viet Minh to look for a location outside Indochina to support their struggle—Thailand was the obvious choice.

During this time, Thailand was again a source of arms supplies for the Vietnamese resistance. A Vietnamese source indicates that some Thai officials facilitated the acquisition and shipment of weapons back to Vietnam. Moreover, with assistance from the Thai government, the Viet Minh set up a number of organisations in Bangkok. The

36 In a recent interview, a Viet Minh cadre, who worked in Thailand during this time, indicated that the Thai government "closed its eyes" to the Viet Minh military in the country and the Thai army "gave full permission" for them to work in Thailand. Ties between Thai leaders and the Vietnamese resistance might have long existed. A Viet Minh member who claimed to be a friend of Pridi in France since the late 1920s, mentioned a number of meetings he had with Pridi in Bangkok in 1946 were mostly on the issues of Thai military support and cooperation with the Viet Minh. He also stated that the Vietnamese received the 'strong support' of Pridi. See Ibid., pp. 92, 103-4.

37 On 25 December, 1946, the Phibun government allied with Japan and declared war against the Allies. The Khabuan kan seri thai was subsequently formed by a group of Thais, led by Pridi, then Regent, to counteract the government's decision. The underground movement was recognised by the Allies.

38 During the Pacific War, the Seri Thai was provided a substantial amount of equipment and weapons from the Allied powers. After the war, a large amount of the weapons were kept by a few northeastern politicians who worked with the Viet Minh during the war years. See Sorasak, Khabuan kan seri thai..., pp. 232, 260.

39 Pridi recalled that when Western colonial powers returned to rule their former colonies, after the war, "a certain number of these nationalists came to Thailand to ask for assistance from us. From the discussion I had with these nationalists, we came to the view that every country in Southeast Asia would soon have its independence." See Goscha, Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French, p. 90.
organisation allowed the Viet Minh to expand their resistance works and more importantly, provided the Viet Minh with a contact point with the international community at the time when the DRV was struggling for recognition. In late 1946, Thailand gave its "unofficial recognition" to the Ho Chi Minh government by allowing it to set up the Representational Office of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The Pridi government's goodwill towards the Vietnamese was manifest in its treatment of some 50,000 Vietnamese inhabitants in Laos who fled the French offensive into the northeast of Thailand. Instead of yielding to the French demand to return the refugees, the government allowed them to remain in the country. They were free to live where they pleased and were permitted to work, albeit with some restrictions. These new refugees helped to strengthen the Viet Minh's resistance movement in Thailand, particularly in the northeast which already contained some 30,000 overseas Vietnamese. They were a source of financial support and more importantly, were recruited to return to Vietnam for the resistance struggle against the French.

The Thai also cooperated with the Vietnamese in the formation of a "Southeast Asia League" in Bangkok in September 1947. According to Pridi, the League was meant to serve as a regional organisation which would provide mutual assistance and oppose European colonialism. Its inception indicates close contact and cooperation between the Thais and the Vietnamese—the most active forces in organising this regional grouping. It also reveals Pridi's ambition for Thailand to be a leading actor in regional affairs. Following the League's formation, the Thai government publicly voiced its support for the Vietnamese independence movement and also for other Southeast Asian independence struggles. Nevertheless, its aims were never accomplished, for two months after it was created, the Pridi government was overthrown in a violent coup.

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40 See Ibid., Chapter 4. Among the organisations set up in this period were an overseas Vietnamese "army" and the Vietnam News Service (VNS), formed in late 1945. A Vietnamese source claims that this "army" comprised of some thousand Vietnamese in Thailand. It was armed by the Thai government and funded with money seized from Vietnamese defectors by the French colonial army during the Thai-Franco border war. While the activities of this force are unclear, its importance can be seen from a Vietnamese report which noted that the Vietnamese in Thailand "linked together closely" in order to "support the Viet Minh front and the provisional government of the DRV." See Ibid., pp. 94-95.

41 According to a Vietnamese source, the Ho Chi Minh government initially hoped to establish a diplomatic mission in Thailand. At that time, however, Thailand was involved in negotiations with France over the issue of Cambodian and Laos territory, which the Thai gained in 1941. Thailand was trying to gain membership in the United Nations so Thai leaders did not want to jeopardise Thailand's position. It therefore allowed the DRV to set up the Representational Office of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. See Ibid., p. 123.

42 Ibid., p. 92 and Wichan and Suthawit, Yuan opphayop kap khwammakhong phainai, pp. 42-43.

43 The top positions in the League were the President (Tiang Sirikhan, MP from Sakon Nakhon), the Public Relations Officer (Senator Tawin Udon, a former MP from Roi-Et), the Vice-President (Tran Van
The November 1947 coup ended Thailand's sympathetic policy towards the Vietnamese independence movement. The coup group consisted of military officers under Field Marshal Phibun and right-wing politicians. The coup diminished the power of the Viet Minh's supporters in Thailand and paved the way for Phibun's resurgence in politics. The second Phibun Administration abandoned its previous policy of supporting Vietnamese independence and became an active partner in the western policy of "containment" in the region, or to be more precise, a policy of opposing the DRV.

Phibun's announcement of anti-communist policy after assuming the premiership in 1948 was essentially meant to gain the West's recognition of his leadership. It was nevertheless welcomed by the U.S which was growing increasingly concerned over communist advances in the region, as was evident that the U.S. favoured a continued French presence because Ho Chi Minh and his associates were regarded as having communist affiliations. Thus, in late 1948, the Americans encouraged the French to cooperate with the non-communist elements in Vietnam.

In order to repay Paris for its recognition of his government, Phibun declared that he would cooperate with France in preventing the Viet Minh's underground activities in Thailand. By early 1949, the American Embassy was already convinced that: "the Thai Government also regarded the nationalist movements along the southern and northeastern [the Viet Minh] borders as threat."

Phibun moved even closer to the U.S. after the communists took over mainland China in 1949, and the U.S. adopted a clear-cut policy of containing communism in the region. He believed that communists in Vietnam and Laos were being given support by China, as part of a plan to undermine Thai security, especially in the northeastern provinces which had a high number of ethnic Vietnamese. In 1950, Phibun yielded to French and

Giao) and Treasurer (Le Hi) were top Viet Minh leaders, and the General-Secretary (Prince Suphana Wong) who later became leader of the Pathet Lao. Other members included, Prince Norodom of Cambodia, and Prince Suvarnavatouma of Laos. See Goscha, *Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French*, pp. 155-160.


American pressure to eliminate Viet Minh activities in Thailand and halted the arms flow from Thailand to the Vietnamese anti-colonialists. Top Viet Minh activists were deported from the country.\textsuperscript{48} 

In early February 1950, the British and the American Ambassadors approached Phibun seeking Thai recognition for the Bao Dai regime in South Vietnam. Phibun initially expressed his caution on the grounds that popular support for Bao Dai was still in doubt. He further argued that if the French-American plan failed, it was possible that Thailand would face an act of revenge from a high number of the underground armed-Viet Minh guerrillas in the northeast. Within the government, the issue of recognising Bao Dai was divisive, for some key policy-makers felt that it was part of a Western plan to counter China and the Soviet Union without taking into consideration the genuine situation in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{49} 

However, Phibun finally sided with the U.S. after the American Ambassador to Thailand told him that the U.S.'s decision to provide aid to Thailand "would depend on the Thai government's recognition of the Bao Dai regime."\textsuperscript{50} On 28 February 1950, Thailand became the first Asian country to recognise the French-American backed Bao Dai regime of Vietnam and was thus fully committed to the West's attempt to prevent the Ho Chi Minh-led DRV from taking power. The declaration of recognition, written by Phibun himself, read in part:

The Communism which spread through China is now approaching Yuan [Vietnam]. The situation is frightening in that people in other Southeast Asian countries including Thailand could be forced to be communists... It is beyond one country's task to contain communism but a collective effort from various governments is needed.... With regard to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, France has kindly given them independence. By doing so, France prevented these countries, and also Thailand, from going communist. Therefore, the Thai government has decided to give recognition to the governments of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} Goscha, \textit{Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French}, p. 184.

\textsuperscript{49} For example, a Foreign Ministry official submitted his recommendation to Phibun that: "The American and the British recognition of the Bao Dai government is little more than a response to the Chinese and the Soviet recognition of the Ho Chi Minh regime.... It is just a part of the East-West conflict in this Cold War era. As a small country close to Vietnam, Thailand faces greater risk than any other country. If we were to recognise the Bao Dai regime and it did not survive, Thailand would become an enemy of the Ho Chi Minh government and it would damage the future relations between the two countries." See Konthi Suphammongkon, \textit{Kanwitasoobuy khongthai} [A conduct of Thai foreign policy], (Bangkok: Rongphim mahawitayalai thammasat, 1984), pp. 451-454 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 458.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., pp. 456-458.
Phibun's decision led to the resignation of the Foreign Minister. Indeed, opposition to Phibun's decision was considerable, not only from the public and the press but also from a majority of middle to high level officials. It is interesting that the U.S. Embassy made the following report to the State Department:

Recognition can hardly be called the policy of the Thai people or nation. It was the decision of Phibun and his clique. To a large extent, the same things is true of many other major foreign policy decisions of the Thai government.

The installation of the Bao Dai regime in Vietnam marked the polarisation of Southeast Asia between communist and non-communist countries. From this time until 1973, Thai-Vietnamese relations were characterised by antagonism. This was a result of Thailand's pro-U.S. policy, which reached a peak in Thai-American collaboration in America's Vietnam war as noted in Chapter II.

Meanwhile, Thailand actively campaigned for diplomatic support for the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). During this time, Thailand's policy was to help maintain the RVN, or South Vietnam, a non-communist state and keep communism away from the Thai frontier. Apart from sending troops to Saigon as noted in Chapter II, Thailand was active in providing diplomatic support for the RVN, rallying international support for South Vietnam and for a continued American military role in that country. This task was left largely to long-time Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman (1958-1971), a leading supporter of the U.S. policy in Indochina. The major argument in Thanat's diplomatic campaign was the importance of the RVN as a front line for the entire "free-world" and


53 Ibid., p. 71.

54 Thai leaders' concern for the RVN's survival also minimised any conflict between the two governments. A case in point occurred in the early 1960s, when the Diem government's anti-Buddhist policy irritated Thai leaders. The situation deteriorated in mid-1963 when several Buddhist leaders committed self-immolation after severe conflict with the government. Although the Thai government considered the situation an internal one, it issued a strong protest to the RVN. The Thai government also proposed that Buddhist countries intervene in the situation. No action was taken in the end, largely because Thai leaders did not want the issue to destabilise the Diem government. See John Funston, *Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni*, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, 1989, p. 235.
that the conflict in Vietnam was a civil war or a war of national liberation.\textsuperscript{55} At the time, Thanat was also one of the strongest defenders of the U.S. intervention in Indochina.\textsuperscript{56}

The Thanom regime also provided aid to the RVN. In July 1964, it sent ten Thai pilots to fly Vietnamese transport planes and seven ground crews to maintain the planes. Another two aid packages were made in 1965—one included construction materials, 100 tons of rice, and the loan of a 15,000 k.w. generator, another included additional facilities for the training of Vietnamese pilots and medical units. Following the "Tet offensive" in January 1968, Thailand sent an emergency grant worth $230,000 to help the victims.\textsuperscript{57}

**Vietnamese refugees**

As noted above, during 1946-47 the Pridi government allowed some 50,000 Vietnamese refugees to flee the French in Laos and live in Thailand. However, after the Thai-DRV relations deteriorated during the Phibun regime, they came to be seen as a 'problem' for Thai security. The refugees were regarded as loyal to North Vietnam and were supposedly sending material support to the DRV. A number of government orders were in 1951 issued to control the refugees' movement and prevent their support of the DRV.

Subsequently, attempts to repatriate refugees took place under the Sarit regime as well. Under the August 1959 Rangoon Agreement, 45,241 refugees were repatriated to North Vietnam from 1960 until 1964, when the Tongkin Gulf crisis took place and the DRV asked the repatriation to be suspended for safety reason. Negotiations on this issue were carried out between Thailand and the DRV in the following period as well, but did not succeed. While consistently voicing strong protest over the Thai government's treatment of the refugees, the DRV refused to accept repatriation. Although South Vietnam appeared to be more receptive, most of the refugees did not want to live under the Saigon regime.

Nonetheless, the Thai government maintained a strict policy on a repatriation. It was explained that more than 90% of the remaining 30,000 refugees were under North


\textsuperscript{56} In 1964, in an interview with a television program in New York Thanat said that the American role in South Vietnam "will go down in history as a courageous decision... In other words, Southeast Asia will owe its freedom and independence to the United States and the American soldiers who are doing a good job in South Vietnam now." See *Collected Papers and Statements of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman*, July 1964 - November 1965, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{57} Funston, *Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni*, pp. 238, 240.
Vietnam's control, thus posing a security threat to Thailand. Most notably, they were accused of being a "fifth column" for Hanoi, spreading communism inside the country, and supporting and joining the Thai communist movement. Thus, arrests of ethnic Vietnamese for such activities occasionally took place. Since the mid-1940s, Thai authorities also voiced concern about the negative repercussions which the refugees had upon the economic condition of local inhabitants.

As a result, the Vietnamese refugees were under special restrictions which other ethnic groups in Thailand were not. Essentially, they were confined to eight provinces in the northeast and travel from their district of residence required permission from heads of police in their provinces. Work permits were needed before they could work in limited areas. Moreover, the Vietnamese refugees were legally not permitted to marry Thais and their offspring were not entitled to Thai citizenship even though born on Thai territory. An ironic consequence of these rules was that the refugees were prevented from assimilating into Thai society. As a result, they eventually ended up maintaining their own ethnic identity, giving rise to conflict between the Vietnamese and local communities.

It can be argued that the Thai government's refugee policy during this period reflected the state of Thai-DRV relations. Refugees suffered as a consequence of Thailand's antagonistic policy towards North Vietnam. In the mid-1970s, the issue of Vietnamese refugees was highly politicised. In effect, refugees became both targets and victims of right-wing elements in the move against the normalisation of relations with Vietnam.

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58 For instance, during the Viet Minh inroads into Laos in 1953-54, more than 800 Vietnamese in three northeastern provinces were arrested and relocated to the south, on charges of assisting the Viet Minh. A number of Vietnamese refugees were also arrested during the crisis in Laos in 1958. During the Vietnam war, several refugees were charged with sabotaging U.S. military facilities in Thailand. See Wichan and Sutawit, Yuan opphayop kap khwammankhong phainai, pp. 49-50, 84-86.

59 Refugees controlled an large section of local trading and businesses. In May 1946, when large number of Vietnamese were arriving, the governor of the northeast province of Nong Khai, expressed concern that the refugees "might eventually control all the business in the area as they were more shrewd than the Siamese." Quoted in Goscha, Thailand and the Vietnamese Resistance against the French, p. 109.

60 Conversely, the situation reconfirmed the relevance of policy. Studies by government officials in charge of Vietnamese refugees portrayed this ethnic group as chauvinist and not conforming to Thai laws. The studies detail "illegal activities" committed by refugees against Thailand. An apparent antipathetic existed between Thais and refugees. The existing policy was justified on the grounds that these Vietnamese were unlikely to assimilate into society. For further details on the Thai government's attitude towards Vietnamese refugees, see Wichan and Sutawit, Yuan opphayop kap khwammankhong phainai; Khachatphai, Yuan opphayop; and an interview with Maj Gen Fuangchaloet Anirutheahwa, senior officer of the Internal Security Operation Command in The Nation Review, 24 May, 1982, p. 5.
Adjusting policy after October 1973

After the Thanom regime was overthrown in the October 1973 student-led uprising, a concrete attempt to establish diplomatic relations with the DRV was made by the Sanya interim government. In May, Foreign Minister Charunphan declared that the government had opened several channels of contact with the DRV in order to pave the way for normalisation of relations. Nevertheless, the major obstacle to normalising relations at this time was the presence of American troops in Thailand. The DRV demanded a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Thailand as a pre-condition for normalisation of relations. Another obstacle was the issue of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand. When Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien visited Bangkok, in May 1973, the Thai government proposed that negotiations be pursued on the question of repatriating all the remaining 70,000 refugees. The DRV ignored the proposal and clearly wanted the refugees to remain in Thailand.

For most Thais, the communist victory in the three Indochinese states in mid-1975 was:

\[\text{a traumatic turning point. But unlike those far away in the West, the question was less a moral one than one of survival in a changed political situation.}\]

During mid-1975 to 1978, the Indochina issue drew different reaction from the two groups. It stimulated civilian leaders to accelerate the process of normalising relations with Indochinese states, while exacerbating the "anxiety" of the right-wing elements - an anxiety which spread through much of Thai society. At least two factors contributed to this "Vietnam phobia". First, was the belief that Vietnam was a powerful country - one strong enough to "defeat" Thailand's superpower ally. Its total armed forces numbered

61 One channel was through Thanat Khoman, Adviser to Prime Minister Sanya, who was assigned to contact the North Vietnamese officials in Europe. The other channel was through Pansa Winyarat, editor of the liberal political weekly Chutarat. In October 1974, he was asked by then Deputy Foreign Minister Major-General Chatchai Choonhavan to make a trip to Hanoi to inform North Vietnamese leaders that Thailand sincerely wanted to carry on negotiations over the issue of normalising relations. According to Pansa, the response from Hanoi was very positive. Interview, Pansa Winyarat, Bangkok, 28 April, 1992.

62 According to the DRV Foreign Minister Phan Hien's letter to Charunphan, on 27 November, 1974, Thailand's "pursuance of a policy aimed at furthering the U.S. imperialists' designs of aggression and intervention in Indochina." See FEER, 6 June, 1975, p. 16.


about 700,000, far more than Thailand's 204,000.65 Hanoi was also believed to have inherited a huge stock of weapons from the Americans.66 The combination of the two factors resulted in Vietnam being perceived as a superior military power. Second, was the fact that Thais had been exposed to the official propaganda about the "Vietnam threat" and "Vietnamese expansionism" for decades. The "Domino theory"—the notion that Thailand would be the next to fall to communism after Indochina—was believed at that time, not only by many Thais but also by many Western observers.67 The Vietnamese authority, more or less, reaffirmed this image by persistently expressing support for worldwide revolutionary movements.68 Rumours about Vietnam's "ill-intentions" towards Thailand were constantly circulated in Thailand. The central concern was Vietnam's alleged expansionist aims - with Thailand being the immediate target.69 One may wonder, in retrospect, the credibility of such rumours. At the time, however, they had wide currency in Thai society.70

In the aftermath of its formation, the DRV viewed Thailand and the other ASEAN states which had long been the U.S.'s allies and committed to anti-communist policy, with


66 According to a *FEER* report, Hanoi in 1975 captured some 800,000 M16 rifles and 130,000 tons of ammunition from the U.S. See John McBeth, "Counting on nearby friends", *FEER*, 13 July, 1979, p. 12.


68 For example, in 1976, the Vietnamese media claimed that "the world balance of forces is changing in favour of revolutionary forces." See Funston, *Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni*, p. 270.

69 In October 1975, the Thai daily, *Sayamrat*, published a 'secret North Vietnam document' revealing the DRV's plan to conquer the northeast provinces of Thailand. According to the plan, the DRV's military action would begin in 1976-77, first by capturing a strip of territory about 50-100 kilometres wide, along the Mekong River and then negotiating with the Thai government over the annexation of this territory into the "Union of Indochina". The *Nation Review* editorial then suggested that Vietnam would not accept the repatriation of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand because "the refugees may be very helpful to Hanoi in whatever she plans to do on this side of the Mekong River." See Somporn Sangchai, "Thailand: The Rising of the Rightist Phoenix", *Southeast Asian Affairs 1976*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), p. 390.

70 The "anxiety" over the collapse of anti-communist regimes in Indochina was well summed up by one article that: "It is often asked: How long has Thailand got? Numerous pundits, both local and foreign, say they give the country two to three years, whatever that means. For all too many, gloom and doom seem the order of the day. Many rumours circulate in business, professional and political circles. Thai language newspapers exacerbate the anxiety with scare headlines and unsubstantiated stories: One recent headline and story predicted the Vietnamese would get as far as Prachinburi [a province close to Bangkok] a few months time." See *FEER*, 23 July, 1976, pp. 10-11.
suspicion. It saw ASEAN as a successor of anti-North Vietnam SEATO and the ASEAN governments as "reactionary forces" and believed that its victory over the Americans would trigger "anti-imperialist forces" in these countries. The DRV thus criticised the policies of ASEAN countries strongly whenever it found that such policies clashed with its security interests. During 1975-76, the DRV's suspicion of Thailand's link with the U.S., because of the presence of American troops, was a major obstacle in normalisation of Thai-Viet relations. In late 1976, however, Hanoi began to reassess its policies towards ASEAN countries and during 1977-78, expressed its greater interest in establishing links with the ASEAN governments. The change in Vietnam's policy was due to economic reasons, it saw ASEAN as potential trade partners and possible sources of aid. It might also have been due to Vietnam's reassessment of ASEAN which after the first summit of ASEAN leaders in early 1976, did not pose to become a threatening military organisation, as Vietnam had anticipated. Another major change of Vietnam's policy towards Thailand and the other ASEAN countries occurred in late 1978. This will be discussed below.

As a part of the overall foreign policy adjustment, the elected Kukrit government (March 1975-January 1976) adopted a policy of rapprochement towards Vietnam. It was announced that a normalisation of relations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia was a high priority. In its goodwill gestures towards all the Indochinese countries, the Kukrit government immediately gave recognition to the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG) and the new governments of Cambodia and Laos. It also paved the way for normalisation of relations by giving a clear commitment that the U.S. troop withdrawal would be completed by 20 July, 1976, six months earlier than had previously been planned.

For key policy-makers—Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj, Foreign Minister Chatchai Choonhavan and a group of high ranking officials in the Foreign Ministry—it was not that the "Vietnam threat" was diminished, for the possibility of a conflict between Thailand and Vietnam was seen to remain. However, they perceived that in a new environment—where the country's decade-long American pillar was no longer there and where Vietnam seemed to be emerging as a regional power—diplomacy was regarded as an effective means in dealing with Vietnam and enhancing the country's security. As

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71 Prior to the first ASEAN summit in February 1976, the DRV criticised ASEAN for being an organisation aimed at rallying "all pro-American reactionary forces to oppose the revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia." See Timothy Huxley, Indochina as a Security Concern of the ASEAN States 1975-1981, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, 1986, pp. 34-36.

72 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
Kukrit recalled after his departure from office, there was a need for peaceful coexistence with neighbouring communist countries:

A long confrontation left Thailand and the Indochinese countries full of mutual suspicion and distrust. Nevertheless, in this new political environment [1975], Thailand was compelled to leave behind the previous foreign policy towards Indochina which solely emphasised on military confrontation. The immediate task for Thailand was to find ways and means to reduce and control any potential conflict and confrontation in the region. Considering our long-term security needs, we had to carry out this long and painful process of reconciliation with the Indochinese countries.\(^{73}\)

That Thai leaders still perceived a potential conflict with Vietnam can be seen from the move by Foreign Minister Chatchai to expand Thailand's relations with other regional countries as a means to "counter" the emergence of Vietnamese power. He did so by emphasising the need for greater cooperation with other members of the long-time inactive Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Moreover, for the first time, China was seen as a counter-balance to North Vietnam. Chatchai revealed many years later that he hoped diplomatic relations with China—established in July 1975—would serve this purpose:

We know how to conduct a pragmatic foreign policy. It has been known for long time that the Vietnamese are fearful of the Chinese because of their shared borders and long Chinese domination in the past. Though Vietnam has long been independent and was the victorious party in the Vietnam war, it cannot get away from its traditional external threat.

Understanding this enigma, we therefore approached China. Since China has long distrusted Vietnam and had recently been disturbed by Vietnam's close links with the Soviet Union after the Vietnam war, we told the Chinese that if they did nothing, Cambodia would again fall under Vietnamese-Soviet influence.\(^{74}\)

The move to establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam during this time was complicated by a number of factors, however. Right-wing politicians and the military began to reassert themselves in national politics, and they were strongly opposed to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Vietnam. One of the more divisive issues was the belief that North Vietnam was the main cause of the dramatic growth of the communist insurgency in Thailand following the communist victory in Indochina. According to the then Secretary-General of the National Security Council, Air Marshal

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Siddhi Sawetsila, the insurgents received increased support from the Indochinese countries, making the suppression of guerrilla activities much more difficult.75

While the Thai insurgency was given support—morally and otherwise—from Vietnam, the extent of support remains unclear.76 Notable was the joint Vietnam-Laos communique on 11 February, 1976, which stated that: "the two sides totally support the struggle of the Thai for a truly independent democratic Thailand..."77 In 1975, Hanoi Radio also voiced concerns over Thailand's domestic anti-communist policy.78 Undoubtedly, some members of the military and cabinet in Thailand immediately seized on this ambiguous position.

After October 1973, most civilian leaders, including Prime Ministers Sanya and Kukrit as well as military officers publicly stated that the growth of communist activities in the country was due—at least in part—to external support. However, Thai leaders disagreed as to how best to cope with this threat. Advocates of rapprochement with Vietnam believed that the major causes of the insurgency were internal economic and social problems, and that the issue of external support would be more manageable once diplomatic relations were established with countries assisting the insurgents. This was the justification of the Kukrit government in establishing relations with China79 and was also true in the case of Vietnam. As Kukrit noted in December 1975:

75 Ibid., p. 104. By the end of 1974, there were reportedly some 8,000 guerrillas operating in Thailand, compared with around 5,000 the previous year and 3,500 in 1972. (FEER, 17 January, 1975, p. 28.) Throughout 1975, Vietnamese and Lao links to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) were well publicized by the military. Acting Supreme Commander General Krit Sivara, for example, said that the CPT had been "reinforced from abroad" with heavy arms; the Thai Border Patrol Police claimed that "high-powered war weapons" were transferred from Laos to "hard-core Vietnamese refugees" and insurgents in Thailand for a "major attempt to liberate Thailand's northeast". (Huxley, Indochina as a Security Concern of the ASEAN States 1975-81, p. 208.) In addition, U.S. intelligence revealed in mid-1975 North Vietnam's "long-time comprehensive plan", with assistance from the Pathet Lao to support the CPT, especially in the north and northeast. Vietnam apparently gave weapon training to Thai guerrillas from a base in Hanoi. See FEER, 22 August, 1975, pp. 10-11.


78 Hanoi Radio broadcasted that: "Malaysia and Thailand are still collaborating with each other to suppress the guerrilla troops in the border region of the two countries. What particularly merits attention is the fact that while changing their foreign policies, these countries are still internally maintaining or even stepping up their anti-communist policies." There was no reason offered for Hanoi's concern over Malaysian and Thai domestic affairs. See FEER, 1 August, 1975, p. 21.

79 This view was expressed clearly by Kukrit, Chatichai and a group of high-ranking officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in their interviews with Bhansoon, Thailand's Foreign Policy under Kukrit Pramoj...
Hanoi is more prominent in supporting insurgency in this country than China - in arms, training of personnel... the [Thai] insurgents were trained in North Vietnam. Arms and ammunition are supplied by the North Vietnamese army. Yet despite that... insurgents don't supply any obstacle to our attempt to resume normal relations with Vietnam.  

But opponents of diplomatic ties with Vietnam argued that the extent of Vietnamese support for the Thai guerillas meant that the government should pursue a strong anti-communist policy internally and externally. Few military officers or politicians believed that rapprochement with Vietnam would reduce the level of insurgency in the country. Furthermore, suspicions of Vietnam were adding to deteriorating Thai relations with the Pathet Lao government. Thai leaders believed that Hanoi was behind Laos' "new tough anti-Thai policies." As a result, there were various attempts to undermine the policy of rapprochement with Vietnam. In many instances, Vietnamese refugees were targets of this right-wing campaign, for this issue would easily upset North Vietnam. A week before Foreign Minister Bichai Rattakun's visit to Hanoi in August, there was a major arrest of illegal Vietnamese refugees who were accused of plotting political unrest in Bangkok. While this right-wing group was ultimately unable to stop the normalisation of relations with Vietnam, it played a crucial role in the next Thanin government.

The Vietnamese were also exceedingly suspicious of Thai motives, as can be seen from the events of early 1975. Prior to the fall of Saigon on 30 April, some 125 South Vietnamese pilots flew to Thailand's U-tapao air base—others came by ship. The sophisticated C-130 transports and F-5 jet fighters which the South Vietnamese flew in, were immediately removed from the country by the Americans. The DRV and the PRG strongly criticised Thailand and insisted that all South Vietnamese planes and ships be returned. Hanoi claimed that the future of Thai-Vietnamese relations depended on the

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80 Interview with Kukrit Pramoj, FEER, 12 December, 1975, pp. 20-21.

81 One of the most anti-Vietnamese politicians was in fact Kukrit's Defence Minister, retired General Praman Adireksan, who regularly complained about communist infiltration along the borders, and called for Thai unity against "outside forces" because "you cannot negotiate with the communists." See FEER, 23 May, 1975, p. 37.


83 In May 1975, prior to the first visit of the PRG delegation, there was a violent riot against Vietnamese refugees in the two northeast provinces. The riot was reportedly organised by military elements in order to sabotage the visit. This incident not only damaged talks over normalising relations, but also resulted in an angry denunciation of Thailand by Hanoi. (FEER, 23 May, 1975, p. 37.) In October 1975, right-wing Thai leaders accused Vietnam of planning to take over the 16 northeastern provinces - they instigated demonstrations against Vietnamese refugees. Again in February 1976, right-wingers claimed that a 122-man Thai-Vietnamese unit had infiltrated Bangkok. See Funston, Thai Foreign Policy from Sarit to Seni, pp. 267-268.
Thai's handing of this issue. While insisting that the government had not been aware of the American action, Prime Minister Kukrit nevertheless firmly refused the Vietnamese demand.

Added to all the above problems was the continuing controversial issue of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand. Again the conflict between the Thai and Vietnamese governments was over Thailand's plan to repatriate of all the refugees while Vietnam did not agree.

These combined obstacles put Kukrit and his supporters in a difficult situation, making the achievement of consensus on this issue—in the seventeen-party coalition government—very difficult to achieve. As the military in Thailand still possessed enormous power, it was inconceivable that compromise or concession with Vietnam could be reached without its agreement. Prime Minister Kukrit was thus unable to act in a manner which might have been interpreted by the military as overly-friendly to Vietnam. As a result, normalisation of relations with Indochinese states did not materialise during the ten-month Kukrit government.

When the Seni government assumed office in April 1976, the Foreign Minster, Bichai Rattakun, also an advocate of improving relations with communist neighbouring countries, felt it imperative to act immediately. As he later revealed, he felt that prompt action was necessary because "right-wing elements were getting stronger." Initially, Vietnam appeared to respond to Thai overtures. The U.S. troop withdrawal from Thailand was by this time nearly completed. On 5 July, three days after the unification of Vietnam, Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh announced an addition to Vietnam's earlier three-point program for establishing relations with countries in the region. What was now a four-point program called for the mutual respect of territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's domestic affairs, no foreign bases, mutual economic and

84 North Vietnam's official daily Nhan Dan wrote that: "This is the right moment for the Thai government to manifest its goodwill by practical deeds... the Vietnamese people may forget the past misdeeds committed by the former dictatorial militarist administration in Bangkok, but will not tolerate any further actions of this kind." (FEER, 16 May, 1975, p. 20.) On this issue, Sarasin noted that: "Apparently, the move was a psychological weapon against a shaken enemy who had just witnessed not only the swift downfall of Saigon - a thing that had been predicted but whose speed had been a total surprise - but also the crumbling of its main pillar of support, the United States." See Sarasin Viraphol, Directions in Thai Foreign Policy, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), p. 40.

85 The Kukrit government was unable to control the American action because previously, American use of Thai air bases had been autonomous, although a Thai commander remained officially in charge. The U.S. later claimed that this agreement had not been cancelled. Obviously when this American operation took place, the government and the Foreign Ministry had no knowledge about the agreement concerning the U-tapao base. See Julaopon, Kanzuksa witiakan mayaques.

cultural exchanges, and development of cooperation among countries in the region for the building of prosperity in keeping with each country's specific conditions.

On 3-6 August 1976, Bichai visited Hanoi where negotiations focused on three issues. First, was the question of the return of the planes and ships taken from South Vietnam before the fall of Saigon. Here Thailand asserted that it was only a third party and thus negotiations must be pursued between Vietnam and the U.S. Second, was the Vietnamese refugee question. Thailand was prepared to allow the refugees to continue living in Thailand, and Vietnam agreed on further discussion as to the return of refugees. The two sides agreed to set up a joint commission on the issue, including "the modalities of repatriation to their native country." The third issue pertained to war reparations. Bichai asserted that while Thailand's involvement in the Vietnam war happened during the military regime, his government would nevertheless be willing to contribute to "healing the war wounds in Vietnam" and the details of assistance would be further discussed once Vietnam was ready. The two sides finally agreed to establish diplomatic relations.87

After 6 October 1976, when the military staged a bloody coup installing the Thanin regime, Thai-Vietnamese relations again deteriorated. Although Thanin announced a friendly policy towards all countries regardless of political and ideological differences, there was no dialogue with communist countries. Thus, there was no follow-up to agreements with Vietnam which had been signed in August 1976. To the contrary, the Prime Minister together with a number of his cabinet, the military, and the official media took every opportunity to emphasise Vietnam's support for internal insurgency. Thus the two countries embarked on a period of mutual recrimination. The most outrageous statement came from Interior Minister Samak Suntanrawat, who declared in late 1976, that Hanoi had set 15 February, 1977 as "D-Day" to launch an invasion of Thailand.88

Thai-Laos relations also reached a low stage during this period. There were frequent clashes in the Mekong River between the two countries. Thai leaders believed that Laos' hostile policy against Thailand was supported or encouraged by Vietnam, which


88 The Minister said that Vietnamese refugees in the northeast would foment unrest and, when the government enforced law and order, Vietnam would intervene "on the pretext of protecting the refugees." (The Nation Review, 9 December, 1976, pp. 1, 12). In May 1977, a Thai army official said that the Vietnamese participated in communist terrorist operations in the south and that radio communications of the Thai army had often been jammed by the Vietnamese. Under Samak's instructions, a number of Vietnamese residents were arrested on charges of communist or subversive activities. See Sayamrat, 12 May, 1977, pp. 1, 12 (in Thai).
continued to station 40,000 to 50,000 troops in that country.\textsuperscript{89} Five battalions of joint Lao-Vietnamese forces were said to be moving along the Thai-Lao border on the Lao side of the Mekong River.\textsuperscript{90} Laos was also seen as a haven for training Thai insurgents with the Vietnamese also said to be involved in this activity.\textsuperscript{91}

Thanin's hardline policy towards communist countries was openly questioned by General Kriangsak Chamanand, then the Supreme Commander. When Kriangsak became Prime Minister after the 20 October, 1977 coup, he immediately advocated a dialogue with communist neighbours and within a month, issued invitations to heads of state of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to visit Thailand. During 1978, Vietnamese leaders made a number of visits to Thailand. On 3 July, Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien made a one-day visit to Bangkok. The most important visit was that of Premier Pham Van Dong on 6-10 September, 1978. In addition to agreements to cooperate in some areas, Kriangsak also offered Dong a long-term credit line, worth 100 million baht. Another delegation, led by Vietnamese ambassador-at-large Nguyen Xuan, arrived on 13 December to discuss an exchange of ambassadors, trade and commercial aviation. The Thai Foreign Ministry expected that ambassadors would be in their new posts in the early months of 1979, following which a whole range of bilateral issues would be opened for discussion.\textsuperscript{92} In addition, the Thai government donated one million baht for victims of a severe flood in Vietnam in October.

Throughout the Kriangsak government, the Thai-Vietnamese relations were unprecedentedly cordial. This change was both a result of Prime Minister Kriangsak's initiative, and Vietnam's increasing conflict with Democratic Kampuchea and China.

Kriangsak was able to pursue a friendly policy with Vietnam, and other communist countries in part because of his army career. As an army man who had long been in charge of suppressing communist activities and being close to the U.S. during his time at SEATO, Kriangsak was not vulnerable to any accusation of being "communist sympathiser"—as had been the case with advocates of rapprochement with Vietnam.

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\textsuperscript{89} Interview with Deputy Defence Minister General Lek Neomalee, \textit{The Bangkok Post}, 8 September, 1977, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{The Bangkok World}, 3 February, 1977, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{91} A statement by the Supreme Commander in August said that "an unknown number" of Vietnamese were under language training in Laos and would be sent to infiltrate Thailand's northeast provinces to rally local insurgents. See \textit{The Bangkok Post}, 26 August, 1977, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{FEER}, 23 December, 1978, p. 11.
during the governments of Kukrit and Seni. There is no doubt, however, that Kriangsak and his supporters still perceived communism as the country's foremost threat. Kriangsak's anti-communism was different from Thanin's as can be seen in his statement that: "we combat communism in our country. We are not fighting communism in Vietnam." He also believed that a friendly policy with communist countries would help stop the flow of aid to communists in Thailand.

Second, Kriangsak had support from a group of powerful young army officers—the "Young Turks". It is unclear whether Kriangsak's policy received support from the top military leaders. One study mentions that Kriangsak's call for negotiations with Cambodia to end violent clashes along the border "was not consistent with the line taken by the military establishment, but very much in tune with the opinion of the press and the Foreign Ministry." However, there was heightened factionalism among top military leaders and Kriangsak's power base was with the "Young Turks" who were convinced that Thanin's rigid foreign policy and obsession with domestic insurgency was leading the country to disaster.

Kriangsak's overtures were well received by the Vietnamese leaders. 1978 witnessed a large-scale open-conflict between Vietnam and China over the issue of overseas Chinese in Vietnam and over Vietnam's close ties with the Soviet Union, which had been formalised by the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in November that year (see Chapter V). Moreover, Vietnam's border confrontation with Cambodia also intensified. Thus, Thailand and its ASEAN partners became an arena of competition for Vietnam and China in their escalating conflict. Since mid-1978, Vietnam changed its hostile attitude towards ASEAN and moved "to win the hand of ASEAN, or at least ensure its

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93 It is inconceivable that Kriangsak's "personal diplomacy" towards heads of Indochinese countries could have been successfully pursued by any other civilian leaders. His "personal diplomacy", included frequent exchanges of gifts, maintaining contacts, etc., (Interview, Wong Phonnikon, Bangkok, 17 March, 1992.) It should be noted that many advocates of rapprochement with communist countries in the governments of Kukrit and Seni were accused of being 'pro-communist'. One of the famous cases was Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Ministry during the Seni government, Anand Panyarachun, who was sacked and charged as being a "communist sympathiser", by the Thanin government.


96 Ibid., p. 305.

97 Chai-anan Samudavanija, *The Thai Young Turks*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), pp. 33-34.
neutralitv," in its conflict with China and Cambodia.98 In July 1978, Vietnamese Deputy
Foreign Minister, Phan Hien, visited Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. This was
followed by Premier Pham Van Dong’s visit to all the ASEAN countries less than two
months later.

Vietnam’s change of attitude towards Thailand was noticeable when Premier Phan
Van Dong visited Thailand on 6-10 September 1978. Dong addressed three issues which had
been formidable obstacles in the two countries’ relations: that Vietnam “would not
support communist insurgents in Thailand”; that it agreed to set up a joint committee to
consider the issue of Vietnamese nationals in Thailand; and that it was “ready to forget”
the issue of aircraft and ships taken to Thailand before the end of the Vietnam war.99 The
joint communiqué stated that: “The two prime ministers expressed their determination...
[to refrain] from carrying out subversion, direct or indirect, against each other and from
using force or threatening to use force against each other”—the phase implied a clear
triumph for Kriangsak’s diplomacy, for it was tantamount to an explicit and unqualified
pledge by Vietnam not to support Thai insurgents.100

Nevertheless, Thailand demonstrated its neutrality regarding Vietnam’s conflict with
China and Cambodia. During the second half of 1978, Thailand received leaders from all
the three countries. Moreover, Kriangsak also accepted invitations to visit the U.S. and
the Soviet Union. Despite some reservations over Vietnam’s dramatic change of policy
towards ASEAN, all the member countries agreed to take a neutral stand on the Sino-
Vietnamese conflict.101

101 Until mid-1978, Vietnam accused ASEAN of being a pro-military alliance. But from June, it no
longer attacked ASEAN’s declaration of the zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in Southeast Asia.
Instead, Vietnam proposed its version of the “Southeast Asia zone of peace, genuine independence and
neutrality”. The proposal was interpreted by most ASEAN leaders as unfriendly, for Vietnam implied that
the ASEAN countries were not independent. Phan Hien, during his visit to Singapore in July 1978,
played down the words and said that even a simple “zone of peace” would do. Unidentified ASEAN leaders
stated the dramatic shift of Vietnam’s approach to ASEAN was “all too much, too soon,” and “no one is
convinced that Vietnam has really reappraised its traditional objectives.” In Malaysia, Dong promised that
Vietnam would not support communist insurgency in the country. He also prepared to sign agreements
committing Vietnam to a non-interference role over communist subversion in ASEAN countries.
However, at a meeting of ASEAN officials in Bangkok, before Dong’s visit, the five countries agreed that
ASEAN should accept Vietnam’s friendship, but not commit themselves to any treaty. See Rodney
Tasker, “Rivals for ASEAN’s hand”, FEER, 15 September, 1978, p. 19; Russell Spurr, “Preparing for
the final round?”, FEER, 6 October, 1978, p. 33; and Rodney Tasker, "Young but not so naive", FEER,
Conclusion

It should be noted here that most Thai policy-makers interviewed in this study believe that understanding the history of Thai-Viet relations was important in understanding the present relationship. As a former Secretary-General of the National Security Council (NSC) observed: "past events caused our suspicion and distrust of Vietnam, and cannot be completely ruled out. Those who deal with the country's security affairs must give a special attention to history's implication." 102

As one sees from this chapter, the Thai-Viet history is characterised not only by an adversarial relationship. But obviously the antagonism between the two peoples is particularly remembered among Thais. In Thai textbooks, the Thais' rivalry with the Vietnamese over Cambodia is the only aspect of the two states' relationship discussed in the early period. In the later period, considerable attention is paid to the history of two ideological "enemies" who fought against each other. Thus, Thai-Vietnamese history charts the course of an unfriendly relationship between the two peoples, the Vietnamese being defined as Thais' "enemies" throughout most of the history. No doubt this has contributed to the feeling of "suspicion and distrust of Vietnam" which exists, to a large extent, among Thais. 103

102 Interview, Prasong Soonsiri, Bangkok, 21 March, 1992 [emphasis added].

103 It is interesting to note that in his introduction to his book, Phumlang khwamsamphan thai, khmen, yuán [Relations between Siam, Cambodia and Vietnam during the early Bangkok period], which was published in January 1980, Thanom Anamwat refers to Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia and concludes that after reading his book, one will understand, among other things, "why Thais don't trust Yuans [Vietnamese]." This, in other words, indicates that Thais' distrust of Vietnamese is a general knowledge in Thai society. See Thanom Anamwat, Phumlang khwamsamphan thai, khmen, yuán, pp. 8-9.
Chapter IV

The Origin of the Sino-Thai Covert Agreement

This chapter focuses on a facet of Thailand's response to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. In particular, it examines the origin of Thailand's covert alliance with China against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. First, I will describe how Thailand was affected by the war in Cambodia. Then I will look at the origin of the Sino-Thai agreement by examining the evolution of the Thai Communist Party's insurgent movement—a development which ultimately influenced the agreement between Thailand and China. In addition, I will show the origin of the agreement from Thai, Chinese and Cambodian perspectives. Finally, I will discuss the Thai government's effort to mobilise international opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.

The setting

On 25 December 1978, a force comprised of more than 100,000 Vietnamese troops and around 15-20,000 Khmer insurgents, launched a campaign from Vietnam's central highlands into Democratic Kampuchea (DK). The capital of Phnom Penh was seized on 7 January 1979 and the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) headed by rebel leader Heng Samrin was subsequently created. Vietnam denied that its forces were involved in the fighting and claimed instead that the offensive was an "uprising" organised by Cambodia's "National United Front for National Liberation". As fighting in Cambodia continued, the deposed Khmer Rouge forces retreated to the west and southwest, to strongholds which had been prepared close to the Thai-Cambodian border.

Amidst these events, Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chamanand proclaimed Thailand's neutrality and stated that Thai territory not be used by any party in the conflict. At the same time, to prevent Vietnamese troops from reaching the Thai border, Kriangsak entered into communication with Vietnam's Premier Pham Van Dong. While Vietnamese troops were crossing into Cambodia, Kriangsak asked—and

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1 Nayan Chanda, "Cambodia: Fifteen days that shook Asia", FEER, 19 January, 1979, p. 10. It was not until the signing of a twenty-five year treaty between Vietnam and the new Phnom Penh regime in February 1979 which retroactively legalised the stationing of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, that Vietnam admitted to the presence of its troops in the country. See discussion below in this chapter.


3 The verbal agreement between Kriangsak and Pham was revealed in the author's interview with former Deputy Foreign Minister Wong Phonnikon, Bangkok, 17 March, 1992. Kriangsak never referred to this agreement publicly. A report in 1983 quoted Kriangsak as recalling that: "when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, he hoped that they would not cross the Mekong. However, they did... then he hoped they would not get near to the Thai border. But they did." See "Kriangsak: We should allow Vietnam to save face", The Bangkok Post, 6 November, 1983, p. 4.
apparently believed that he had obtained Pham's assurance—that Vietnam's troops would not cross the Mekong River. Very shortly after, however, the agreement was broken. Kriangsak then asked that Vietnamese troops stop at a line 25 kilometres from the Thai border. This agreement was also short-lived because the Khmer Rouge forces used this zone as a sanctuary from which to attack Vietnamese forces. The Vietnamese responded by pushing the Khmer Rouge forces into the sanctuaries. The Thai government, after learning that Vietnamese units had reached a position about five kilometres from the Thai border, publicly reminded Hanoi on 16 January that it strongly opposed to Vietnamese troops taking position along the Thai-Cambodian border. To do so, Kriangsak declared, would be considered a threat to Thailand.

Nevertheless, tension along the Thai-Cambodian border continued to build. After the fall of Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge forces retreated to their guerilla bases in the west and southwest of Cambodia, locating their 'headquarters' some 10 to 30 kilometres from the Thai border. Therefore, heavy-fighting between the Vietnamese troops and the Khmer Rouge took place in many Cambodian border towns. According to a Thai military source, Vietnam employed up to 50,000 troops in its offensive against the Khmer resistance forces in Western Cambodia. In fact, by the end of 1979, Vietnamese troops stationed in Cambodia were being estimated at 20 divisions. As an immediate consequence, the Thai government became increasingly concerned about Vietnamese military intrusions into the Thai territory.

Moreover, fighting also drove a massive influx of Cambodian refugees—civilians and combat forces—into Thailand. The situation reached a critical stage in late April when a

4 It is unclear why Pham made this agreement, in view of the evidence which will be discussed in this chapter, which indicates that Vietnam's objective in launching an invasion was to overthrow the Khmer Rouge regime. In this regard, the plan to capture Phnom Penh was unquestionable. However, there was a theory, Chanda suggests, that the seizure of Phnom Penh might not have featured in Vietnam's initial plan, but was possibly "the product of strategic opportunism." According to Chanda, Vietnamese troops gained total control of the east bank of the Mekong on 4 January. They received an order from the Poliburo that night to cross the River and seize Phnom Penh. One of the Khmer rebels later revealed that "We were just thinking in terms of taking over half the country, the half on one side of the Mekong... But then when the attack was launched and there was no resistance, we just kept going... There wasn't any point in letting it remain unoccupied." Chanda suggests that there was also "clear indications of hasty preparations" by Cambodian's "National United Front for National Liberation" to catch up with the events. It was not until two weeks after the offensive began, that the front broadcasted an eight-point "immediate" program to be applied in the "liberated zones" in Cambodia. See Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy: The War after the War, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1986), pp. 345-346.


6 FBIS, 6 April, 1979, p. J2 and The Nation Review, 16 April, 1979, pp. 1, 8.

7 The Bangkok Post, 12 April, 1979, pp. 1, 3.

large-scale Vietnamese offensive sent thousands of refugees into the Thai territory. In May, barely five months after the invasion, the Thai government announced that some 138,000 Cambodian had fled into Thai territory. Although Thailand repatriated large numbers of them, some 90-95,000 Cambodians remained in Thai camps in early June. By the end of 1979, this number had increased to 124,641. In addition, about 600,000 Cambodians remained on the Thai-Cambodian border, seeking refuge in Thai territory whenever major fighting erupted.

Faced with the refugee crisis—not only from Cambodia, but also from Laos and Vietnam—Army Chief of Staff General Saiyud Kerdphol asserted that the refugees were not only a heavy financial burden, but a serious and immediate national security problem for the country. He argued that refugees could easily become "a sixth column"—a political, economic and social liability for Thailand, providing cover for "a fifth column" and constituting a potential "casus belli" for any hostile country to use as a pretext to invade Thailand.

The worsening situation on the Thai-Cambodian border ultimately caused Thailand's relationship with Vietnam to deteriorate. In the aftermath of the fall of DK, the Thai stance on the Vietnamese invasion was immediately made clear by Kriangsak when he said that Cambodia and Laos should remain free, independent and "patriotic to their own country by themselves and not be discriminated against by other." On 29 January, the Thai government, citing the unclear situation in Cambodia, also announced that it would continue to give recognition to the deposed regime of Democratic Kampuchea.

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13 The Bangkok Post, 1 June, 1979, pp. 1, 3. At the end of May, the number of refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam was more than 250,000. (FEER, 15 June, 1979, p. 26.) In fact, Thai leaders' suspicions of the negative impact of the refugee influx this time was more pronounced, with respect to Vietnamese refugees. (In 1979, the number of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand was 16,119.) In early June, General Thuangthong Suwannathat, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, said that one of the reasons why Vietnamese boat people were sent out of the country was because they could be a Vietnamese ploy aimed at sending unarmed troops to occupy non-communist countries in the region. After the arrest of a Vietnamese refugee in a Laotian refugee camp, in Nong Khai province, on charges of being a spy, Deputy Secretary-General of the National Security Council Prasong Soonsiri said that at least ten per cent of Vietnamese refugees were "spies sent for subversion." See Sayamër, 30 May 1979, p.1 and 10 June, 1979, pp. 7-8 (in Thai).

The stationing of Vietnamese troops along the Thai-Cambodian border was viewed with particular concern by Thai leaders, however. In late 1979, General Prem Tinsulanonda, Army Commander and Defence Minister, spoke with alarm of the 40,000 "foreign troops" in Cambodia which were stationed along the Thai border and noted as well that there had also been a large movement of weapons by "foreign forces" into Cambodia since mid-1979.\(^{15}\) The Thai military also noted that artillery shells were being regularly fired from Cambodia into Thai territory and Vietnamese troops were periodically entering into Thailand.\(^{16}\) In April, Kriangsak warned that military action would be taken against any "foreign forces" which crossed Thailand's eastern border with Cambodia.\(^{17}\) Increasingly, individual military leaders began to voice their concern over the Vietnamese threat as well. In late June, General Thuangthong Suwannathat placed the military on full alert after announcing that there was evidence that: "Vietnamese forces were preparing for incursions into Thailand."\(^{18}\) Similarly, Lieutenant General Som Khattaphan, Director of the Supreme Command Information Office, mentioned that Vietnamese troop movement implied that: "the Vietnamese soldiers intend to attack us."\(^{19}\) In addition, Thai military sources also voiced concern over Soviet military supplies going to Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.\(^{20}\)

By February, Vietnam and the PRK began alleging that Thailand was being used by China, as a route to supply the Khmer Rouge. Among other things, they claimed that the Khmer Rouge remnants were being given sanctuary on Thai territory and receiving supplies at Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand. Accusations were also frequently made by Vietnam and the PRK over violations of Cambodia's airspace and territory, and firing of artillery into Cambodia by Thai troops in support of the Khmer Rouge forces.\(^{21}\)

In early June, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach proposed to alleviate Thai concern over Vietnamese aggression by signing a non-aggression pact with Kriangsak. However, the proposal was turned down by the Thai government on

\(^{15}\) Sayamnikon, 14 January, 1980, p. 16.

\(^{16}\) FBIS, 14 May, 1979, p. 11 and The Nation Review, 3 June, 1979, pp. 1, 2.

\(^{17}\) The Bangkok Post, 27 April, 1979, pp. 1, 3.

\(^{18}\) The Bangkok Post, 23 June, 1979, pp. 1, 3.

\(^{19}\) FBIS, 21 June, 1979, p. 14.

\(^{20}\) The Bangkok Post, 8 July, 1979, p. 1.

\(^{21}\) See, for example, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, "Are they really neutral?", FBIS, 30 April, 1979, p. K15; "They want to indulge themselves in a new gamble", FBIS, 24 October, 1979, p. K1. For the PRK's accusations over Thai violations of the Cambodian border see FBIS, 15, May, 1979, p. K1.
the grounds that the two countries "have no common border and showed no intention of aggression."²² For Thach, the Thai stance was ambivalent because Thai leaders perceived that there was a threat from Vietnam, yet refused to sign a pact.²³ It was clear to all parties that, what had begun as a triangular conflict between China, Vietnam and the DK, was also becoming a serious conflict between Thailand and Vietnam.

Shortly after the collapse of DK, Prime Minister Kriangsak had in fact moved to undermine Vietnam's position in Cambodia by entering into a covert agreement with China to support the revival of the deposed Khmer Rouge forces. At the same time, Thai leaders also moved to mobilise international opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.

**The Sino-Thai covert agreement**

Sino-Thai cooperation in opposing the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia emerged over a period of time. Available evidence suggests that some sort of consultation between the Thais and Chinese on this issue had been underway before the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. To understand the origin of the Sino-Thai agreement, it is necessary to trace the growth of insurgent movement of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), and the threat which it posed to the Kriangsak government. It was this situation on which an exchange concerning the Chinese use of Thai route to supply the Khmer Rouge forces and a reduction of Chinese aid to the CPT was build.

**Insurgent movement of the CPT**

In the 1977-78 period, the CPT-led insurgency in Thailand was at an all-time high. Clashes between the government and the guerilla forces rose from 281, in 1975, to 1,050 and 967, in 1977 and 1978, respectively. Personnel losses on the government side increased from 277, in 1975, to 597, in 1978.²⁴ The area in which the CPT operated—fifty-two out of Thailand's seventy-two provinces—was also at its largest. The CPT armed strength throughout the country was an estimated 8,000 in 1975.²⁵ At the end of 1978, the number increased to between 12,000-14,000.²⁶ Of this total, about 4,000

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²² *The Bangkok Post*, 3 June, 1979, pp. 1, 3.


²⁵ Ibid., p. 161.

insurgents operated in the northeastern area, with the help of an estimated 60,000 sympathisers.27

As noted in Chapter II, the CPT had been committed to a Maoist political line from its inception. It received support mainly from China and, to a lesser extent, from North Vietnam and Laos. Up until 1975, the Party made slow progress in building popular support inside the country. In 1975, however, the victory of communist forces in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos brought about a great change for the Thai communist movement. Most notably, Laos and Cambodia could now provide sanctuaries which enabled the CPT to move back and forth between almost every point on Thailand's eastern border. The two countries also served as channels for aid flows from various communist states to the CPT. Therefore, up until the end of 1978, the CPT's major strongholds in the northeast, were on the Thai border areas with Cambodia and Laos.

Until the outbreak of hostilities between Vietnam and Cambodia, and Vietnam and China, in late 1977 (see discussion below), the CPT enjoyed the support of all three countries. After 1975, Vietnam competed with China for influence within the Thai communist movement, however. It has been suggested that the Vietnamese aimed at maintaining their interests in the Thai revolution and their influence in the northeastern insurgency, as part of a broader strategy of not only weakening Thailand but also competing with the Chinese.28 Vietnam provided arms and ammunition, and food and clothing, through a supply network largely controlled from the former Laotian capital of Luang Prabang.29 Until the end of 1978, active sections of the CPT operated with lines of supply and sanctuary in Vietnamese-controlled areas in Laos.30

Meanwhile, most of the Thai communists in the southern part of Thailand's northeast region were ethnic Khmers and were under the Siem organisation, a branch of the CPT which received substantial support from the Khmer Rouge regime. Around December 1977, according to a left-wing Thai Journal, Thai nikon, the Siem and the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) reached a secret agreement to form a CPT-CPK joint force. Under this agreement, the Siem was also provided with about a dozen base-camps inside northern Cambodia. The group worked directly with a regiment of the Khmer Rouge which provided manpower backup on request.31 According to the Thai military,

27 *The Bangkok World*, 24 January, 1979, p. 3.

28 Martin Stuart-Fox, "Tension within the Thai Insurgency", *Australian Outlook*, August, 1979, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 188.


there were about 1,200 Thai guerillas working under this arrangement; their area of 
operation being on the eastern border with Cambodia.\footnote{The Bangkok Post, 24 January, 1979, p. 3; The Bangkok World, 24 January, 1979, p. 3; and John 
McBeth, "A battle for loyalty in the jungles", FEER, 8 June, 1979, p. 20.} The CPT also had camps in 
Laos, west of the Mekong River, and infiltration routes across the Cambodian border 
into Thailand.\footnote{Richard Nations, "Thailand prepares to think of the unthinkable", FEER, 2 February, 1979, p. 9.} Between December 1976 and December 1978, the area along this 
border was described as the "hottest place in the country." In 1978, it accounted for 
42\% of guerilla-initiated military incidents in Thailand.\footnote{John McBeth, "A battle for loyalty in the jungles", FEER, 8 June, 1979, p. 20.}

In 1976, internal events in Thailand further contributed to the CPT's development. 
Following the bloody coup of October 1976, the Thanin regime's repressive treatment 
of left-wing intellectuals drove some 2-3,000 students and labour leaders to join the 
CPT. This new generation helped enhance\footnote{Chai-anan Samudavanija, et al, From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive: Attitudinal 
Transformation of Thai Military Officers since 1976, (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International 
Studies, 1990), pp. 62-63. The study does not mention any links between the 'L Plan' and the Vietnamese.} the Party's image—as a genuine Thai 
movement—and brought about the Party's unprecedented success in organising an 
urban united front. According to one study, this strength enabled the CPT to work out in 
late 1977, a strategy called the 'L Plan' which aimed at removing the 16 northeast 
provinces from Thai government control.\footnote{Kambanyai khong phonek chavalit yongchhaiyudh, 2523-2531, [General Chavalit Yongchhaiyudh's 
were Udomchai, Luangnamtha and Chaiburi.}

In 1976, according to Chavalit, China planned to help the CPT 'liberate' the northern 
part of Thailand by seizing three Laotian towns to be used as the CPT's bases of 
operation. However, the plan did not materialise because China's conflict with Vietnam 
and Laos soon intensified.\footnote{Nopporn Suwannapanich and Kraisak Choonhavan, "The Communist Party of Thailand and conflict in 
Indochina", a paper presented at the conference on "Vietnam, Indochina and Southeast Asia: Into the 
1980s", Hague, 29 September-3 October, 1980, cited in Sukhumbhand Paribatra, From Enmity to 
Alignment: Thailand's Evolving Relations with China, (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International 
Studies, 1987), p. 16.}
Party after the coup of October 1976 were less ideologically committed to China than were the old guard. Indeed, some openly questioned the wisdom of the Party's official line and sought to remain neutral in the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnamese conflicts.38

**Origin of the Sino-Thai covert agreement**

The origin of the covert Sino-Thai agreement against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia is explained in Nai jew, an account which was published in 1990 by 'Brothers in the Thai Armed Forces' on the occasion of Supreme Commander General Chavalit Yongchayiyudh's resignation from military service.39 According to the account, the agreement arose to counter the threat posed by the growing links between the Vietnamese and the Thai communists. Among other things, the account notes Vietnam's offer to help the CPT 'liberate' parts of the northeast of Thailand by sending Laotian, Cambodian and Vietnamese fighters to help the CPT. Although no mention is made of when Vietnam's alleged offer to the CPT was made, the circumstances discussed in the text suggest that it occurred between late 1977 and early 1978. Moreover, this is seemingly confirmed by other sources.40

In an interview with high-ranking officials of the Thai security establishment, the Vietnamese plan was said to have been learned by the government intelligence service from some captured members of the CPT. Details of the plan were not mentioned, although the officials noted that Vietnam planned to use its experience in assisting the Pathet Lao movement to 'liberate' Laos in order to bring about a similar result in Thailand.41

According to the account, Thai intelligence under the director of Colonels Chavalit Yongchayiyudh and Phat Akkanibut initially anticipated Vietnam's large-scale military

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40 According to Somchai, the Vietnamese plan was to be carried out sometime between the end of 1977 and early 1978. (Somchai Rakwichit, *Panha kхwanmankong haengchat nai tatsana phunamthai*, [The problems of national security in Thai leaders' perspective], *Paithya*, 26 July, 1982, pp. 9-10, in Thai.) A CPT defector, Wirat Sakjirapaphong, claimed that sometimes after October 1976, Vietnam offered to help the CPT 'liberate' northeast Thailand by using Vietnamese main forces and also some Laotian forces. (Sayannikon, 1 November, 1980, p. 13-14, in Thai.) According to Huxley, in late 1977, the CPT refused an offer of direct Vietnamese and Laotian assistance to help 'liberate' northeast Thailand, but there is no evidence to support this claim. See Timothy J. Huxley, *Indochina as a Security Concern of the ASEAN States: 1975-1981*, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, p. 233.

operation against the DK during the border dispute between the two countries in late 1977. During these battles, Vietnam carried out military preparations—including mobilisation. There was also a transfer of a large amount of Soviet weapons at the Vietnamese ports. Such military preparations were apparently perceived by Chavalit and Phat to be the largest in the period after the seizure of South Vietnam in May 1975 and was intended for an invasion of Cambodia. The two officers further believed that Vietnam's military capability was so formidable, that it could not only launch a lightning attack against Cambodia, but also invade Thailand.  

After Vietnam's offer to assist the CPT in liberating the northeast of Thailand was discovered, military leaders began to seriously consider the possibility that Vietnam would attack Thailand. Accordingly, a covert and informal "war committee" was formed to closely monitor the situation in Indochina. It was comprised of Prime Minister Kriangsak, Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Sawetsila, Secretary-General of the National Security Council (NSC), General Thuanthong Suwannathat, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, General Pin Kason, Army Chief-of-Staff, General Ard Chatnakrob, Director of Directorate of Joint Intelligence, Colonel Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Head of 'Unit 315' of the Army responsible on Cambodian affairs and Colonel Phat Akkanibut, Head of Intelligence Office attached to the Joint Command Centre of the Supreme Command Headquarters.  

In the end, according to Nai jew, the "war committee" concluded that China was the most important actor in preventing a "Vietnamese threat" against Thailand, for it was the main supporter of both the CPT and the Khmer Rouge regime. It was thus the only country that had both the capacity and determination to stop the Vietnamese "expansionism". In this context, cooperation with China to reduce the threat from the CPT and deter Vietnamese aggression was deemed inevitable. Therefore, the "war committee" agreed to send a covert mission to China, with Pin as its head and Chavalit and Phat as key negotiators. The aim was two-fold: first, to ask China to deter the

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42 The account also mentions that, at that time, the idea that Vietnam would launch a large-scale invasion against Cambodia was dismissed by security officials within the government and most foreign military attaches in Thailand on the grounds that China would be a crucial deterrent to Vietnam. (Nai jew, p. 119.) According to Chanda, large-scale Vietnamese preparedness against the DK, including moving Soviet-built MiG-19s and MiG-21s from the north to the air bases in the south, was also a cautious measure against threats from Cambodia and China. These threats included the possibility of an air attack by the DK on Ho Chi Minh City, which was less than thirty minutes from Phnom Penh by air, and a pincer attack - an assault by the DK and a direct Chinese move against the north. Vietnamese fear was said to be based on intelligence reports since the spring of 1978, that China had stepped up its delivery of tanks, armoured cars, and MiG-19 fighters to Cambodia, and that it had accelerated work on a new large airfield in the Cambodian town of Kompong Chhnang. Vietnamese leaders also believed that some ten thousand Chinese soldiers, advisers, and technicians were engaged in a rapid build up of the Cambodian army, for an attack against southern Vietnam. See Chanda, Brother Enemy..., pp. 333-334.

43 Nai jew, p. 121.

44 The following three paragraphs are entirely from Ibid., pp. 119-123.
Vietnamese threat to Thailand by applying military pressure on Vietnam's northern border and second, to convince China to end its support for the CPT and cooperate with the Thai government in deterring the Vietnamese "expansionism".

Military leaders believed that China would be immediately unwilling to reduce support for the CPT, for China "had long given considerable support" to the Thai communist movement and this was the time when the Party was "at its peak". Moreover, the relationship between China and Thailand during the previous Thai government of Thanin had been cold. Therefore, it was thought that the Thai mission to China could hardly succeed.

When the mission met with then Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping in Peking, the discussion was first on the expansion of Soviet hegemonism as a result of the U.S. withdrawal from mainland Southeast Asia following the Vietnam war. The two sides agreed that at that moment, the Soviet strategy of encircling China was nearly complete. The only two points that allowed China access to the world were Pakistan and the area around Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Chinese leaders were particularly concerned by developments in Cambodia. Explained the situation in that country, Chavalit concluded that: "Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia would definitely take place." Although Chinese leaders remained sceptical, they agreed that if the Vietnamese invasion were to occur, China's assistance to the Khmer Rouge could be made more effectively with cooperation from the Thai government. At any rate, the two sides found that they shared a common interest in stopping Vietnamese 'expansionism'. With this in mind, the Thai side turned the discussion to focus on relations between the governments of China and Thailand, on the one hand, and the Communist Party of China and the CPT, on the other. In an effort to persuade the Chinese to stop their assistance to the CPT, Chavalit and Phat proposed that China consider cooperation with a government representing some fifty million Thai people as opposed to some twenty thousands CPT guerillas. The Chinese agreed that cooperation with the Thai government was more important. As a result, Deng gave two promises to the Thai mission: first, the Thai government should not worry about Vietnam, for China would take the responsibility of "eliminating Vietnamese threat" and second, China "would, step by step, reduce its assistance to the CPT." However, there is no mention how the two countries would cooperate in the event of a Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

What should be noted is that the account, Nai jew, provides an exceedingly favourable view of Chavalit, and his role in bringing about a change in Chinese policy towards the CPT, and forging a security alliance between Thailand and China against Vietnam. The tone of the account, however, was more on Chavalit's success in convincing China to reduce its support for the CPT. This may suggest, from the military leaders' viewpoint, that they were more concern about the CPT threat rather than the Vietnamese threat.
There is evidence that the Chinese made their request to Thai leaders—to supply the Khmer Rouge forces—via Thailand just before and immediately after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia (see below).

During Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Bangkok on 5-9 November 1978, he told Kriangsak about the rapidly deteriorating relationship between the DK and Vietnam, and said that China was sending supplies to the DK in order to cope with the expected Vietnamese invasion. Deng believed that a large-scale Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia would soon occur and Phnom Penh might be captured. If that was the case, Deng said, it was not an end of the Khmer Rouge forces, for their anti-Vietnamese war would be continued. Kriangsak then asked if China would use force to stop Vietnam in the event that the DK were invaded. Deng said he would consider this if the situation warranted it, and added that China did not accept that Vietnamese military capability was the world’s third largest. He also stated that it was necessary that “an elated Vietnam” be given “a lesson”. He then told Kriangsak that China would appreciate Thai cooperation if Cambodia were invaded. Kriangsak responded that he would take the matter into consideration if warranted.45

Immediately after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, the Chinese again contacted Thai leaders. The official Chinese document, "Report of Geng Biao, Politburo member and Secretary-General of the Military Commission on the situation in the Indochinese Peninsula, 16 January, 1979", mentions that on 13 January, 1979, Vice-Premier Deng requested that visiting Thai Deputy Prime Minister Sunthorn Hongladarom ask Prime Minister Kriangsak to permit China to send material aid to the Khmer Rouge via Thailand. Deng also asked that Thailand continue to recognize the Government of Democratic Kampuchea, provide political asylum to officials of the DK, and cooperate "more effectively" with China in order to "resist the expansion of the Soviet Union and Vietnam and ensure peace and stability in Southeast Asia and the Asian-Pacific area." According to Deng: "we now have very good relations with Thailand, but clear cooperation is necessary in the light of Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia..."46

On the same day, Radio Peking reported a discussion between Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng and Sunthorn as follows:


Premier Hua said: The development of closer relations and cooperation between Thailand and China in accordance with the needs of the present situation is not only beneficial to the people of the Asia and Pacific region. China and Thailand and the people of the two countries must assist and support each other... Now the Soviet hegemonists have extended their tentacles very far. We must maintain vigilance... Deputy Prime Minister Sunthorn said: As Premier Hua Guofeng said, the strengthening of close cooperation between Thailand and China will benefit stability in the region. Prime Minister Kriangsak, the Thai government and people are very worried about the development of the situation in Kampuchea...

Up to this point, according to Geng Biao's Report, Thai leaders had not yet agreed to the Chinese request, as it mentions that:

Vice Chairman Deng also requested Vice Premier Sunthorn Hongladarom to tell Premier Kriangsak Chamanand and the Thai Government that the Government of China wishes that the Government of Thailand will permit China to send material aid to Cambodia via Thailand. As regards to this request, the Thai Government still has not expressed its opinion. The Thais of course have their own problem for they are unwilling to get into conflict with Vietnam. We know this well.

However, we must explain the fact very clearly. We told Sunthorn Hongladarom that the relationship between Cambodia and Thailand and between Cambodia and Southeast Asia is one of the mutual dependence. If one falls, the other will be in danger. Therefore, it is impossible for Thailand to stay aloof.  

The timing of Sunthorn's visit to China, according to then Foreign Minister Upadit Pajareeyangkun, "has nothing to do" with the situation in Cambodia. He said that Sunthorn left Thailand before the invasion and the objective of the trip was to buy oil as agreed by Deng during his visit to Thailand in November 1978. In his interview with the author in 1992, Sunthorn denied that he ever discussed the "Cambodian problem" with Deng or even with Kriangsak because he was in charge of economic affairs and "lacked knowledge on foreign affairs." The visit, he said, was intended only to ask China to sell petroleum oil to Thailand. He thus totally denied the Report.

Another document, "The Chinese Rulers' Crimes Against Kampuchea", published by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRK in 1984, claims that on 14 January, 1979, a secret meeting between Kriangsak and Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Han Nianlong and Politburo member Geng Biao took place at Thailand's U-tapao air base. Discussion at the meeting was on the modalities of Sino-Thai cooperation in the Cambodian


48 Ibid., p. 234 (emphasis added).


50 Interview, Sunthorn Hongladarom, Bangkok, 30 June, 1992.
conflict. In that meeting, Kriangsak allegedly agreed to the Chinese use of Thai territory as a supply route for the Khmer Rouge. Furthermore, he agreed to provide transport and transit facilities for Khmer Rouge personnel and material and also to help Khmer Rouge leaders to travel overseas via Thailand.\(^{51}\)

It seems, on the basis of interviews with a number of Thai policy-makers, that the decision to cooperate with China was made by Kriangsak. According to former Deputy Foreign Minister Wong Phonnikon, Kriangsak's initial response to the Chinese request was that the Thai government would turn a blind eye to the Chinese activities. At the early stage, the Thai involvement in this task remained minimal.\(^{52}\) In addition, according to General Lek Neomalee, the Chinese were to be allowed to supply the Khmer Rouge mainly by sea, but only occasionally by air.\(^{53}\)

From early February, there were journalists' reports that Chinese supplies had arrived by sea at Thai ports and were being transported overland to the Khmer Rouge forces in the southwest of Cambodia.\(^{54}\) In early March, mention was made of the "Deng Xiaoping Trail". The Chinese were reported to be using mule trains to ship arms and ammunition down the newly dubbed "Deng Xiaoping Trail" which starts in China's Yunnan Province, dips into Thailand and ends at the Cambodian border. Thailand... reportedly is not interfering with traffic along the trial.\(^{55}\)

There were also reports of large-scale Chinese efforts to supply the Khmer Rouge at Cambodia's Kong Island coastal province. Throughout most of 1979, the overall Chinese military and economic aid to the Khmer Rouge was said to be insufficient and unreliably delivered, however.\(^{56}\)

All of this changed in late 1979 when the Chinese began sending large amounts of supplies to the Khmer Rouge forces. One study mentions a secret agreement between Thailand and China for Chinese ships to deliver arms and ammunition to Thailand's

\(^{51}\) Chanda, *Brother Enemy*..., pp. 348-349. According to Chanda, the secret meeting was confirmed by "a high Thai Foreign Ministry official and a senior U.S. official then serving in Bangkok" and that "the authenticity of the transcript has never been denied by Peking." See Chanda, *Brother Enemy*..., footnotes 51 and 52, p. 450.

\(^{52}\) Interview, Wong Phonnikon, Bangkok, 17 March, 1992.

\(^{53}\) Interview, General Lek Neomalee, Bangkok, 22 March, 1992.


\(^{55}\) *Newsweek*, 12 March, 1979, p. 9.

Satahip and Klong Yai ports, from which the Thai army then transported the weapons to the Khmer Rouge strongholds along the Thai-Cambodian border. The weapons were soon delivered to the non-communist Khmer resistance groups as well. The Chinese Embassy in Bangkok, working with Sino-Thai businessmen and the Thai army, was responsible for supplying food, medicine, and other civilian supplies to the Khmer Rouge forces.\textsuperscript{57}

Thailand and China apparently played a crucial role in regrouping and reviving the Khmer Rouge forces at the time when they were in disarray, with command and member cadre were out of touch with one another and their forces. Some high-ranking leaders of the Khmer Rouge were reportedly sent back to their strongholds in Cambodia with the assistance of the Thai military.\textsuperscript{58} The Cambodian border with Thailand was a place where the Khmer Rouge fighters could find sanctuary, safe conduct, and access to supplies in Thailand.\textsuperscript{59} One report mentioned that, by the end of 1979, the resistance forces' strongholds inside Cambodia had been over-run and they were either in sanctuaries in Thailand or in zones straddling the Thai-Cambodian frontier.\textsuperscript{60}

International food and medical aid which flowed to Cambodian refugees in the Thai camps helped recovering Khmer Rouge fighters. According to Thai Foreign Minister Upadit, Thailand gave a medical treatment to all wounded soldiers including the Khmer Rouge's and this was "in line with humanitarian principle and accepted international practice."\textsuperscript{61} Deliveries of food aid also went to Cambodians regardless of political factions.\textsuperscript{62} Nevertheless, while relief aid also went to the Phnom Penh-controlled area, the tacit understanding among relief agencies was that distribution must also go to people under the Khmer Rouge control.\textsuperscript{63} According to one study, regular and large-scale international relief assistance to Khmer Rouge-controlled areas began in early October 1979 and largely continued until June 1980. It further mentions that:

Deliveries to Democratic Kampuchea bases in the Danrek mountains and on the periphery of the Cardamom mountains were handled almost

\textsuperscript{57} Chanda, Brother Enemy..., p. 381.


\textsuperscript{59} Richard Nations, "The fight to remain neutral", FEER, 11 May, 1979, p. 8 and Nayan Chanda, "The storm that follows the calm", FEER, 30 November, 1979, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{60} AFP report in FBIS, 27 December, 1979, p. K7.


\textsuperscript{62} Interview, Prasong Soonsiri, Bangkok, 21 March, 1992.

The Khmer Rouge was also able to rebuild its military strength through the recruitment of soldiers among the refugee population. Refugees in the camps were tacitly allowed to slip back into Cambodia at night to continue the fighting with the Khmer Rouge and the non-communist resistance forces known as "Khmer Serai" or "Free Khmer".

As such, the Khmer Rouge forces were revived with international aid from the Thai refugee camps and armed with the Chinese weapons. It was estimated that the Khmer Rouge combatants grew from 20-30,000 fighters in October 1979, to some 40,000, in July-August 1980, with a large number of them concentrated on the Thai border.

In the foregoing section, I have described the development of the Sino-Thai covert agreement in opposing Vietnamese expansionism. At this point, it is necessary to indicate that the Kriangsak government's decision to cooperate with China was also due to another factor: a deal in which the Chinese gave up their support of the CPT in exchange for Thai support for China's policy of aiding the deposed Khmer Rouge.

The CPT: a quid pro quo

There was a two-fold rationale for the Kriangsak government's policy of cooperating with China: first, the threat which Thai leaders perceived from Vietnam's support for the Thai communist movement; and second, the quid pro quo where Thailand facilitated

64 Deliveries to Khmer Rouge bases in, or near, the Wattana Gap (immediately north and south of the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet) were handled jointly by the International Committee of the Red Cross. After the resumption of aid in August, the Red Cross no longer participated in general deliveries but only provided medical aid while UNICEF tried to set up a system that would provide food to women and children only. See Heder, p. 4. See also Nayan Chanda, "The storm that follows the calm", FEER, 30 November, 1979, p. 15.


66 Newsweek, 19 March, 1979, p. 21; 23 April, 1979, p. 18; and Richard Nations, "A dangerous diplomacy", FEER, 10 October, 1980, p. 14. The author's interviews with a number of former high-ranking Thai policy-makers confirm these reports. The term "Khmer Serai" is rather general and refers to all non-communist resistance groups. The original "Khmer Serai" was founded by Son Ngoc Thanh before 1970 and was in opposition to both Lon Nol and the Khmer Rouge. After 1975, in Tam was the acknowledged leader of the group and apparently had a tacit agreement to cooperate with the Khmer Rouge in some of their military operations. See Ng Shui Meng, "Vietnam in 1980", footnote 5, p. 352. A 1979 report reported that the only Khmer Serai group still in good standing with Bangkok, was Son Sann and Dien Def's group, which was created in late 1979. See Richard Nations, "Battle for the hearts and stomachs", FEER, 7 December, 1979, p. 15.

the Chinese supply of the deposed Khmer Rouge forces via Thai territory in exchange for a reduction of Chinese assistance to the CPT.

The Thai communist movement fell into disarray after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, for the event triggered a rift within the CPT between the dominant Maoist faction and dissidents supporting Vietnam. After the invasion, most of Thai insurgents in Cambodia filtered back into Thailand, although some remained with the Khmer Rouge troops. Early in November 1978, the CPT was given an ultimatum by the Laotian government: to endorse Vietnam's position vis-a-vis China and the Khmer Rouge or withdraw from its bases in Laos within a month. The deadline had not been reached when Vietnam overthrew the Khmer Rouge regime, however. Immediately after the Vietnamese invasion, according to Thai military sources, the CPT's Thai People's Liberation Armed Forces, which had its operational bases in Laos but under Chinese influence, was ordered to move out by 1979, unless it changed its policy to conform with that of Laos, Vietnam and the Soviet Union. The CPT insisted on preserving its Maoist line and therefore, evacuated all its bases from Vietnam and Laos by the end of 1979. Many of the pro-Chinese CPT elements fled to Thailand and tried to build new bases in northeast Thailand.

The CPT therefore became a concern of the Thai government following the fall of Phnom Penh. It was feared that the scattered Thai communists could join either side in the Cambodian conflict. Either way, the threat was perceived to be enormous. During Kriangsak's visit to Laos in early January 1979, he tried to gain the cooperation of the Laotian government in suppressing the Thai communists residing in Laos. A Thai-Lao joint communique on 8 January 1979, signed during Kriangsak's visit to Laos, indicated that the two countries "shall not let anybody use its territory as a base to interfere in or threaten to invade the other in any form." This point was reconfirmed in a joint communique during Laos' Premier Kaysone Phomvihane's subsequent visit to Bangkok in April.

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70 Matichon, 28 May, 1979, pp. 1, 12 (in Thai); Chanthima, "The Communist Party of Thailand: Consolidation or Decline", p. 369; and John McBeth, "A battle for loyalty in the jungles", FEER, 8 June, 1979, p. 19.

71 The Bangkok Post, 17 July, 1979, p. 3.

72 FBIS, 8 January, 1979, p. 12.

73 Sayamnikon, 6 August, 1979, p. 26 (in Thai). In 1982, Somchai claims that the two leaders made a secret agreement whereby Thailand would suppress anti-Lao movements in Thai territory, and Laos would drive out Thai communists in Laos. See Somchai Rakwiji, Panha khwammankhong haengchat
Nevertheless, the Thai military believed that while Laos expelled pro-Chinese members of the CPT, it continued to accommodate pro-Vietnam elements. In July 1979, according to Colonel Phat Akkanibut, an intelligence officer attached to the Joint Command Centre of the Supreme Command Headquarters, pro-Soviet members of the CPT set up a new party called the 'Thai Northeastern National Liberation Party' (*phak thai isan kuchat*) with its headquarters in the Laotian capital of Vientiane. The new party was said to have about 1,000 militants in Vientiane and another 2,000 in the Laotian town of Suvannakhet, and were receiving assistance from the Soviet Union and Vietnam.\(^{74}\)

Few independent sources are available for information on the formation of the pro-Soviet/Vietnam party. A report in *FEER* in 1984, indicated that the pro-Soviet party, *Pak mai* (New Party), was set up in 1978 by a breakaway faction of the CPT. The report added as well that the party was operating in Thailand's northern and northeastern provinces, but had not been able to pose a serious threat to the Thai government.\(^{75}\) For Thai leaders in 1979, however, they believed that the new Thai communist party reflected Vietnam's intent to support Thai communists 'liberate' the northeastern region of Thailand. According to General Saiyud Kerdphol, in his interview with the author in 1992, there was "compelling evidence" that the Soviet Union, Vietnam and Laos supported a new Thai communist party.\(^{76}\) Siddhi recalled that the most likely scenario was that Vietnam would, after consolidation of its control over Cambodia, give support to an uprising led by the pro-Vietnam Thai communists. In that event, Cambodia would be "a base or a springboard for action against southern provinces and some parts of Thailand's eastern provinces."\(^{77}\)

In early 1979, the CPT leadership remained unified and committed to the Maoist line, with the top positions of the CPT still occupied by ethnic Chinese.\(^{78}\) In this situation, there was little doubt that China maintained its influence over the Party. It seems from the "Geng Biao's Report" on 16 January, 1979, that the CPT became China's 'bargaining chip' after the fall of the DK. According to the Report, if the Thai government agreed to

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\(^{74}\) *Maichon*, 31 July, 1979, pp. 1, 12 (in Thai).

\(^{75}\) John McBeth, "Foreign legion threat", *FEER*, 6 December, 1984, p. 29.

\(^{76}\) Interview, Saiyud Kerdphol, Bangkok, 11 May, 1992.

\(^{77}\) Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992. This view was also made in the author's interviews with Prasong Soonsiri, Bangkok, 21 March, 1992; Saiyud Kerdphol, Bangkok, 11 May, 1992; and Arthit Kamlang-ek, Bangkok, 7 July, 1992.

cooperate with China in assisting the Khmer Rouge, China would make sure that the
CPT was not an impediment to the Thai government's endeavour to cope with the
Vietnamese threat. Otherwise, it would consider using the CPT to assist the Khmer
Rouge, as the Report stated:

the Thai Communists will play a very important role in the work to
support Cambodia in the future. Therefore, we are ready to persuade
them not to show different views against the Thai Government because
they are faced with a formidable enemy and are in a position to fight
against Vietnamese hegemony... It doesn't really matter if Premier
Kriangsak Chamanand does not give his consent. At least, the Thai
communist are supporting us. Letting Thailand seek its own safety
through wise means is out of the question. The situation is very obvious
that it is impossible for Thailand to keep itself uninvolved...79

It will be recalled that Thai military leaders asked China to end its support to the CPT in
exchange for support from the Thai government for China's policy toward Cambodia
and Vietnam. They claimed that they had gained Deng's promise that China would
gradually reduce its support to the Thai communists. However, the Geng Biao
document seems to suggest that some sorts of bargaining or negotiation on the issue
were still underway when the Report was published. In interviews with former high-
ranking Thai military officials, they only accepted that the fall of the DK brought about
an agreement between the Chinese and Thai governments, that China agreed to reduce
its assistance to the CPT in exchange for the use of Thai route to supply the Khmer
Rouge.80 However, the details of the agreement were not made public.

Be that as it may, one can imagine that it was the first time ever that Thailand actually
found itself to be in a bargaining position with China concerning the issue of the CPT.
For many years previously, Thai leaders had tried in vain to urge China to cease its
support for the Thai communist movement. Writing years later, General Saiyud
Kerdphol mentioned that:

The Cambodian conflict made Peking suddenly more dependent on Thai
goodwill in order to pursue its goals in the region. More specifically, this
shift saw the need to channel munitions and logistics support to pro-
Chinese Khmer Rouge guerillas along the Thai border in order to provide

document also mentions the Kuomintang forces, remnants of the Chinese Nationalist forces, living on
the Thai-Burmese border, as another alternative if the Thai government refused to cooperate with China.
It mentions that the Kuomintang was "...another effective force, even more effective than the Thai
Communists... The fighting strength of the Kuomintang is quite strong... If this force can be transformed
to help us wage guerilla warfare against Vietnam, the situation will be better that what Thai Communists
can achieve." (Ibid., p. 238.) Some 4,000 Kuomintang forces were driven from China by the
communists, in January 1930. They then moved to Burma's southern Shan state and long enjoyed a semi-
autonomous status, in a town close to the Thai border.

80 Confidential interviews.
continued resistance to Vietnamese occupation forces. Bangkok found itself in a position to appeal to Peking to end its support for the CPT.81

The first published report concerning this issue appeared in March 1979. It stated that in return for the Thai government's permission for the Chinese to use of the "Deng Xiaoping Trail" as mentioned earlier, "pro-Chinese Thai communists are easing off their attacks on Thai Government outposts."82 In May 1979, General Thuathanthong Suwannathat, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, also publicly noted that Chinese-backed communists were in a state of confusion and were facing a supply shortage because "China shifted its interest toward Cambodia."83

Most importantly, the CPT's clandestine radio, Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT), announced on 10 July that it would henceforth "temporarily suspend its broadcasts." The end of the Yunnan-based radio station was indeed a dramatic change of the Chinese policy toward Thailand. This was the station that Thai leaders had repeatedly asked the Chinese to close down. Now China had responded positively Kriangsak's request.84

China's response had a very positive impact on Thai leaders. In 1980, Kriangsak recalled his belief that China should be encouraged to develop government-to-government relations over party-to-party relations. In his opinion, as long as a dialogue of mutual interests with China was maintained:

the relationship between the Communist Party of Thailand and the Chinese Communist Party should be worrisome only when our economic and social conditions are exploitable by the subversives and insurgents.85

Nevertheless, it should be noted that China did not completely cut off its ties with the CPT. It only reduced aid and continued its moral support to the Party.86 The ties between China and the CPT also continued. In early November 1979, for example, there was a report that China was trying to coordinate different pro-Peking groups for a

81 Saiyud, The Struggle for Thailand..., pp. 166-167.
82 Newsweek, 12 March, 1979, p. 9.
83 The Bangkok Post, 25 May, 1979, p. 5.
86 Interview, Saiyud Kerdphol, Bangkok, 11 May, 1992.
war against Vietnam.\textsuperscript{87} In this respect, it can be said that the CPT was kept by the Chinese as a bargaining chip in dealings with the Thai government. At the early stage, there was a concern among Thai leaders that the CPT might be reactivated if there was a conflict between Thai and Chinese interests on the issue of Cambodia. A study in 1981 cited a Thai official saying that:

\begin{quote}
Now we have bargaining power with the Chinese. The Cambodian problem has made the Chinese \textit{more moderate} on support for communist parties in Southeast Asia. \textit{If we cut support for Pol Pot immediately, China will take a more hostile stance toward Thailand and give more support to the CPT}.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

An official of the Foreign Ministry who played an instrumental role in the Sino-Thai relations noted this point in 1983 that:

\begin{quote}
The CPT, however, may be down but not out. Beijing has gone to great lengths in placating the Thai government as a result of the Cambodian conflict... It could, however, easily revert to its former policy of directly aiding the CPT; for one thing, China has so far refrained from definitively renouncing its two-tiered (government/party) approach to its relations with Thailand and other countries confronted with a similar problem. What is alarming is that the issue of the foreign-backed CPT is now inextricably involved with the larger regional-security issue and could be used as a bargaining chip by the antagonists.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Mobilising international opposition to Vietnam}

Apart from the covert cooperation with China in assisting the Khmer resistance forces, Kriangsak conducted a policy of mobilising international opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. At the same time, he also tried to strengthen ties with the U.S. in order to gain support for Thailand's position on the issue of Cambodia.

At Thailand's request, ASEAN foreign ministers held an emergency meeting on the situation in Indochina in Bangkok during 12-13 January, 1979. The joint statement issued after the meeting stated that ASEAN:

\begin{quote}
strongly deplored the armed intervention against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kampuchea... affirmed the right of the Kampuchean people to determine their future by themselves free from interference or influence from outside powers... [and] called for the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{87} According to a \textit{FEER} report, representatives of the CPT and dissidents of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party held a conference in Yunnan to discuss the situation in Indochina and Thailand with Chinese representatives. See \textit{FEER}, 7 December, 1979, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{88} Quoted in Gareth Porter, "ASEAN and Kampuchea: Shadow and Substance", \textit{Indochina Issue}, February, 1981, p. 6 (emphasis added).

immediate and total withdrawal of the foreign forces from Kampuchean territory.\textsuperscript{90}

In September, ASEAN was successful in its concerted effort at the United Nations to secure Democratic Kampuchea's seat at the General Assembly. ASEAN's initiative also led to a resolution adopted by the General Assembly in November calling for an "immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea."\textsuperscript{91}

Throughout the Kriangsak period, and in the succeeding period as well, ASEAN's position on Cambodia was largely determined by the Thai stance. Although there was a certain degree of concern among ASEAN countries over the threat to peace and stability in the region caused by the fall of Democratic Kampuchea, there was little consensus on how serious the threat was. Solutions to the conflict were thus seen in different ways. For Indonesia and Malaysia which had had problems with the Chinese-backed communist movements and ethnic Chinese in their respective countries, the long-term threat to the region was perceived to come from China. Therefore, these states were very cautious regarding any expansion of China's role in the Cambodian conflict. They also believed that an independent Vietnam could play a crucial role in the containment of Chinese influence in the region. So Indonesia and Malaysia were more prepared to accommodate Vietnam's security interests in Cambodia. Moreover, Malaysia was the strongest advocate of the 1971 Kuala Lumpur Declaration of the Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). It was a concept designed for regional peace which, among others, refers to a policy of non-involvement in great power politics. In a clear reference to Thailand's move to closer relations with China, Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie asserted that:

ASEAN must not succumb to external power persuasion to seek security through military alliance against Vietnam, whether or not Vietnam is backed by another external power.\textsuperscript{92}

In other words, China's role was opposed despite Soviet support for Vietnam. Indonesian President Suharto also argued that:

if the Chinese push too hard in Vietnam then Vietnam will have no other option but to rely more heavily on the Soviet Union. This will only lead to greater big power involvement in the region.\textsuperscript{93}


\textsuperscript{92} "Peking lays a snare for Kriangsak", FEER, 18 May, 1979, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{93} David Jenkins, "Maintaining an even keel", FEER, 1 June, 1979, p. 23.
Conversely, Singapore, and to a lesser extent, the Philippines held a different view. Singapore was open in criticising Vietnam's aggression. Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stressed that the Vietnamese aggression had "shocked the world" and argued that ASEAN must stand behind Thailand in mobilising international support to prevent the danger of conflict "embroiling Thailand and dangerously widening the area of devastation and conflict beyond the territory of Cambodia into Thailand." For the sake of self-preservation, Lee also suggested that ASEAN's neutrality might be temporarily set aside, noting that:

We must try to defend our interests and if it means from time to time taking sides with one against the other, it must not be consistently on one side against the other.\(^\text{95}\)

Ultimately, ASEAN went along with Thai policy over the issue of Cambodia. This was mainly due to ASEAN's recognition of the particular Thai concern over its national security. As noted by an Indonesian official:

It is because of our appreciation of Thai concern that we have done so much to accommodate our policy to the Thai view. If it were not for Thailand, our reaction would have been more flexible.\(^\text{96}\)

ASEAN's strong position on Cambodia was also due to its support of the principle of non-intervention—a consideration that may have particularly strong in Singapore's case. The main danger was perceived to be not that Vietnam would launch an out-right attack on Thailand, but that a precedent might be set. The fact that Vietnam was receiving military and economic aid from the Soviet Union, made it difficult for those who claimed that Vietnam had legitimate security interests in Cambodia. An Indonesian policy-maker pointed out that: "if Vietnam was alone in a vacuum, we would be more pro-Vietnam because we would consider Vietnam a buffer in Southeast Asia to China."\(^\text{97}\) Indonesia also saw that the close relations between Thailand and China were a result of the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnamese, not because Thai leaders were particularly pro-Chinese. Therefore, a solution which lead to Vietnamese troops withdrawal from Cambodia should be ASEAN's main objective.\(^\text{98}\)


\(^{95}\) Rodney Tasker, "Diplomacy loses its power", *FEER*, 7 March, 1979, pp. 17-18.

\(^{96}\) David Jenkins, "Maintaining an even keel", *FEER*, 1 June, 1979, p. 23.

\(^{97}\) David Jenkins, "Maintaining an even keel", *FEER*, 1 June, 1979, p. 23.

Another factor which influenced ASEAN’s position towards Vietnam was concern of member states over the massive flow of Vietnamese boat refugees. Since 1975, the number of people leaving Vietnam had increased steadily, reaching crisis proportions in 1979.99 Between mid-1978 to mid-1979, some 163,000 Vietnamese boat people landed in the ASEAN countries, with Malaysia and Indonesia receiving far greater numbers than the others.100 In mid-1979, Malaysia alone accommodated some 80,000 Vietnamese refugees.101 Amidst the refugee crisis, all ASEAN countries voiced their concern over the security implications of the refugee pressure in their countries. Some ASEAN leaders believed that the influx of refugees was part of Vietnam’s strategy to destabilise the non-communist countries in the region. Malaysia and Indonesia were particularly concerned over the fact that refugees were predominantly of Chinese origin. They were also frustrated with Vietnam’s lack of cooperation in halting the flow of refugees. After various attempts to solve the problem failed, Indonesian Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja stated directly that: "Vietnam must be made to accept its responsibility with regard to the problem."102 By the end of 1979, the Cambodian conflict and the Vietnamese boat people caused confrontation between ASEAN and Vietnam at every international forum.

Nevertheless, while ASEAN generally supported the Thai stance on the Cambodian issue, individual countries also pursued their own efforts for political solutions to the problem. Indonesia and Malaysia in particular, always made known their positions on the conflict. This relieved their frustration from what was sometimes seen by the two countries as the Thais’ uncompromising position on their conflict with Vietnam. It also meant that they were seen as more accommodating by Vietnam. A case in point was in May 1980 when Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach proposed that Indonesian and Malaysian teams join Laos in observing elections in Cambodia and the situation along the Thai border.

An ambivalent U.S. security commitment

The aftermath of the fall of Democratic Kampuchea saw the Thai leaders again seeking to gain a firm U.S. security commitment. Given the long-standing security alliance between the two countries over the past decades, it was not surprising that Thai leaders

99 Early in 1978, Vietnam began the policy of controlling private businesses. As a result, the number of people leaving the country increased greatly, averaging at about 3-4,000 per month. See K. Das, "Refugees: Rocking ASEAN's boat", FEER, 15 June, 1979, pp. 21-23.


102 Andrew MacIntyre, Indonesian Foreign Policy and the Conflict over Kampuchea, M.A. Thesis, Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, 1984, p. 54.
should have sought American protection. In March 1979, Kriangsak said that in time of emergency, he would permit the Americans to send troops to Thailand and to fly sorties from Thai territory, adding that: "I do not want to rule out the possibility that we might ask our friends for help some day." Kriangsak also stated the possibility of opening American bases in Thailand, if necessary, while noting that:

There is no need at the present time to allow the U.S. to use the military base because we can defend ourselves in the current situation, however, the future is a different matter. Kriangsak's visit to the United States in early February 1979 was intended to gain a firm U.S. security commitment in the light of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. Nevertheless, the U.S. offered little more than its moral support to Thai leaders. Earlier in January, President Carter announced that it was in the U.S.'s interests to see the integrity of Thailand protected from the conflict in Cambodia, and that: "we have warned both the Vietnamese and also the Soviets who supply them, against any danger they might exhibit toward Thailand." This statement was confirmed during Kriangsak's visit. Carter also affirmed the U.S. commitment to the region as outlined in the Manila Pact. On military aspects, the U.S. promised to accelerate the delivery of weapons Thailand had ordered and increase military credit (FMS - foreign military sales) for 1979, from $30 million to $50 million. In addition, the U.S. donated ammunition, storing in Thailand at that time, worth about 230 million baht to Thailand.

Throughout 1979, the U.S. gave the impression of siding with China in the latter's dispute with Vietnam. In particular, the U.S.'s postponement of the normalisation of relations with Vietnam appeared to link with the broader U.S. policy of strategic alignment with China against the Soviet Union. In this respect, Vietnam was viewed as


104 FBIS, 22 February, 1980, p. J1. It was reported that Kriangsak offered the U.S. land for naval bases on Thailand's west coast, to strengthen the American's Indian Ocean posture. See FEER, 10 October, 1980, p. 14.

105 U.S. foreign policy during the early Carter administration had moved from power politics towards a more moralistic approach. While still largely caught up in a process of policy readjustment, the policy clearly underlined a great deal of disillusion with foreign military involvement, particularly in Southeast Asia. In June 1977, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke stated that the U.S. had formulated a new policy for Asia which "does not return us to the inappropriate level of earlier involvement in the internal affairs of the region, and yet does not constitute a confusing and destabilising 'abandonment' of Asia." The U.S. policy toward Thailand, after the Cambodian conflict, largely coincided with this stance. See R. Sean Randolph, The United States and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics, 1950-1985. (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986), pp. 205-206.


a Soviet proxy.\textsuperscript{108} The U.S. may also have given tacit approval to China to attack Vietnam in February 1979.\textsuperscript{109} Moreover, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's national security adviser, later admitted that: "I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot. I encouraged the Thai to help the DK."\textsuperscript{110} Another source claimed that the former director of the State Department's Office for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia said that from 1978, "the U.S. countenanced the revival and building up of the Khmer Rouge's political and military capability."\textsuperscript{111}

Nevertheless, the U.S.'s public policy on the issue of Cambodia was to give political and moral support to ASEAN's diplomatic efforts on the problem. At the ASEAN meeting in July, U.S. Secretary of States Cyrus Vance made only a vague statement that:

\textit{Southeast Asia is important to the United States and to our security, and we see our cooperation with ASEAN as vital to the peace, prosperity and stability of Southeast Asia... We are committed morally and by treaty to support the ASEAN states.}\textsuperscript{112}

From the Thai viewpoint, when its national security was perceived as being at stake, such words of assurance and moral support from American leaders seemed inadequate. The confirmation that the Manila Pact remained a commitment of the U.S. was considered vague, for there was no agreement under what circumstances the Pact might be activated. One Thai official stated: "what we want to hear from the Americans is that any attack on Thailand would be considered an attack on the vital interests of the U.S. But so far they have refused. The talk that the Manila Pact is still alive is not enough."\textsuperscript{113} Similarly, Kriangsak asserted that: "if the U.S. government wanted to assist Thailand, it should do so now because Thailand is strategically important in the region or otherwise it will be too late."\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{108} For further discussion see Sutter, "China's Strategy Toward Vietnam...", pp. 186-190.

\textsuperscript{109} For example, while the U.S. condemned Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia as "a threat to regional peace and stability [that] raises the danger of wider conflict," it only called for immediate withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, and Chinese troops from Vietnam, a request that could be interpreted as the U.S. not objecting to Chinese troops presence in Vietnam as long as the Vietnamese were in Cambodia. See Chanda, \textit{Brother Enemy...} p. 359. Becker observes that: "The U.S. accepted the Chinese rationale of retaliating against the Vietnamese without a whisper..." See Elizabeth Becker, \textit{When The War Was Over: The Voice of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People.} (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987), p. 440.

\textsuperscript{110} Becker, \textit{When The War Was Over...}, p. 440.

\textsuperscript{111} John Pilger, "The return to year zero", \textit{The Bulletin}, 11 May, 1993, p. 34


\textsuperscript{113} Nayan Chanda, "A bid to hold the middle ground", \textit{FEER}, 7 March, 1980, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{The Nation review}, 19 February, 1980, p. 1.
Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the Kriangsak government's endeavours to employ various means in order to undermine Vietnam's position in Cambodia. Two salient aspects of the Kriangsak policy should be noted here. First, the decision to ally with China against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia reflected Thai military leaders' perception of threat and their management of a national security issue. It seems that the perceived threat from Vietnam owed more to the military leaders' worst-case planning—Vietnam might invade further into the northeast of Thailand or support Thai insurgents to 'liberate' the northeast region. In any case, the loss of Cambodia as Thailand's "buffer zone" was totally unacceptable for military leaders (see Chapter V).

Thai military leaders' decision to agree to a quid pro quo with China, that in exchange for a reduction of Chinese assistance to the CPT, Thailand facilitated the Chinese supplying the deposed Khmer Rouge forces via Thai territory, was remarkable. Before 1978, the communist insurgent movement in Thailand had undergone considerably growth. For more than a decade before 1979, the Thai military had tried in vain to suppress the insurgency. Indeed it was brought to an end largely as a result of the change of Chinese policy towards the Thai communists. Presumably, it was for this reason that the deal between Thailand and China has never been admitted by Thai leaders publicly (see a discussion on the collapse of the CPT in Chapter VII).

Second, while pursuing a covert alliance with China in the Cambodian conflict, Kriangsak also tried to avoid direct confrontation with Vietnam. The perceived threat from Vietnam's domination of Cambodia and the uneasy alliance with China help explain Kriangsak's ambivalent policy. A reliance on an external power's protection in time of crisis, and an ability to exploit the situation from every direction was not uncommon in the history of Thai foreign relations. However, given that China had long been Thailand's principal threat, the Thai leaders' decision to align with China, at that juncture, could not have been an easy option. The military leadership perceived that because Thailand and Vietnam had been enemies for centuries—Thai troops had even fought against communists during the Vietnam War—the danger from Vietnam was more immediate and real than that from China. In referring to the Chinese role in the Cambodian conflict, Kriangsak said that: "while there are no Chinese forces occupying other countries, there are Vietnamese troops in Cambodia."  

Initially at least, it would seem that the relationship with China and the Soviet Union was pursued with caution. While covertly cooperating with China in assisting the

116 The Nation Review, 7 February, 1979, p. 3.
deposed Khmer Rouge forces, Thailand also allowed Soviet special flights passing over Thai territory to Vietnam. The purpose was "to make some sorts of balance on the Thai stance in their conflict."\(^{117}\) Kriangsak also tried to avoid direct confrontation with Vietnam. For example, the term "foreign forces" was used when referring to Vietnamese troops in Cambodia instead of the term "Vietnamese forces". He also offered to be a mediator between Vietnam and China, and proposed that he visit Vietnam during a particularly tense period.\(^{118}\) According to former Deputy Foreign Minister Wong, Kriangsak did not see the Sino-Thai covert cooperation as long-term, for he believed that the situation was "an internal conflict" between the three communist countries in which Thailand had no part to play.\(^{119}\) After leaving office, Kriangsak referred to the role of superpowers in the country's policy toward the Cambodian conflict in the following way:

Because Thailand is a small country and is a front-line state, it is sometime impossible to pursue a policy of equi-distance [from great powers.] Therefore we sometimes lean toward one side and some other time to the other. [Nevertheless] Thailand should not pose a threat to any country. It is imperative that we avoid a policy of direct confrontation and must not allow any country to drag us into war. [At the moment] we are not ready [for war].\(^{120}\)

As the Thai policy towards the Cambodian conflict during the Kriangsak government was largely controlled by Kriangsak, his sudden departure from office in February 1980 thus led to an end to Thailand's ambivalent policy on the conflict.

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\(^{117}\) Interview, Lek Neomalee, Bangkok, 22 March, 1992 (emphasis added). However, he did not give details about the timing which allowed for the Soviet special flights. A report in June 1979 quoted Kriangsak as saying, that Soviet flights were being allowed to pass over Thailand into Vietnam, see *Newsweek*, 30 June, 1979, p. 23.

\(^{118}\) *The Bangkok Post*, 22 March, 1979, p. 3 and *FBIS*, 16 October 1979, p. J1. To a certain extent, Kriangsak was able to keep Thai-Vietnamese relations from being openly hostile. In October 1979, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach said after talking with Kriangsak that although there had been a deep divergence of views between the two countries, he nonetheless held the Thai Prime Minister in high esteem and referred him an outstanding political figure and statesman. (*FBIS*, 23 October, 1979, p. J4.) Thach's restraint from openly criticising Thai leaders changed after the Kriangsak government was replaced by Prem.


Chapter V

Thailand's Security Interest in Cambodia

This chapter analyses how Thailand’s security interests were affected by Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. It examines the importance of "buffer zones" in Thai defence planning and the perceptions of the Vietnamese threat held by Thai leaders under the governments of Kriangsak Chamanand (November 1977-February 1980) and Prem Tinsulanonda (March 1980-August 1989). The policies of other major actors in the Cambodian conflict, namely China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union, are examined in order to explain why Thailand's security interests conflicted with those of Vietnam but coincided with those of China.

The importance of "buffer zones" in Thai defence planning

Vietnam's invasion and the imposition of a pro-Vietnamese regime in Cambodia meant that Thailand lost a traditional buffer zone between itself and Vietnam. The Vietnamese invasion created a de facto common border between Thailand and Vietnam on Thailand's eastern frontier. For the Thai security establishment, an independent or anti-Vietnamese Cambodia was crucial to Thai defence planning; the loss of this area itself threatened national security.

Indeed, from the post-World War II period right through to the period under study, the importance of "buffer zones" was central to Thai defence planning - not only on the eastern frontier, but on all other frontiers as well. In an interview with the author, former Supreme Commander General Saiyud Kerdphol stated clearly that:

For the interest of Thai national security, it is imperative that Cambodia, Laos and ethnic minorities on the western border [with Burma] are our buffer zone or buffer forces because these countries or minorities are weak and are likely to be controlled by others.¹

A brief discussion on the situation in other frontiers is perhaps useful here.

To the west, a strategy of supporting "Burmese fighting Burmese" had been followed since the late 1950s. Members of Burma's minorities, who were fighting against the Rangoon regime, were openly allowed to reside in "autonomous zones" on Thai territory and were linked with the security establishment in Bangkok. These minorities were seen by Thai authority as "buffer forces" between Thailand and Burma. It was perceived that although Thailand has had little conflict with Burma in recent years, a "buffer force" between the two countries was nonetheless necessary, on the grounds that all countries have the potential to become a security threat. In the eyes of the Thai

¹ Interview, Saiyud Kerdphol, Bangkok, 11 May, 1992.
security establishment, so long as Rangoon was preoccupied with the pacification of Burma's minorities, the prospect of Burma becoming a direct threat to Thailand was not great.\(^2\)

Security problems in southern Thailand arose from the activities of the CPT and the separatist movements, while Malaysia was concerned with the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM). It has been suggested that since the late 1950s or early 1960s, there existed an informal agreement on a "peaceful co-existence" between Thai security authorities and the CPM. Informal Thai cooperation with the CPM, which had been operating in the area close to the Thai border and also had bases on the Thai territory, was explained on the grounds that the CPM could serve as a bargaining counter in order that the authorities on the other side of the border would refrain from supporting the anti-Bangkok movements—which also had bases on the frontier.\(^3\)

It was on the eastern frontier that a buffer zone was considered to be most vital, however. From the late 1940s, the threat to national security was perceived to come from communism emanating from North Vietnam and China. As a result, Thailand's "forward defence policy" led to an extensive involvement in internal politics in Laos and Cambodia. At the height of this policy, Thai troops were dispatched to join the regimes in Laos and South Vietnam in a struggle against communist forces in their respective countries.

After the formation of communist regimes in Indochina in 1975, a number of reports indicated that support for right-wing Laotian and Cambodian armed insurrections was still given by some factions in the Thai security establishment.\(^4\) The military had long believed that peaceful co-existence with communist countries was not possible and thus felt that Thailand's interests were best served by having non-communist neighbouring countries.\(^5\) In consequence, support for right-wing insurrectionary movements was seen as a means of undermining the Indochinese communist regimes. Moreover, it was hoped that non-communist regimes might be restored in these countries and thus restore Thailand's "buffer zones". After the creation of Democratic Kampuchea in early 1975,

\(^2\) It is interesting to note that the strategy of supporting "Burmeses fighting Burmeses" is admitted in a Thai military account, Nai jiew, [Boss jiew], (Bangkok: Thammanit, 1990), pp. 104-105 (in Thai). The account was published in 1990, by 'Brothers in the Thai Armed Forces', on the occasion of Supreme Commander General Chavalit Yongchaityudh's resignation from military service. It is unclear whether this 'strategy' has been halted. See also Sayamrat supdawichan, 16 August, 1981, p. 8; 6 December, 1981, p. 8; 11 July, 1982, p. 5; and Khaophiset, 23-29 October, 1992, pp. 21-23 (in Thai).

\(^3\) Nai jiew, pp. 104-105, 112 and Surin Pitsuwan, Khwamkhatyang thai-malaysia, [Conflict between Thailand and Malaysia], Sayamrat supdawichan, 5 December, 1982, pp. 18-23 (in Thai).

\(^4\) See, for example, Sayamrat supdawichan, 17 May, 1981, p. 8; 3 September, 1981, p. 5; and 15 November, 1981, p. 6 (in Thai).

according to General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, considerable efforts were made to destabilise the country "in the hope of changing a communist state to be a capitalist one." In 1982, Supreme Commander General Saiyud Kerdphol insisted that Thailand did not want the Khmer Rouge to return to power in Cambodia by citing the reason that: "since Thailand has an anti-communist policy, we naturally don't want to see a neighbouring country run by communists."  

After 1975, the idea of a "buffer zone" also retained its importance for the Thai security establishment because of suspicions of Vietnam. The country was unified and independent for the first time in more than a century. Moreover, the new Vietnam had powerful military capabilities and was under a "hostile communist ideology." Some military leaders also saw Vietnam as an expansionist state. It was noted, for example, that Vietnam had continued to build up its military capability with assistance from the Soviet Union. Moreover, it had also stationed of some 40,000-50,000 troops and maintained a large number of civilian administrative personnel in Laos since 1977. In 1987, after his appointment as Supreme Commander, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh stated that Thailand's most immediate security problem was the struggle to create "buffer zone" with its socialist neighbouring countries—implying that Thailand was trying to secure Laos and Cambodia which were free from Vietnamese influence.  

In this context, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia confirmed Thai military leaders' suspicions. For Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chamanand, accepting Vietnam's domination of Cambodia was out of the question because "for future generations of Thais, we cannot let the border of an aggressive Vietnam be brought right up to our border." It was thus vital to pursue an all-out effort in order to force Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia.  

Kriangsak also said, after his departure from office, that there were various means to force Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia. If political and diplomatic measures failed, he asserted, Thailand would have to carry out "military operations" in

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8 Interview, Arthit Kamlang-ek, Bangkok, 7 July, 1992. This view was also pointed out by Prasong Soonsiri in The Nation Review, 6 August, 1980, p. 3.


order to defend their territory "as far as [Cambodian towns of] Battambang and Sisopon." This perception clearly reflected Kriangsak's "buffer zone" mentality.

For many Thai leaders, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia resurrected the history of century-long competition between Thailand and Vietnam over the land area comprising present-day Laos and Cambodia as noted in Chapter III. Interviews with a number of former Thai policy-makers suggest that this history has generated a sense of distrust and dislike of the Vietnamese—which has remained up to the present time. In his talk on "The concept on the development of the Army" in 1987, Supreme Commander General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh stated that:

Whether a country is a military threat to us depends on its potential and its previous practice. For Vietnam which was historically rather aggressive and offensive, we cannot perceive it as a friend.... What the Vietnamese have done in the past must be taken into consideration: they occupied some parts of Cambodia and then went further into Laos. Now although that practice was claimed as a Socialist country's 'liberation' of another country, that still posed a threat to us [like in the past]... What the Vietnamese did in history tells us of what they will do in the future. This [assumption] may not be correct, but we still have to watch Vietnam with utmost care.

Given this interpretation of history, it is not surprising that Thai leaders perceived Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia as intended to do more than simply to drive out the hostile Khmer Rouge regime or eliminate the Chinese threat from that country, as Vietnam had claimed. Rather, Thai officials believed that Vietnam planned to 'swallow' Cambodia. As Kriangsak noted in August 1979, Vietnam was unlikely to pull out its troops from Cambodia unless pressured to do so. Similarly, in interview with the author, Thai leaders repeatedly referred to the "Vietnamisation of Cambodia"; namely Vietnam's forced relocation of Vietnamese peoples into Cambodia in the aftermath of the invasion.

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11 Sayamnikon, 22 April, 1983, p. 14 (in Thai). Battambang and Sisopon are about 100 and 40 kilometres, respectively, from the Thai border.


14 Interviews: Arthit Kamlang-ek, Bangkok, 7 July, 1992; and Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992. In 1984, Supreme Commander General Arthit Kamlang-ek said that: "Vietnam is determined to Vietnamise Cambodia on a permanent basis. The process is being undertaken stage by stage. While more Vietnamese are being moved into Cambodia, the Khmer themselves are being forced out. The intermarriage is part of the process." (The Nation Review, 25 April, 1984, p. 4.) A document published by the Army in 1985 claims that since the Vietnamese invasion, Vietnam had brought more than 150,000 Vietnamese families into Cambodia. (See the Army's black book on Songkram lang phaophon [The war of genocide], in Arthit-Wiwat, 9-15, July, 1985, pp. 25-26, in Thai.) However, there have been no independent sources on the forced relocation of Vietnamese peoples into Cambodia after 1979. The number of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia during the 1980s is also unclear. According to a report in FEER, in 1970, an estimated 500,000 Vietnamese resided in Cambodia. In 1983, the figure ran from fewer than 50,000 - a figure given by Hun Sen, Foreign Minister of the PRK, - up to 300,000 (there is no evidence of how this figure comes from). The report indicated that discussion over Vietnamese
It is interesting to consider why Thai leaders reacted strongly to the presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia, but publicly at least, tolerated a similar presence in Laos. One explanation is that Thailand's recognition of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975 took place after the right-wing regime in that country had been defeated locally, although the Communist Party of Lao received considerable support from Vietnam. In the case of Cambodia, however, the formation of the Heng Samrin regime was totally carried out by Vietnamese troops.\textsuperscript{15} Although Thai leaders cited a use of force and the violation of international law, as the basis for opposition to Vietnam's military operation, the real reason would seem to be that Thailand could never accept a situation in which Vietnamese troops were deployed along its entire eastern border.

Another factor that contributed to the Thai leaders' perception of a Vietnamese threat immediately after the fall of the DK was that the invasion occurred at a time when Thai confidence of its own ability to protect national security was at a particular low ebb and Vietnam's domination of the entire Indochinese regimes essentially disturbed the balance of power between Thailand and Vietnam.

\textsuperscript{15} Interviews: Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992; and Suraphong Chaiyanam, Bangkok, 30 April, 1992.
Thai perceptions of Vietnam's military capability

In this regard, it is useful to look at Thailand's military capacity vis-a-vis Vietnam during the period 1975 to 1980.

**Table 1**

Thailand's military capacity vis-a-vis Vietnam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total armed forces</th>
<th>Estimated GNP (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>43,690,000</td>
<td>210,000</td>
<td>14.7 bn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>45,090,000</td>
<td>211,000</td>
<td>14.7 bn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>46,390,000</td>
<td>212,000</td>
<td>18.1 bn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>46,540,000</td>
<td>216,000</td>
<td>21.7 bn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Vietnam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total armed forces</th>
<th>Estimated GNP (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>45,760,000</td>
<td>615,000</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>46,855,000</td>
<td>615,000</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>48,090,000</td>
<td>615,000</td>
<td>7.1 bn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>50,250,000</td>
<td>1,023,000</td>
<td>8.6 bn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From the comparison, it can be seen that Vietnam's total armed forces were far greater than those of Thailand at any time. The Vietnamese also possessed a large amount of U.S. equipment left with the former South Vietnamese forces following the end of the Vietnam war.16 Moreover, from 1975, Vietnam had received substantial economic and military assistance from the Soviet Union. Finally, although available figures show that Thailand's estimated GNP was more than double that of Vietnam, the latter had extensive combat experience, the former, relatively little.

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As discussed in previous chapters, from the early 1950s Thailand's defence system and its national security establishment depended largely on the U.S. During this period, the U.S. was actively involved in opposing Thailand's enemies. Thus, the Thai armed forces had no experience of confronting external enemies on their own and had never fought in real combat. The Thai defence system relied heavily on the U.S. following the signing of U.S.-Thai military assistance agreement in October 1950. After the agreement, the U.S. established its military advisory group as part of the American Embassy in Bangkok. The group was subsequently upgraded as the Joint United States Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) and administered security assistance programs which included military equipment, training and technical assistance to the Thai Armed Forces under the command of the U.S. Defence Department. During this period, American weapons given to Thailand were leftovers from the U.S. armed forces and were mostly of low quality and out-of-date. The weapons were also only sufficient for the Thai military's main task at the time, that is, suppression of internal subversion—primarily the CPT-led armed insurgency.

As a result, the change in the security relationship between Thailand and the U.S., in the period after the Vietnam war, had an enormous impact on the Thai military. In 1975, Thailand had to pay for U.S. military aid for the first time since 1950. The amount of total aid was also reduced substantially, as Table 2 shows.

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17 As noted in Chapter II, Thai troops were dispatched to join U.S. troops in South Vietnam in 1967, but the troops engaged in little real combat. It was in fact a show of "Free World Military Forces", headquartered in Saigon.

18 I would like to thank Professor Dr. Suchit Bunbongkan, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, for his advice on the situation within the Thai military and defence planning. (Personal communication, Canberra, 1 November, 1993)

19 In addition, the U.S. assistance largely changed, from grants under the Military Assistance Program (MAP) and the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET), to loans and credits under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program.
### Table 2

U.S. military assistance to Thailand  (US$ million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Grants (MAP &amp; IMFT)</th>
<th>Loans and credits (FMS)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>103.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is also useful to look at Thailand’s defence budget during the period from 1975 to 1980.

### Table 3

Thailand’s defence budget, 1975-80

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Defence as % of GNP</th>
<th>Percentage increase over previous FY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Bureau of Budget, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand; and National Social and Economic Development Board, Office of the Prime Minister, Thailand.²⁰

The figures show that Thailand's defence expenditure increased considerably since 1976. The increase was related to the withdrawal of U.S. military presence in mainland Southeast Asia, the decrease in U.S. military assistance to Thailand and the communist victory in Indochina. According to an expert on Thai military, from the time when Thailand first received U.S. military assistance, the annual budget was only sufficient to pay salaries and maintain weapons and buildings. After 1975, a major arms purchase was made by the Thanin government (October 1976-October 1977). The allocation of 20,000 million baht—from a foreign loan—was not included in the annual budget. The weapons acquired at this time were for suppression of CPT-led guerilla warfare.

The weaponry acquired, up to the time when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, was mainly for counter-insurgency purposes. The Thai military had, since the early 1970s, trained for guerilla rather than conventional capacity. After 1978, with Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, Thai forces were suddenly confronted with what was perceived to be a major conventional threat, for which existing weaponry and training were quite unsuitable.

Thus a combination of underlying and immediate causes contributed to Thai leaders' threat perception. This was best summed up by Siddhi when he noted that:

The most serious threat was the loss of the historical buffer between Thailand and Vietnam. If we were to remain unconcerned in the face of this fait accompli, Thailand would have a de facto common border with Vietnam on the entire eastern border because the Vietnamese already controlled Laos. Given that Vietnam in 1979 had more than a million armed troops—four or five times greater than that of Thailand, many of whom were battle-tested veterans in the war against the Americans, and that the Vietnamese arrogantly viewed themselves as the world's third largest military power—they had both military capability and intention. If they could conquered Cambodia, Thailand would be the next target.

One of Siddhi's close aides explained in a similar vein:

The troops of a powerful potential foe which lined up on the entire eastern border were beyond the capacity of the Thai defence. That made it clear from the very beginning that whether or not Thailand still had any other options [apart from opposing Vietnam's domination of

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21 Ibid., p. 91.

22 Personal communication with Dr. Suchit Bunbongkan, Canberra, 1 November, 1993. See also Surachart (ed), Rabub thahanthai: kansuksa kongthap nai boribot thang sangkhom-kanmuang, p. 140.

23 Personal communication with Dr. Suchit Bunbongkan, Canberra, 1 November, 1993. In his interview with Sukhumbhand Paribatra on 10 February, 1987, Kriangsak admitted that when the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia occurred, the country indeed stood alone with an inadequately prepared defence system. See Sukhumbhand, From Enmity to Alignment..., p. 29.

Cambodia] at that juncture was just a matter of debate among academics but not among policy-makers.25

When asked about the threat from Vietnam, Thai leaders referred to two threats in particular. One was via Vietnam's support to the Thai communists as discussed above. The other was via Vietnam's plan for creating a "Federation of Indochina". According to Thai leaders, the origin of the plan derived from the time when Ho Chi Minh first created the Indochinese communist movement. The federation was to have included Thailand's northeast region which Vietnam claimed was historically part of Laos. After the formation of the Heng Samrin regime, Thai leaders believed that plans for the Federation of Indochina were effectively being pursued under the guise of the "special relationship" formalised by friendship treaties between Vietnam and the PRK; Vietnam and Laos; and Laos and the PRK.26 Senior Thai officials also argued that Vietnam's immediate goal after the overthrow of the DK was to exert total control over Cambodia and Laos, while its long-term goal was to include the northeast of Thailand in the Federation, or invade further into other parts of the country.27

Thais also perceived Vietnamese actions within the larger framework of an expansionism global communist movement, or as Siddhi labelled it: "Greater Southeast Asia with Vietnam as a regional hegemonist."28 In 1987, a senior military official explained that:

Vietnamese policy towards the region [Southeast Asia] can be divided into two steps. The first is to unify Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam into a federation under the control of Vietnam. Initially Vietnam will still allow Laos and Cambodia to retain their conduct of foreign relations and their identity. The unification will emphasise administrative, security, and economic affairs... The second step is to expand the Vietnamese influence throughout other countries in Southeast Asia and to make them come under the leadership of Vietnam.29

25 Interview, Sarasin Viraphol, Bangkok, 26 July, 1992. See also his article on "Panna bangprakan keikap nayobuy khonghai to indochina", [Some internal factors concerning Thailand's policy towards Indochina], Saranrom, 10 February, 1983, (in Thai).


27 Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992. See also interviews with Deputy Secretary of the NSC, Prasong Soonsiri in Sayamnikon, 8 March, 1980, p. 18, with Supreme Commander General Chavalit Yongchayudh in Kambanyai... p. 410, and with General Sanan Sawetseranee, Lak thai, 26 February, 1990, p. 24 (all in Thai).


Did the Thai leaders really believed that the Vietnamese military would continue their drive into Thailand, or was this more a matter of worst-case contingency planning? As Thailand's key decision-maker on foreign and security affairs for more than a decade, Siddhi is perhaps the most appropriate person to cite here:

Our perception of the Vietnamese threat was based on our intelligence collection which indicated that Vietnam was targeting Thailand after it had gained complete control over Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam possessed the military capability to do so, for in 1979, the size of its armed forces was about four to five times greater than that of Thailand. Most of the Vietnamese soldiers were battle-tested veterans of the previous two Indochina wars.

National Security must be premised first on the military capability of a potential foe because intentions could change overnight while military capability takes years to build up. Therefore, Thailand must be prepared in the face of Vietnam's overwhelming military capability. To do otherwise risks the fate of Kuwait which until the last minute refused to believe that Iraq would invade.30

Thai leaders' concern over the perceived threat from Vietnam, was further heightened by the fact that Vietnam was receiving economic and military aid from the Soviet Union. On the basis of interviews with former Thai leaders, there appears to have been a clear consensus that Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia was made possible only with assistance from the Soviet Union, and the Vietnamese invasion of Thailand would be made possible with Soviet support as well. In this respect, the Soviet Union was seen as both a threat to Thailand and a key actor in any political settlement in Cambodia. As Kriangsak recalled: "while Vietnam fears a Chinese threat through Cambodia, Thailand fears a Soviet threat through Vietnam."31

According to Thai leaders, the Soviets aimed to dominate not only Indochina but also the entire region. The massive build-up of military facilities in Vietnam was cited as evidence for this belief. In 1984, Secretary-General of the NSC Prasong Soonsiri stated that Soviet expansionism in the region was one of the most destabilising problems facing Thailand. He noted that since 1979, Moscow had been supplying Vietnam with massive amounts of military equipment, including 25 MiG 21-N's and 1,720 missiles. The Soviet aid to Vietnam amounted to about one billion dollars a year between 1981-85. In return, the Soviets had been given access to the use of naval and air-base facilities at Cam Ranh and Danang since 1979. In 1985, Prasong referred, for the first

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31 FBIS, 28 January, 1980, p. 17. For Kriangsak, Soviet influence was behind the activities of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Vietnam was the Soviet ally, under a friendship treaty, which covered military cooperation. Meanwhile, it also had treaties with Laos and Cambodia. Without interference by superpowers, Kriangsak believed that the current conflict in the region would improve. See The Bangkok Post, 29 May, 1983, pp. 1, 3.
time, to the stationing of 14 MiG23s, a technologically highly developed fighter-interceptor, at Cam Ranh Bay and argued that the Russian military build-up had given the Soviets to the offensive capacity to land their troops anywhere in the region. The build-up had reached a level at which it was "threatening the peace of the region and the sovereignty of countries in the area." Most importantly, the Soviet assistance enabled Vietnam to launch aggression against Thailand and the region, as he said:

The Soviet Union is threatening the security of Thailand and the stability of peace in Southeast Asia by [its] material aid to the Vietnamese for their invasion and occupation of Cambodia. Soviet artillery and ammunition fired by Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, has killed both Thai soldiers and Thai villagers.33

Similarly, Siddhi said in 1983 that the region had witnessed an "unprecedented threat" from the Soviet Union with its formidable naval presence in Asian waters. In his view, Vietnam had brought about the Soviet threat to Asia by serving as a "Trojan horse" for the Soviets in exchange for its ambition of dominating Indochina. As he said:

Vietnam's acquiescence to the utilisation of its strategic bases as important outposts of the Soviet Pacific Forces has significantly increased the Soviet military capabilities in the region for intelligence monitoring and projecting naval power with potentially grave consequences to the security of all Asian countries... [As such,] Vietnam had transformed the region into a cockpit of superpower rivalry.34

The Kriangsak government believed that the Soviet Union could play a key role in solving the Cambodian issue, for without Soviet support, Vietnam could not afford to maintain its troops in Cambodia. For this reason, Kriangsak visited the Soviet Union in March 1979.35 In the succeeding years, efforts were made by Thai authorities to persuade the Soviets to halt their assistance to Vietnam. In 1983, for example, the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the Soviet Ambassador to Thailand to persuade Moscow to warn Vietnam about violating Thai territory and terminate its arms supplies to Vietnam, since the weapons were being used for "aggressive purposes".36 Similarly, in 1985, the Soviet Ambassador was again summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be told that the Soviet Union should play a role in encouraging peace in the region. Identical meetings between Soviet


35 After the visit, Kriangsak said that he was relieved to hear Soviet leaders' assurances that a Vietnamese invasion of Thailand "was not possible." See _FBIS_, 28 March, 1979, p. 11.

Ambassadors and ASEAN officials were held in other ASEAN capitals as part of ASEAN's co-ordinated Cambodian policy. 37

Notwithstanding such pressure, the Soviets continued to support their ally. In 1985, Soviet Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa told Thai leaders that:

We are not for confrontation... We are for negotiation... We are not for appeasement. We are for detente. And as far as that is concerned, we shall always be your friend and Vietnam's friend. They [the Vietnamese] help us, therefore we would like to help our friend... You help your friends too. 38

Privately, according to Siddhi, Kapitsa suggested that it was wise that Thailand "make an agreement" with Vietnam, otherwise the Thais would "get nothing in Cambodia." The suggestion, which the Soviet Union repeatedly made, implied that Thailand should accept Vietnam's fait accompli in Cambodia. 39

From the Thai viewpoint, keeping the Khmer resistance as a buffer force was an effective means of opposing Vietnam's domination of Cambodia. In this respect, the Chinese and Thai interests in maintaining the Khmer Rouge forces coincided (see discussion of China's policy towards the Cambodian conflict below in this chapter). In late 1979, Lieutenant General Som Khattaphan, Director of the Supreme Command Information Office, referred to "third-party forces" along the Thai-Cambodian border as follows:

I am trying to use them as a buffer... Let's just say that we will try to build our base while using other people to act as a fence for us and while China takes care of the other side... Although [the "third-party forces"] will not have much capacity to help us, they can provide us information as to an impending Vietnamese invasion... Actually, we have tried to push them out of our territory, but they kept returning. At times we just look the other way because we want to strengthen our position. We must use every trick in the book in the interests of the country. 40

During his tenure as Supreme Commander, General Saiyud Kerdphol perceived that so long as fighting between the Khmer resistance forces and the Vietnamese was going on in Cambodia, "Thailand's 'buffer' in that sense has not yet disappeared." 41


40 Sayamrat, 26 November, 1979, p. 3 (in Thai).

The importance of Thailand in China’s policy

It is useful at this stage to discuss Thailand’s strategic importance in China’s conflict with Vietnam over the issue of Cambodia over the previous decade. Chinese policy in Asia was shaped, in large part, by a strategic concern to promote a balance of influence that was favourable to China and to block what it perceived as Soviet efforts to contain the Chinese influence. Thus, China’s ultimate aim was not simply to counter "Vietnamese expansionism" as an end in itself, but to thwart the Soviet’s increasing role in the region. Its relations with Vietnam, which had deteriorated in the years prior to 1978, underlined the anti-Soviet sentiment in China’s policy towards Vietnam. After the outbreak of conflict between China and Vietnam over the overseas Chinese in Vietnam and the boundary disagreement in 1978, Deng publicly pointed out the alleged threat posed by Vietnam and the Soviet Union—that the latter intended to use developments in various parts of the world including Vietnam, for the Soviet design of global expansion and the encirclement of China.42

In this respect, Chinese leaders perceived the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia as an act of Soviet-sponsored aggression aimed at strengthening Vietnam as a base for Soviet operations in Southeast Asia. For China, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia materialised only with support from the Soviets. Therefore, the invasion was not a matter concerning only the China-Indochina area but was, as Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, Han Nianlong asserted, "a part of global expansionism by the Soviet Union."43

The fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, its only ideological ally in Southeast Asia, was thus a major setback for China and it became determined to restrain "Vietnamese expansionism", as Deng said before China’s border attack of Vietnam in February 1979:

We consider it necessary to put a restraint on the wild ambitions of the Vietnamese and to give them an appropriate limited lesson...44

We call the Vietnamese the Cubans of the Orient. If you don’t teach them some necessary lessons, their provocation will increase...45

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Therefore, military pressure on Vietnam was seen by China as vital. Still the ultimate aim was not to force Vietnamese troops to withdraw from Cambodia per se but rather to weaken Vietnam as a whole. Moreover, the key target of China's policy on the Cambodian issue was the Soviet Union not Vietnam. In late 1979, Deng told visiting Japanese Prime Minister, Masayoshi Ohira, that he opposed Japan's plan to continue aid to Vietnam because that would "only lighten the Soviet burden." Similarly, in April 1980, Han Nianlong asserted that: "it is only when the Soviets can no longer support the Vietnamese that a political solution to the crisis will be possible," and that nothing should be done, for the time being, to lighten [the Soviets'] burden. We should exert efforts, and also use public opinion, to put pressure on them, to let them see that it won't do to continue their way... We must ensure that the Soviet Union is very isolated.

Since China viewed the Khmer Rouge as the most effective resistance force to the Vietnamese, the most effective way to prevent Vietnam's consolidation of power in Cambodia, was to support the Khmer Rouge. Therefore, China was prepared to give all-out support to the deposed Khmer Rouge forces. It was in this context that Thailand was important. According to an official Chinese document, "Report of Geng Biao...", China sent supplies to the DK before its collapse. Since there was no common border between China and Cambodia, a large amount of aid could only be sent by sea. After the fall of the DK, the document mentions, China anticipated that Soviet and Vietnamese vessels would appear in the international water off Cambodia. Therefore, China's frequent use of the sea area facing the Thai-Cambodian border—to enter into Cambodia—would make it "a very obvious target." In this respect, Thailand's proximity to Cambodia made it the most suitable route for sending supplies to the Khmer Rouge strongholds.

Moreover, Thailand's uneasy accommodation with Vietnam after 1975 had been obvious and China clearly played on Thai fears of a Vietnamese threat. Deng told Kriangsak during his visit to Bangkok in November 1978 that cooperation between Thailand and China, in restraining the Vietnamese influence, would contribute to the


47 Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy..., p. 379.

48 "Report of Geng Biao...", in Rajendra K. Jain (ed), China and Thailand 1949-1983, (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1987), p. 236. According to FEER, in August 1978, Defence Minister of the DK, Son Sen, led a military delegation to China to seek Chinese assistance and advice. Son Sen was told that in view of China's long-standing principle, as well as for concrete political-diplomatic reasons, it would be unable to come to the rescue of Cambodia in the event of a Vietnamese invasion. Instead, the Chinese leaders persuaded Son Sen to start preparing for a long-drawn-out guerilla resistance. Following Son Sen's visit, China sent by sea and air a sizeable quantity of arms, food and communication equipment to be stored in caches in jungles and mountain. The DK then started organising its base areas in the Elephant Mountain range southwest of Phnom Penh, which was not far from the Thai-Cambodian border. See Nayan Chanda, "Cambodia: Fifteen days that shook Asia", FEER, 19 January, 1979, p. 12.
security and stability of Southeast Asia, particularly that of Thailand. In June 1979, Chinese Vice-Premier Chen Muhua made the same argument to Thai leaders, that China had to support the Pol Pot forces "to fight the invading Vietnam and to stop Vietnam from expanding its war to Thailand and Malaysia."

Undoubtedly, it was in the Chinese interest if Thailand openly pursued a policy of confrontation with Vietnam. Thus, while Thai leaders denied publicly any use of Thai route by the Chinese to supply the Khmer Rouge, Chinese leaders exposed the secret agreement between Thailand and China on assisting the Khmer Rouge. In February 1979, Deng said publicly that:

We don't have a common border [with Cambodia] but weapons are being sent by China. Of course, the only route now is through Thailand, and Thailand has its difficulties.

This clearly indicates that the Chinese were attempting to undermine Thailand's declared neutral position on the Cambodian conflict. It was also a great embarrassment for the Thai government which kept insisting on its neutrality in the conflict. Moreover, Chinese leaders occasionally expressed their intention to support Thailand in the event of Vietnamese aggression. In June, for example, Deng told visiting Thai Deputy Premier Thawee Chullasup that: "any danger that faces Thailand also affects China," and that China would come to the rescue of Thailand "in every way" if Thai security was threatened. Such an offer, while putting Thai leaders in an awkward position, also increased Vietnam's sense of suspicion towards Thailand.

The Vietnamese perception of Cambodia and Laos

While Thailand perceived the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia as an immediate threat to its national security, Vietnam perceived that control over Cambodia, and also Laos, as being directly linked to its national survival. In order to understand Vietnam's policy toward Cambodia in the period under study, it is relevant here to look at the strategic importance of Cambodia and Laos through the eyes of the communist Vietnamese leadership. In addition, I will also look briefly at the Soviet Union's role in connection with Vietnam's military operation in Cambodia.

49 Chanda, Brother Enemy..., p. 326.

50 The Bangkok Post, 4 June, 1979, p. 1.


52 The Nation Review, 26 June, 1979, pp. 1, 8.
As Thai leaders' perception of the Vietnamese threat was largely based on the notion of Vietnam's desire to establish an Indochinese Federation and thus dominate Laos and Cambodia, it is relevant that the discussion begins with this issue.

The importance of Laos and Cambodia in Vietnam's revolution was formally declared by the Communist International (Comintern) in the First Plenum of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP)'s Central Committee in October 1930. Although the Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians were different ethnic groups, the Comintern suggested that it was necessary to include Laos and Cambodia in the VCP's framework and the three countries "must maintain intimate relationships." To indicate the importance of "proletarian internationalism", the Conference also decided to give the VCP a new name, the Indochinese Communist Party, which remained until November 1945. Not all members of the VCP at the time were satisfied with the new name and the inclusion of Laos and Cambodia into the Vietnamese party at the time when they did not have their own communist parties. Nevertheless, the two countries were soon recognised by Vietnamese communists for their strategic importance.

During Vietnam's two wars against France and the U.S., Indochina was a "single strategic unit." Vietnam's shape, long and narrow, posed a basic geostrategic weakness. Apart from its very exposed position, Vietnam lacked strategic depth in which Vietnamese forces could use to retreat and build base areas during war-time. This weakness was realised by the Vietnamese communists during their war against the French. France's advantageous position at the early stage of the war was due to the fact that it could launch attacks on the Viet Minh from the Laotian and Cambodian territories. Thus, the ICP took the view in 1931 that:

Although the three countries are made up of different races,... in reality they form only one country... It is not possible to make a revolution separately for Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. In order to oppose the enemy of the revolution which has a united concentration of force in the entire Indochina, the Communist party will have to concentrate the forces of the Indochinese proletariat in a united front...  

Therefore, the Viet Minh also attempted to secure rear areas in the two neighbouring countries. The success of this strategy was shown by the Viet Minh's victory over the French, at Dien Bien Phu, in 1954, which eventually led to France's final departure from Indochina. During the Cold War period, Laos, since the early 1950s, and Cambodia, since the late 1960s, were exploited by the U.S. and Thailand in their policy


54 Ibid., p. 128.

55 Chanda, *Brother Enemy*..., p. 120 and Lim Joo-Jock, *Geo-Strategy and the South China Sea Basin*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1979), p. 13. See also Chapter II.
armies, mass organisation and other specialised bodies, and intensive, in that it embraces contact at all echelons from national, to province and local levels.  

In contrast to Laos, Vietnam's attempt to establish a special relationship with the Democratic Kampuchea did not materialise. The failure was due to various reasons, including the Chinese factor. It is not the purpose here to thoroughly examine the roots of conflict between Vietnam and the DK, or for that matter, between Vietnam and China. Suffice it to say that the underlying problems between Vietnam and the DK lay in the Khmers' traditional fear of being swallowed up by the Vietnamese and the troubled relationship between the two communist parties during the war years. In the post-liberation period, a decisive factor in the two countries' conflict was their differing conceptions of what a bilateral relationship should include—the Khmer Rouge regime totally rejecting the Vietnamese emphasis on close ties among the three Indochinese countries. Finally, the question of mixed ethnic groups living in both countries and a dispute over land and maritime frontiers served as immediate causes leading to the rupture in DK-SRV diplomatic relations in December 1977.

The dispute between Vietnam and the DK was further complicated by the Sino-Vietnamese-Cambodian triangular relationship. While the Sino-Vietnamese conflict had been a culmination of a long-term development, the eventual break-up of the relationship was largely caused by the two countries' diverging geopolitical interests in the context of a Sino-Soviet rivalry. Since the early 1970s, China considered the Soviet Union its number one enemy. Its relations with the pro-Soviet communist Vietnamese consequently deteriorated. As Vietnam moved closer to the Soviet Union after the reunification of Vietnam, and as the Sino-Soviet confrontation intensified in the mid-1970s, the SRV-Soviet ties were increasingly perceived by China as a potential threat to the security of its southern border. If a Soviet-backed Vietnam were to dominate all of Indochina, the threat would further increase. In 1975, China ended all its military aid to Vietnam and cut back on long-term economic assistance, while in February 1976, it signed a major arms supply agreement with the DK. Meanwhile, 'incidents' along the Sino-Vietnamese border steadily escalated. In mid-1978, China cited the Vietnamese mistreatment of overseas Chinese in Vietnam as a reason to suspend what was left of its aid programs and recalled all its advisers from Vietnam. Shortly afterward, China

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60 As a result, Laos was generally described in terms such as 'puppet government', 'colony', and 'satellite state'. See Carlyle A. Thayer, "Laos and Vietnam: The Anatomy of a Special Relationship", in Martin Stuart-Fox (ed), Contemporary Laos: Studies in the Politics and Society of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), pp. 245-267.

61 See details on the Sino-Vietnamese-Cambodian conflict in Khanh, 'Into the Third Indochina War'. 
increased its shipments of military supplies to Cambodia. By now, China had replaced the U.S. as Vietnam's main and immediate enemy.

In the context of growing Sino-Vietnamese hostility, a competition for influence over Laos and Cambodia was seen by both China and Vietnam as vitally important. The Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge regime was perceived by Vietnam as a threat to its survival and its elimination was at the top of Vietnam's agenda. By the autumn of 1978, four or five attempted coups against the Khmer Rouge regime in Phnom Penh by dissident Khmer communists had been sponsored by Vietnam. In July that year, Vietnam publicly stated that the "Peking-Phnom Penh axis" had reached the stage where Vietnam's survival was in danger. Hanoi believed that the DK must be overthrown, or it could become a "springboard" for China to attack Vietnam. This perception was one of the crucial determined factors of Vietnam's military invasion of Cambodia.

The overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime was justified by the Vietnamese on the grounds that it aimed at eliminating the Chinese threat from that country. Le Duc Tho, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and the highest ranking official dealing with Cambodian affairs at that time, said in 1979 that:

[the Vietnamese had] great responsibility not only to our country but also toward the people of Kampuchea and other peoples in the world struggle against the Beijing expansionists and hegemonists... Our attacks on the [Khmer Rouge regime] were not an act of self-defence, but also a great contribution to the liberation of the Kampuchean people...

The common history of alliance between Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos was noted by Vietnam:

For decades Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos have adhered to the tradition of the militant solidarity in the struggle against their common enemies, namely, the French colonialists and U.S. imperialism. The geographical positions of the three countries and the histories of their peoples have closely linked to and cannot be separated from the common destiny of the peoples of the three countries...


63 Khanh, "Into the Third Indochina War", p. 333.


Given that Vietnam had made such formidable efforts to secure its strategic interests in Cambodia, it is not surprising that it would seek to maintain their interests after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. On 18 February, Vietnam and the new PRK regime in Phnom Penh signed a twenty-five year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation. The Treaty retroactively legalised the stationing of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. It also stated that:

The two sides attach great importance to the long-standing tradition of militant solidarity and fraternal friendship between the Kampuchean, Lao and Vietnamese people, and pledge to do their best to strengthen this traditional relationship...\(^{67}\)

In the face of opposition to their occupation of Cambodia, Vietnamese leaders categorically insisted that the situation in Cambodia was irreversible, and there was no "Cambodian problem".\(^{68}\) Le Duc Tho said that Vietnamese troops would be withdrawn from Cambodia when there was no longer a Chinese threat to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.\(^{69}\)

Nevertheless, it was immediately evident that the survival of Khmer Rouge forces—a major impediment to Vietnam's consolidation of its control over Cambodia, were being sustained because of support from China and Thailand. Tension between Vietnam and Thailand quickly arose in consequence. In late 1979, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien said clearly that Vietnam's policy of not to crossing into Thai territory was conditional upon Thailand refraining from supporting Khmer resistance forces. Vietnamese official\(^{5}\) also stated the possibility of attacking the Khmer Rouge positions "inside Thailand".\(^{70}\)

Vietnam's position on Cambodia underwent little change in subsequent years. In 1985, General Le Duc Anh, commander of the Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, summed up Vietnam's interests in Cambodia and Laos as follows:

Indochina is a theatre of operations and the strategic and combat alliance among the three Indochinese countries constitutes the law of survival and development for each individual country and the three countries as well.

...if in the past the path to liberation for the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia was the path of alliance to fight side by side against a common enemy, so now the path of national construction and defence must also be that of special solidarity... and close combat alliance among the three nations... However, if at one time the bloc of solidarity and


\(^{68}\) FBIS, 23 August, 1979, p. K2.


\(^{70}\) Nayan Chanda, "Hanoi ponders its strategy", FEER, 7 December, 1979, p. 22.
alliance was not firmly maintained, the revolution of the three countries would not be able to avoid difficulties and losses. None of the three countries would be at peace if the independence and freedom of one of them was threatened.

...we must be very vigilant and determined to smash all the enemy plots and tricks which sabotage the solidarity bloc of the three Indochinese countries and to separate Vietnam from Cambodia. 71

Soviet support for Vietnam

Virtually all Thai policy-makers during the 1980s perceived that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia was made possible by Soviet support and that Soviet support would make aggression against Thailand possible as well. It is thus useful to look briefly at security relations between the Soviet Union and Vietnam on the Cambodian issue.

For Vietnam, the move into the Soviet orbit was largely a result of its conflict with China. Although relations between the communist Vietnamese and the Soviet Union can be traced back to the formation of the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP) in the early 1920s, Soviet support for the VCP in the succeeding period fluctuated and the relationship was by no means cordial. When the Sino-Soviet dispute was underway, the Vietnamese largely maintained their independent position. Nevertheless, as the end of the war in Vietnam was approaching, Soviet-Vietnamese ties firmed up. The increasing strain in Sino-Vietnamese relations coincided with the expansion of Soviet power in Asia. Significantly, while China persuaded Vietnam to pursue unification as a long-term goal, the Soviet Union continued, and even increased its military assistance which enabled Hanoi to achieve final victory in the war. By this time, the Soviet Union's general approach to the Third World was in favour of military support as the main avenue of influence in socialist countries. During 1975-77, however, the SRV still refused to commit itself to the Soviet bloc, as was evident when it turned down the Soviet request for military access to Cam Ranh Bay in late 1975 and refused to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) in 1976. 72

When the conflict with China reached a critical stage and preparations for military operation in Cambodia were underway, a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union—which it had turned down in the early 1970s—became vital to Vietnam. On 3 November, 1978, the two countries signed a twenty-five year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The Treaty, together with Vietnam's full membership of CMEA earlier in June, was generally seen as proof of Soviet support to Vietnam's policy in Indochina and, in particular, the latter's invasion of Cambodia.


72 Thakur and Thayer, Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam, pp. 60, 121.
For Vietnam, the Treaty arose from a perceived need for Soviet security protection. As one study has suggested, the signing of the Treaty could be viewed "as an insurance policy designed to protect Hanoi from China. [It] was aimed to precede Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, [and was designed] to deter a full-scale Chinese response."\(^73\) The other was the fact that Vietnam produced only a limited range of small arms and had depended heavily on the Soviet arms supply. It was estimated that between 1954-1975, about 75-90% of arms imported to Vietnam came from the Soviet Union, with the rest from China and Eastern European countries. By 1979, Vietnam acquired about 97% of military equipment from the Soviet Union, with the remainder coming from Eastern European countries.\(^74\)

For the Soviet Union, the Treaty provided for the first time a foothold in Southeast Asia. Under the terms of the Treaty, it obtained access to several military bases, including the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay which was of particular strategic value for the Soviet Union. The use of bases in Vietnam gave the Soviet Union a warm-water port and a secure station between the Baltic and Black Seas and the major bases in the Pacific. It increased the Soviets' capability of rapid deployment in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf regions as well as in Southeast Asia. Therefore, it would enhance the Soviets' ability to threaten strategic shipping lanes.\(^75\) During the period from 1979 to 1984, the Soviet military build up at Cam Ranh Bay increased considerably.\(^76\) In return, the Soviet Union not only provided military assistance but also made a defence commitment to Vietnam. The principal security provisions of the Treaty stated that the two parties would consult each other in the face of armed attack and would take "appropriate effective measures to ensure the peace and security of their countries."\(^77\) The commitment Vietnam obtained from the Soviets, as one study has observed, was stronger than the one Thailand had from the U.S. under the Manila Pact of 1954.\(^78\)

\(^73\) Thakur and Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam*, p. 123.


\(^76\) Thakur and Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam*, p. 127.

\(^77\) Article 6 of the Treaty stated that: "In case one of the parties becomes the object of attack or threats of attack, the High Contracting Parties will immediately begin mutual consultations for the purpose removing that threat and taking appropriate effective measures to ensure the peace and security of their countries." See Lau Teik Soon, "The Soviet-Vietnamese Treaty: A Giant Step Forward", *Southeast Asian Affairs 1980*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980), p. 56.

The Soviet role in Vietnam's decision to launch military operations against Cambodia is unclear. On the one hand, it has been suggested that the Soviet "either helped plan the invasion or knew in advance."\textsuperscript{79} On the other hand, Vietnam informed the Soviet beforehand "not to get Soviet approval but to inform Moscow of an irrevocable decision."\textsuperscript{80} Be that as it may, in view of the fact that Vietnam relied almost entirely on Soviet arms, it is reasonable to assume that Vietnam's invasion and continued occupation of Cambodia was made possible with the Soviet assistance. The amount of Soviet military aid to Vietnam increased steadily from 1975 as Table 4 shows.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Soviet military aid to Vietnam, 1975-82}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\hline
Year & A & B & C (US$) \\
\hline
1975 & 25m & 280m & 123.3m \\
1976 & 30m & 450m & 44.1m \\
1977 & 100m & 630m & 11.5m \\
1978 & 190m & 720m & 53.2m \\
1979 & 1.5 bn & 1.3 bn & \\
1980 & 240-280m & 960m & \\
1981 & 331m & 800m & \\
1982 & 302m & 940m & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{80} Porter, "Vietnam's Soviet Alliance: A Challenge to U.S. Policy", p. 5.
It has been estimated that during the first half of 1979, Vietnam received about 90,000 tons of military equipment, and also had more than 7,000 Soviet personnel in the country.\textsuperscript{81} By late-1979, the Soviet Union gave more than US$2 million a day to Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. Moreover, it supplied Vietnam with an enormous quantity of sophisticated weapons, including MiG23s fighter-interceptor and a number of ships from the Soviet Baltic fleet. The Soviet also stationed "combat ready fishing trawlers" in the Gulf of Tonkin.\textsuperscript{82}

Soviet economic aid also increased substantially after 1975. Total aid (grants and loans) during the period 1966-75 was 1,500 million roubles. It rose to 1,500 million roubles during 1976-80, 3,323 million roubles during 1981-85, and 8,700 million roubles, during 1986-90.\textsuperscript{83}

The Soviet Union was also a major arms supplier to the Heng Samrin regime. In July 1979, the Soviet agreed to fully equip the PRK's armed forces with tanks, guns, aircraft and ships. At the end of 1980, it was reported that the Soviet Union had assisted the PRK in civil engineering and telecommunication area.\textsuperscript{84} By mid-1981, Cambodian pilots were in the Soviet Union for training.\textsuperscript{85}

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter has shown that the anti-Vietnam policy of the Thai government during the Kriangsak and Prem periods was largely shaped by the military leaders' worst-case planning, in response to Vietnam's military capability, rather than to evidence of Vietnamese aggressive intentions. Moreover, I have argued that the Sino-Soviet rivalry in the region was a crucial factor in exacerbating the conflict between Thailand and Vietnam as well.

In retrospect, the Thai military's assumption of Vietnamese threat to Thailand is questionable. Even though Vietnam possessed the military capability to invade Thailand, it is doubtful that Vietnam had any intention to do so. To the contrary, it was in the interests of Vietnam, at least in the aftermath of its invasion of Cambodia, to maintain cordial relations with Thailand and the other ASEAN countries. To threaten


\textsuperscript{82} Nayan Chanda, "Hanoi ponders its strategy", \textit{FEER}, 7 December, 1979, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{83} Thakur and Thayer, \textit{Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam}, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{84} Sayamrat supdawichan, 14 December, 1980, p. 8 (in Thai).

Thai national security, in any form, after Cambodia, Vietnam risked escalating the conflict into something it would be difficult to control.

In contrast to Cambodia and Laos, Thailand was not strategically important to Vietnam’s survival. Therefore, in the long-term, the only possible threat to Thailand, from Vietnam, was political subversion in the form of support for Thai communist insurgents. Nor is it likely that Vietnamese support could have enabled the Thai communists to liberate a part of Thailand, let alone the entire country.

Nevertheless, it is easy to understand the reason why Thai leaders perceived a threat from Vietnam. In his study on "Threat Perception", Klaus Knorr has suggested that:

Threat perception can be *situationally easy* when the opponent’s behaviour is confidently known and leaves no doubt about their acute danger...

Threat perception is *experientially easy* for societies, especially weak ones, that have been subject to repeated attack and military pressure...

Threat perception is *strategically easy* when societies are prepared to see a threat in any state whose military strength is either great or growing relative to their own, even when that state exhibits no present indication of hostile intent.\(^{86}\)

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia took place at the time when the Thai military leaders’ confidence in their ability to protect national security was at the low ebb. The military had just lost its decade-long American patron, leaving the country’s defence system inadequately prepared. At the same time, Vietnam was seen as a militarily powerful country with massive battle-tested forces. Moreover, it was also receiving large-scale military and economic aid from the Soviet Union. In this respect it is not surprising that security consideration was given high priority in Thai policy formulation. The fact that throughout the 1980s, the policy was largely controlled by the military, security consideration remained importance in the Vietnam policy.

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Chapter VI

The Persistence of the Sino-Thai Alignment

This chapter analyses the combination of factors which served to buttress Sino-Thai cooperation against Vietnam's domination of Cambodia during the governments of General Prem Tinsulanond (March 1980-August 1988). It examines the situation leading up to the Vietnamese incursion into Thai territory in June 1980 - an event which resulted in a direct confrontation between Thailand and Vietnam on the Cambodian issue. It will then look at Sino-Thai cooperation during the period, including the strengthening of the Khmer resistance forces, and security cooperation between Thailand and China. Finally, it examines the three main factors resulting in the growing Sino-Thai cooperation during the Prem period: China as a deterrent force against the Vietnamese threat, the collapse of the CPT, and a Thai consensus on the anti-Vietnam policy.

The setting

On 29 February, 1980, Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand unexpectedly resigned amidst a mounting crisis over his government's economic policies. In early March, he was replaced by Commander-in-Chief of the Army General Prem Tinsulanond, who was seen at the time as an unknown quantity. Prem's leadership was not outstanding and, since he did not belong to any political party, he had no real support from the elected House of Representatives. Rather, he became Prime Minister with the support of an appointed Senate and the Armed Forces. Prem's first coalition government (March 1980-March 1981) was unstable from the very beginning. It was formed of five political parties and immediately faced a number of serious economic problems, most notably the high oil prices and spiralling inflation which had caused the downfall of the Kriangsak government.

The appointment of the Secretary-General of the National Security Council (NSC), Air Chief Marshall Siddhi Sawetsila, as Foreign Minister indicated the increased importance given to security issues during this period. Siddhi was a long-time intimate

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1 Prem was Prime Minister for the five successive governments from March 1980 to August 1988. He had served in the Second Army Region based in the northeast province of Nakhon Ratchasima from 1968 to 1977 when he was appointed the Bangkok-based Assistant Commander-in-Chief of the Army. He therefore was seen as political inexperienced. See Chai-anan Samudavanija, *The Thai Young Turks*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1981), pp. 39, 50 and David Morell with Chai-anan Samudavanija, "Thailand: Meeting the Challenges of the 1980s", *Southeast Asian Affairs 1981*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1981), p. 320.
of Prem with considerable experience of security issues and foreign affairs. From the outset, Siddhi was openly opposed to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. As he recalled, he perceived a threat to Thailand since Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and felt that the threat was very serious when he became foreign minister in March 1980. At that time, Vietnam had already gained control over most of Cambodia and Vietnamese troops were stationed close to the Thai border. Meanwhile, remnants of Khmer Rouge forces retained control of little more than the remote and mountainous part of Cambodia. Thus, Vietnam was on the brink of consolidating its rule over Cambodia and Siddhi believed that once that goal was accomplished, Thailand was to be Vietnam's next target. For this reason, Siddhi felt that Kriangsak was far-sighted in allowing Chinese assistance to go to the Khmer Rouge forces via Thailand, otherwise, the forces would have been eliminated.

The new Prem government did not specifically mention its policy towards the Cambodian issue. It only announced that there would be no change in foreign policy and that it would pursue a policy of friendship with all countries. Still, the importance of ASEAN in Thailand's foreign policy was emphasised from the outset by Siddhi.

The change of leadership in Thailand occurred at a time when a number of external events were reshaping Thailand's position on the Cambodian issue.

Right after Prem assumed the prime ministership, China's Foreign Minister Huang Hua paid a visit to Thailand, during which he called for the international community to maintain strong pressure on Vietnam, politically, economically and militarily. He said that conditions for a political solution in Cambodia could be created by giving "morale, political, diplomatic as well as material assistance to the patriotic Cambodian forces." For him, material assistance included "things necessary for battle." It seems likely that China wanted to find out whether the new Thai government would continue the previous government's policy towards the Cambodian problem. For one thing, Prem was a well-known strategist of Thailand's counter-insurgency policy. He fought the Chinese-backed communist insurgency when he served in the Second Army Region based in the northeast province of Nakhon Ratchasima (1968-1977). Moreover, when

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2 After serving in the Royal Thai Air Forces for 25 years, Siddhi was Secretary-General of the NSC (1975-1980), and concurrently Minister Attached to the Prime Minister's Office (1979-1980) and Foreign Minister during Kriangsak's last cabinet (February 1980).


4 Siddhi announced after taking the office that: "solidarity among ASEAN members is very important. We must maintain good understanding among ourselves... We gain a lot by being in ASEAN because our voice become louder in the international arena. No one would pay much attention to us if we were alone..." See FBIS, 1 April, 1980, p. J1.

he became Prime Minister, the armed insurgency was immediately declared by his
government to be the most important threat to Thailand's internal security.  

In late March, a meeting at the Malaysian town of Kuantan between Indonesian
President Suharto and Malaysian Premier Dato Hussein Onn resulted in what became
known as the "Kuantan Principle". The two leaders suggested that in order to bring
peace and stability back to the region, it would be necessary for Vietnam to be free
from the influence of either the Soviet Union or China. Moreover, they concluded as
well that a political solution to the conflict in Cambodia would require that Vietnam's
security interests in that country be specifically recognised. In essence, the Kuantan
Principle implied a recognition of some degree of Vietnamese influence in Cambodia in
return for easing Vietnamese pressure on Thailand.

The initiative arose from the Indonesian and Malaysian leaders' increasing concern over
the instability of the region, in particular Thailand, in the light of the Cambodian
conflict. The Kuantan meeting took place at a time of political confusion in Thailand
resulting from the change of leadership. The new Thai prime minister was seen to be
less capable than his predecessor of coping with the mounting political pressure both
internally and externally. Leaders in Indonesia and Malaysia believed that there was a
possibility that the new Thai government might collapse in the face of deteriorating
economic conditions at home, the increasing inflow of Cambodian refugees into the
Thai territory, and the armed confrontation along the Thai-Cambodian border.
Moreover, it was felt that such a collapse would be to the benefit of China.

Similarly, Indonesian and Malaysian leaders perceived that the prolongation of the
Cambodian conflict would enhance the role of China and the Soviet Union in the
region. On the one hand, the Thais might become more reliant on the Chinese who were
promising to support and protect Thailand against Vietnam. On the other hand, there
was a prospect of Vietnam becoming more dependent on the Soviet Union, or
alternatively falling under Chinese influence if its strength was undermined by its battle
with the Chinese-backed Khmer resistance forces. Therefore, among other things, the
Kuantan formula was designed to lessen Thai reliance on Chinese support in its conflict
with Vietnam. Later, Malaysia suggested that deviation from the UN resolution calling

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6 Sayamrat Supdawichan, 18 May, 1980, p. 6 (in Thai).

7 See Justus M. Van der Kroef, "ASEAN, Hanoi, and the Kampuchean Conflict: Between Kuantan and a
Policy and the Conflict over Kampuchea, M.A. Thesis, Department of International Relations, The
Australian National University, 1984, pp. 58-60.

8 David Jenkins, "Second thoughts on Kuantan", FEER, 10 October, 1980, p. 27.
for a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia would be possible as long as the "sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Thailand was safeguarded.9

By the time that Prem assumed the prime ministership, covert cooperation between Thailand and China in assisting the Khmer-resistance forces had already emerged as a central theme of Vietnam's diplomacy. According to Siddhi, Vietnam tried to persuade ASEAN to recognise the Heng Samrin regime and sought to exacerbate concern among Indonesian and Malaysian leaders over the flow of Chinese aid to the Khmer Rouge forces via Thailand. During Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong's visit to India in April 1980, for example, Vietnam asked India's leaders to act as intermediaries between Vietnam and ASEAN. As a result, Indonesia and Malaysia were subsequently persuaded by India to recognise the Heng Samrin regime on the basis of its effective control of the country. India further suggested that Thailand should be cut off from ASEAN because of its "wrongdoing", that is, its alliance with China in assisting the Khmer Rouge. Most importantly, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur were persuaded that Hanoi would withdraw its troops from Cambodia once Bangkok cut off Chinese access to the Khmer Rouge forces.10

According to Siddhi, he was then told by Malaysia that if Thailand cut off the Chinese access to the Khmer Rouge, Vietnamese troops would withdraw and then a political settlement in that country could be worked out. Siddhi was alarmed by the prospect that Thailand would be isolated from ASEAN because of Malaysia's and Indonesia's misgiving about the close strategic relationship between Thailand and China. As a result, he decided that Thailand had to address its allies' concerns. Thus upon Siddhi's advice, Prem agreed to cut off Chinese transit rights to the Khmer resistance forces.11 At the same time, a report in the Bangkok Post, which normally reflected the official view, noted that Thailand had refused sanctuary to all parties in the Cambodian conflict,


10 Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992. Vietnam sought Indian recognition of the PRK since 1979. In the aftermath of the formation of the PRK regime, Indian Prime Minister Moraji Desai declared in January 1979 that the PRK would be recognised upon receipt of official communication. But the recognition had not taken place by the time the Desai government resigned in December 1979. During the general elections in early 1980, the Congress Party, led by Indira Gandhi, had included recognition of the PRK in the party campaign. The Gandhi government announced its recognition of the PRK on 7 July, 1980, for the main reason that it acknowledged the reality of the regime in power. See Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam 1945-1992, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 254-258.

11 Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992. In his public interview on 2 May, 1980, Siddhi stated that: "Prime Minister Prem and I have developed a specific policy [on Thailand's assistance to the Khmer Rouge.] It will be a categorical denial from us if the accusation should come up again." See The Nation Review, 1 May, 1980, p. 2.
including the Khmer Rouge, and cut down the Soviet arms-aid overflights from a peak of 92 per month in the previous year to only two per month.\textsuperscript{12}

During Prem's visits to the ASEAN countries in April, he informed ASEAN leaders that he disagreed with the Kuantan formula, since it would only cause a rift within ASEAN. Prem made clear that there would be no change in the Thai policy on the Cambodian issue, i.e., any political settlement to the Cambodian issue must be based on the resolutions of the United Nations which called for a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and the establishment of an independent and neutral government in Cambodia. Nevertheless, Prem informed ASEAN leaders that Thailand would no longer allow the Chinese to use the Thai route to aid the Khmer Rouge. The change of Thai policy towards China was greeted with "gratified surprise" by President Suharto and it was considered as a change for the better.\textsuperscript{13} According to Siddhi, ASEAN leaders were pleased with the Thai stance and agreed to continue their support for Thailand's policy on Cambodia.\textsuperscript{14}

Regarding the support by Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Datuk Hussein Onn for Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong's proposal that Thailand pursue direct negotiations with Vietnam on the Cambodian issue, Prem said that Thailand would not initiate such negotiations and that no official contact on the issue had been made by Hanoi. Prem also said that in the meantime, it was imperative that efforts be made to "preserve the legitimacy" of the DK and its right for representation in the United Nations.\textsuperscript{15}

When Chinese Foreign Minister, Huang Hua, visited Thailand in early May, he was told that Thailand and the other ASEAN countries wanted China to stop its arms supply to the Khmer Rouge, at least for several months in order to appraise the chances of talks with Vietnam on the Cambodian issue.\textsuperscript{16} Siddhi also told his Chinese counterpart that China's interests were best served by "strictly respecting Thai neutrality." Support from ASEAN was crucial for China, Siddhi said, but if China appeared to play a major role in Thai affairs in order to achieve its objectives in Cambodia, the prospect of support from ASEAN would be in serious doubt.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, the Thais tried to convince Hua

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{The Bangkok Post}, 1 May, 1980, pp. 1, 3.


\textsuperscript{14} Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{The Nation Review}, 21 April, 1980, p. 1.


\textsuperscript{17} Richard Nations, "Revolving door diplomacy", \textit{FEER}, 16 May, 1980, pp. 11-12.
that China should accept the right of Cambodians to choose their own government. Thailand hoped that if China did not insist on the return of the Khmer Rouge to power, Vietnam would accept some sort of compromise on the Cambodian issue.18

Huang Hua insisted that China would never recognise the Heng Samrin regime in exchange for a withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. As noted by Hua, a withdrawal of Vietnamese troops was not "something to be bargained for or part of a package deal. It is the precondition to settlement of the Cambodian conflict."19 He also asserted that the situation in Cambodia was part of the Soviets' plan "to realise their global strategic supremacy."20 While Hua publicly expressed satisfaction over the Thai stance on total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, he also argued that support for the Khmer Rouge was crucial in the battle against the Vietnamese aggression.21 According to an official of the Thai Foreign Ministry, Hua said that it was too early for China to say anything about the Cambodians' right of self determination and added that China would "continue its support to the Pol Pot forces even if Thailand does not."22

There was no evidence that the Thai government's policy of blocking the Chinese supplies to the Khmer Rouge via Thailand was actually implemented. Indeed, if such a policy was adopted, it was soon reversed following the Vietnamese incursion into Thailand in June 1980.

Before the Vietnamese incursion in June, the Kuantan Principle was rejected by Vietnam. During his visit to Malaysia in mid-May, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach described the proposal that Vietnam be free from Soviet and Chinese influence as an insult which implied that Vietnam was not independent. He reiterated that a withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia could not be considered until the "Chinese threat" had been removed from Indochina and the rest of the region.23 Moreover, Thach asserted that:

The Kampuchean issue was not a negotiating issue between Vietnam and [ASEAN] countries... The three Indochinese countries never allow any

18 Sayamrat, 1 June, 1980, p. 10 (in Thai).


22 Sayamrat supdawichan, 1 June, 1980, p. 10 (in Thai).

country to turn one of the three Indochinese countries into a buffer zone between themselves and ASEAN countries.\textsuperscript{24}

In a subsequent trip to Bangkok, he repeated the same message to Siddhi. While insisting that there was "no Cambodian problem", Thach asserted that time was on the Vietnamese side and argued that the world would eventually recognise the Heng Samrin regime.\textsuperscript{25} According to Siddhi, Thach further suggested that Thailand accept "Vietnam's peace terms" in Cambodia by recognising the Heng Samsin regime. It would be wise for Thailand to do so, he "warned", because only Vietnam could guarantee Thai sovereignty and security, while Thailand should not hope for U.S. protection, for the Americans had been defeated by the Vietnamese.\textsuperscript{26} There is little doubt that the first meeting between the two foreign ministers left Siddhi extremely unimpressed.

The June 1980 Vietnamese incursion: causes and consequences

Vietnam's incursion into Thai territory on 23-25 June, 1980 proved to be a turning point in Thailand's policy toward Vietnam. It resulted in a renewal of Sino-Thai cooperation which was to continue until the end of the Prem Administration. Thus, it is necessary to examine the causes and consequences of the incursion in detail.

The Vietnamese incursion resulted from a Thai plan for the voluntary repatriation of Cambodian refugees which was announced on 11 June. According to a document published by the Thai Foreign Ministry after the June incident, the voluntary repatriation program was drawn up after a number of refugees indicated their desire to return to Cambodia. The plan was then carried out under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with the assistance of Thai authorities.\textsuperscript{27}

For Vietnam and the Phnom Penh regime, the repatriation program was an outrage. The Vietnamese regarded the program as a Thai ploy to send back Khmer Rouge-controlled refugees in order to bolster Khmer Rouge forces in the coming wet season fighting. On 15 June, the Phnom Penh regime told the UNHCR to drop the plan, while warning that the consequences of repatriation would be "dangerous and unpredictable." In similar fashion, on 18 June, Vietnam warned that "the consequences of this repatriation will not

\textsuperscript{24} FBIS, 2 June, 1980, p. K1.

\textsuperscript{25} Sayamrat supdawichan, 1 June, 1980, p. 10 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{26} Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992.

\textsuperscript{27} See detail in The Vietnamese Acts of Aggression Against Thailand's Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity, (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).
be good for Thailand." Both warnings were ignored by Thailand and the repatriation began on 17 June, however.

The Vietnamese attack, which began on 23 June, was directed against the two refugee camps at Non Mak Mun and Nong Chan, Thai villages about 20 to 30 kilometres north of the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet, Prachin Buri province. Vietnamese troops, comprising 200-300 soldiers, were ordered to advance two kilometres into Thai territory and hold their position for five days. The two-day battle, in which Thai troops deployed F-5 aircraft, tanks and helicopter gunship, and 22 and 75 Thai and Vietnamese troops respectively were killed, was to that time the largest confrontation between Thai troops and Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.

Vietnam initially denied that its troops entered Thai territory. Hanoi and Phnom Penh both claimed that the clashes occurred inside Cambodia and were caused by anti-Vietnamese Khmer resistance fighters infiltrated from Thailand under the pretext of the voluntary repatriation program. Moreover, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach further accused Thailand of succouring refugees during the dry season and sending them back as soldiers to fight inside Cambodia during the monsoon season when guerillas had the advantage. A year later, however, Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Minister Vo Dong Giang admitted that Vietnam's troops "had knowingly penetrated Thai territory" after the Thai government ignored its warning on the repatriation of Cambodian refugees.

The Thais argued that the incursion was "a planned, premeditated and carefully thought-out attack upon Thailand from Kampuchea by Vietnam." Siddhi asserted that Vietnam's intention was "to force Thailand to recognise the Heng Samrin regime." In addition, he claimed that Vietnam wanted to test Thai determination to protect Thailand's sovereignty as well as a solidarity between Thailand and its allies, particularly ASEAN and the U.S.

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The incursion aroused strong public resentment against Vietnam in Thailand. The editor of *The Nation Review*, for example, called for a long-term policy... to keep up the pressure [on Vietnam] in all aspects, locally and in all international forums, to drive home the point that Vietnam has not appreciated Thailand's diplomatic gestures. And if any meaningful dialogue is to resume, Hanoi would have to come with convincing evidence that the broken promise from Hanoi could be repaired. Only Hanoi, and not any other country, could persuade Thailand to respond to any initiative in any positive way.35

The incident has remained a matter of controversy for several reasons, however. It occurred at a time when ASEAN support for Thailand's Cambodian policy was by no means clear and ultimately worked to Thailand's political advantage. The evidence available seems to suggest that the repatriation program was aimed at sending the refugees to join the Khmer Rouge forces, but without any anticipation that this might trigger a large-scale attack from Vietnam.

Although Chinese supplies to the Khmer Rouge via Thailand might have been cut off, Thai leaders presumably wanted to see the Khmer resistance continue. The Thai government maintained a consistent policy of keeping the Khmer resistance as a buffer force, as noted in Chapter V.

Until the incursion took place, a total of 9,090 Cambodians from the two holding centres, *Sa Kaeo* and *Khao I Dang*, returned under the repatriation program. Among these, 7,464 were from the *Sa Kaeo* camp.36 Evidence suggests that the *Sa Kaeo* camp, accommodating about 24,000 Cambodians, was controlled by the Khmer Rouge. According to one source, the Khmer Rouge cadres managed to retain their political monopoly with the help of a 300-man "police force".37 Moreover, even though repatriation was under the UNHCR auspices, there was no way to prevent the refugees from returning to Khmer Rouge-controlled areas.38 In one report, for example, some 7,000 refugees repatriated under the plan were said to have returned to the Khmer Rouge-occupied areas in the period just prior to the incursion.39 In addition, the timing


36 See detail in *The Vietnamese Acts of Aggression*...


of the repatriation plan was close to rainy season which fighting tended to be in favour of resistance guerillas.\textsuperscript{40}

Thai leaders apparently did not anticipate large-scale Vietnamese retaliation. Military defences in the area around the two refugee camps were not well-prepared. Moreover, in the first few hours of battle, Vietnamese troops met almost no resistance, and it was not until the use of air strikes half a day later that Thai troops were able to gain control of the situation. Even then the fighting continued for more than a day.\textsuperscript{41}

The Vietnamese incursion nonetheless brought favourable diplomatic consequences for Thailand. Taking place on the eve of the thirteenth ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 25-26 June, the incursion had the effect of diminishing support for the idea of recognising Vietnam's security interests in Cambodia under the Kuantan formula. The incursion was also a major stimulus to ASEAN's hardline position, publicly at least, towards Vietnam and its support for Thailand. In a joint statement issued in Bangkok on 25 June, ASEAN leaders condemned Vietnam's "irresponsible and dangerous act" which "constituted a grave and dangerous threat to the security of Thailand and the Southeast Asian region," and indicated its "firm support and solidarity" to Thailand.\textsuperscript{42} A joint communiqué issued after the ASEAN meeting on 26 June further reiterated ASEAN's position on Cambodia: a total withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and a continued recognition of the Pol Pot regime.\textsuperscript{43} Significantly, ASEAN ministers agreed that a future dialogue with Vietnam on the issue of Cambodia was now dependent upon "the initiative of Hanoi", implying that there would be no initiative from the ASEAN side.\textsuperscript{44}

The Vietnamese incursion also resulted in increased U.S. support for Thailand. During the fighting when the shortcomings of Thai logistics capacity were evident, President Carter used his special powers to launch an emergency airlift of military hardware from the U.S. mainland to Thailand. In what was the fastest American response to a crisis in the region since the Vietnam war, eight U.S. C141 Starlifter air force transports flew

\textsuperscript{40} As a matter of fact, the repatriation plan could have been postponed in order to avoid any negative consequences. Siddhi, however, said after the Vietnamese incursion that the refugees had the right to return to their country and that "it's now the rainy season. It's good time to go back and start planting rice." See \textit{The Nation Review}, 25 June, 1980, pp. 1, 10.


\textsuperscript{43} "Joint Communiqué issued at the Thirteenth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 25-26 June, 1980" in Documents on the Kampuchean Problem, 1979-1985, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{44} Van der Kroef, "ASEAN, Hanoi, and the Kampuchean Conflict: Between Kuantan and a Third Alternative", p. 520.
urgently needed artillery, recoilless rifles, anti-tank missiles and half a million rounds of heavy machine-gun ammunition to Thailand. The U.S. also speeded up arms transfers previously announced by U.S. Secretary of State Edmund Muskie during the ASEAN Foreign Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur. In addition, the U.S. State Department expressed "grave concern" over the incursion and urged Vietnam to refrain from all hostile acts against Thailand.

Nevertheless, Thai leaders realised the question of American military assistance in the event of armed attacks to Thailand was problematic and that a dispatch of U.S. ground troops to aid the country was entirely impossible. What Thai leaders hoped for was a specific U.S. commitment towards Thailand if it were to again confront a crisis. After the June incursion, Siddhi noted that consultation with the U.S. was necessary so that, in case of emergency, "the U.S. can fulfil our needs without having to go through additional procedures." Discussing on the Vietnamese incursion with Siddhi, Muskie appeared to be reserved on how the U.S. would act in the event of Vietnamese armed aggression against Thailand. Siddhi subsequently talked with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Adviser, who felt that the Khmer resistance forces needed to be strengthened and suggested that Thailand "turn a blind eye" to the transit of Chinese aid to the resistance forces. Brzezinski also suggested that an agreement be made with China to keep matter "secret from the public."

During these events, China expressed firm support for Thailand. In the aftermath of the incursion, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement, demanding that Vietnam "stop their aggression in Thailand at once" and warned the Vietnamese of "the grave danger involved" if their "military adventures" continued. Moreover, China pledged that it would stand by Thailand "if Vietnam continues to create incidents on the Thai-Kampuchean border and provoke Thailand," while asserting the right to launch a "second lesson" along Vietnam's northern border if Thailand was subjected to a large scale invasion. Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng also personally gave similar assurances to Prem. When the two Premiers were attending services for the late Japanese Prime

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46 The Bangkok Post, 1 July, 1980, pp. 1, 3.
50 John McBeth, "Moulding a new relationship", FEER, 8 August, 1980, p. 9. China's "first lesson", or its attack against Vietnam, was in February 1979. See further discussion below in this chapter.
Minister, Masayoshi Ohira, in Tokyo on 9 July, Hua requested a meeting with Prem at the Thai Embassy. In the meeting, Hua warned that Thailand had to prepare for possible future Vietnamese acts of aggression. He noted that China would like to see Thailand as a strong and prosperous country, and added that if Vietnam posed a threat to Thailand's progress, China would always be on the Thai side. Finally, Hua said that Chinese troops were putting heavy military pressure on Vietnam's northern border, causing the Vietnamese to maintain about 60 per cent of their best troops in the north. In addition, Hua noted that the Khmer Rouge forces were going from strength to strength and therefore pledged "to continue an all-out support to the forces." Prem agreed with Hua over continued support to the Khmer resistance forces.51

When Siddhi visited Peking in August, he was told by Chinese leaders that any Vietnamese attack on Thailand would automatically trigger a Chinese attack on Vietnam's northern border. The same message was relayed by Chinese military attaches in Washington to Pentagon officials.52 In any event, the incursion increased the perception among Thai leaders that Vietnamese troops in Cambodia threatened the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Thailand. After the incursion, the border situation remained tense, with at least eight Vietnamese regiments stationed in forward positions along the Thai-Cambodian border from Aranyaprathet north to Ta Phraya. The strongest concentrations were in the area between the Nong Chan "land bridge" used by the relief organisations to channel food to the Khmers, and the Cambodian border town of Poipet.53

From the Thai viewpoint, Vietnam had ruled out any possibility of negotiations on the Cambodian issue and was seeking to gain complete control over Cambodia by force. Thus, the potential for future armed conflict with Vietnam was clear. As Prem said right after the incursion:

With eight divisions of Vietnamese troops near the Thai border, nobody could deny that there is a real threat to Thailand. And nobody would dare give the guarantee that Vietnam would not send its forces to violate Thailand's territorial integrity once again.54

51 See memoir of former Secretary-General of the NSC Prasong Soonsiri, Chetroiyisiaphuk wan taibanlung prem, [726 days under Prem's leadership], (Bangkok: Samnakphim matichon, 1989), pp. 202-203 (in Thai). According to American experts in 1982, after the Chinese incursion in February 1979, Vietnam maintained about 500,000 to 700,000 troops in the area between Hanoi and the Chinese border, including about 250,000 regulars organised into 20 fully integrated divisions, or roughly a quarter of Vietnam's standing army. See John McBeth, "Offensive build-up", FEER, 3 September, 1982, p. 12.

52 The attaches revealed to the Pentagon details of two Chinese attacks on the Vietnamese border in late August. The attacks were reportedly confirmed by American military intelligence. See FEER, 12 September, 1980, p. 9.


At roughly the same time, Prem also made direct mention, for the first time, of Vietnam's intention to create a Federation of Indochina, noting that:

After securing a firm grip on the former states of Indohina, Vietnam's expansionist campaign is likely to be extended to the 16 northeastern provinces of Thailand. [As a result, the provinces have been proclaimed] future targets for the so-called liberation movement whose aim is to detach [them] from Thailand and join them in the pipedream project of the Federation of Indochina.\textsuperscript{55}

Subsequently, two former Supreme Commanders, Generals Saiyud and Arthit, recalled that defence preparation was perceived as being a matter of urgency after the June incursion because Vietnam's objective in that event was to test the Thai defence capacity. If it proved to be weak, it was believed that there was a real possibility that this would encourage a large-scale invasion.\textsuperscript{56}

Finally, Siddhi began to openly refer to Vietnam by name rather than simply referring to "foreign forces", as he noted that:

The continued, relentless and reckless effort by Vietnam, prodded on by another external power, to complete its conquest of Kampuchea and thereby win supremacy over the entire so-called Indochina region has been intensified... Vietnam is resorting more and more to naked force and various transparent subterfuges to enforce a \textit{fait accompli} in Kampuchea.\textsuperscript{57}

According to Siddhi, only China showed the intent and willingness to use force to oppose Vietnam. Moreover, as he believed that there was a high possibility of continued military confrontation between Thailand and Vietnam, he felt as well that it was necessary to allow the Chinese to strengthen the Khmer resistance forces. This would prevent Thailand from having to engage directly in armed confrontation with Vietnam. As Siddhi recalled:

At that juncture, it was China that had both the capacity and willingness to deter Vietnam... If the Khmer resistance forces had not increased and strengthened enough to sustain the anti-Vietnamese war, our troops would have had to fight with the Vietnamese.\textsuperscript{58}

The June incursion thus brought about a direct confrontation between Thailand and its ASEAN allies on the one hand, and Vietnam, the PRK and Laos on the other.

\textsuperscript{55} Prem's speech at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand, see \textit{Asiaweek}, 26 September, 1980, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{56} Interviews: Saiyud Kerdphol, Bangkok, 11 May, 1992; and Arthit Kamlang-ek, Bangkok, 7 July, 1992.


\textsuperscript{58} Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992.
In the period from 1980 to the end of the Prem leadership in August 1988, Thailand's strategy to force Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia included diplomatic, economic and military measures. A number of proposals for a settlement of the Cambodian conflict were made both by Thailand and its ASEAN allies, and by Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Although both sides' statements were modified over time, there was no substantive change in their positions.

Thailand's ultimate objectives in seeking a political settlement of the Cambodian problem were based on the framework stemming from the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK), held under the auspices of the United Nations on 13-17 July 1981. The ICK declaration called for a comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia which included a total withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia and the establishment of an independent Cambodia brought about by free elections under United Nations supervision.59

Vietnam's conditions for settling its conflict with Thailand and ASEAN on Cambodia were reflected in the Ho Chi Minh [City] Statement of 28 January, 1981. This stated that a withdrawal of troops from Cambodia would be considered "when the threat from China no longer exists," and a partial withdrawal would be considered "if Thailand ceases making Thai territory available for the use of the Pol Pot gang and other reactionary Khmer forces."60

In seeking Vietnamese compliance with its conditions, Thailand, acting alone and with ASEAN, mobilised international support for their policy. From 1979, the most important institution for this effort was the United Nations. Thai/ASEAN efforts gained considerable success as was evident from the constant support for the two resolutions on Cambodia sponsored by ASEAN: the resolution calling for a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and the DK credentials at the UN General Assembly.61

Thailand and the ASEAN countries also brought economic pressure to bear on Vietnam. All ASEAN countries prohibited government-to-government trade with Vietnam and the Phnom Penh regime. In addition, there was a joint effort to mobilise international economic isolation of Vietnam. ASEAN's major allies, including Japan


61 Voting records on the UN resolution calling for a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in 1979 was 91 for, 21 against, and 29 abstentions, and in 1985 was 114 for, 21 against, and 16 abstentions. The DK had been able to maintain its seat at the UN since 1979. See Document on the Kampuchean Problems, 1979-1985, p.141.
and the European Community either cut off or substantially reduced their economic ties with the two governments. This policy was a considerable success in that Vietnam was virtually cut off from access to non-communist markets and sources of aid, technology and investment, its economy suffering as a consequence.\textsuperscript{62}

As for Thailand, the Prem government refused to pay a 100-million baht loan agreed to by Prime Minister Kriangsak in 1978 as credit for the purchase of Thai products. Moreover, although there was no official prohibition on private sector trade with Vietnam, trade was restricted. Long-term credits and advanced technological transfers were prohibited and from 1981, some 273 "strategic goods" were banned from being exported to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.\textsuperscript{63}

The private sector was also discouraged from doing business with Vietnam by the fact that Vietnam lacked hard foreign currency reserves and preferred to trade on a barter basis. Besides, Vietnam could not sell its products freely to Thai importers because of its long-term commitment to send certain products to the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.\textsuperscript{64} In truth, the restrictions were designed to ensure that trade relations with Vietnam did not harm the policy of applying economic pressure on Vietnam. Businessmen were advised that security considerations should come before economic relations and asked to remember that trading and investment would enhance the Vietnamese economy. Once Vietnam became prosperous, such prosperity could enable it to threaten Thailand.\textsuperscript{65}

On the military side, the crucial aim of the policy was to prevent Vietnam from winning on the battlefield. Thus, Thai leaders deemed it necessary that the anti-Vietnamese war of the Khmer must continue to be supported. Thailand and China thus found common interests in two major areas: first, in cooperating to strengthen the Khmer resistance forces; and second, in deterring the Vietnamese threat by strengthening Thai defence capacity.

\textsuperscript{62} In 1988, Sweden was the only major non-communist aid donor to Vietnam, see Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "ASEAN and the Kampuchean Conflict: A Study of a Regional Organisation's Responses to External Security Challenges", in Robert A. Scalapino and Masataka Kosaka (eds), Peace, Politics and Economics in Asia: The Challenge to Cooperate, (Virginia: Pergamon-Brassey, 1988), p. 162.

\textsuperscript{63} A special committee comprising representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce, the NSC and the military was set up to ensure that exports of Thai goods to the three Indochinese countries did not include strategic goods. See The Nation Review, 4 June, 1983, p. 14; and 10 February, 1988, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{64} Interview with Atsada Chaiyanam, Thai Ambassador to Vietnam, in FBIS, 31 July, 1985, pp. J1-2.

\textsuperscript{65} Khaophiset, 4-10 May, 1988, p. 33 (in Thai).
Before considering Sino-Thai security relations in detail, it is necessary to discuss a major Thai objective which emerged after the June incursion; namely the formation of a Khmer coalition government in 1982.

**Thailand and the formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK)**

The idea of a coalition Khmer government which would include non-communist factions as well as the Khmer Rouge originated with officials in the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reasoning behind the plan was two-fold: first, the sustainability of the anti-Vietnamese Khmer resistance forces had to be preserved since the Thai policy was to avoid direct military confrontation with Vietnam; and second, the "viability" of the policy of opposing the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia had to be maintained in the international community. In this latter quest, Thailand was compelled to confront the obvious problem of the Khmer Rouge's image in the world community. The Thai dilemma was obvious. On the one hand, the Khmer Rouge was the strongest anti-Vietnamese force and on the other, its brutal image increasingly threatened to erode international support.

Since the Kriangsak government, Thai leaders were by no means comfortable with the Khmer Rouge. The change of leadership within the deposed Khmer Rouge regime in early 1980, when Pol Pot stepped down from the premiership in favour of Khieu Samphan, was largely a result of Thai pressure on China which then applied pressure on the Khmer Rouge. In September 1980, Prem said that the DK's seat in the United Nations was supported by Thailand on the basis of Thailand's opposition to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. It did not suggest any "support to the political system under former premier Pol Pot" - Thailand had problems with the Pol Pot regime before.

On the diplomatic front, the DK succeeded in maintaining its seat in the UN from 1979 onward, as a result of the efforts of ASEAN and China. However, Thailand and ASEAN realised that their support would be difficult to maintain because of the growing international criticism of the DK. Support for the DK seat from the European

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68 *The Nation Review*, 24 September, 1980, p. 3. Siddhi also said that Thailand did not want to see the Pol Pot regime reinstated in Phnom Penh, but only wanted the Cambodian people to freely choose their government without the presence of foreign troops in the country. See *FBIS*, 2 October, 1980, p. J1.
countries, ASEAN's major allies, was being noticeably undermined. Nevertheless, on the battlefield, the Khmer Rouge remained the strongest anti-Vietnamese forces. In late 1980, they were reportedly better equipped than at any time since the regime had been overthrown and their guerillas numbered between 25,000 to 45,000 in 1981-1982. Conversely, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) under Son Sann, which was the most favoured choice for ASEAN, had only about 1,600 fighters in 1979 and was still far from being a well-trained army. Similarly, the National Sihanoukist Army had less than 2,000 armed men in August 1981, although its leader, Prince Sihanouk, appeared to be the most respected figure among the international community and the Cambodians.

In this context, Thai leaders perceived that it was crucial to maintain the legitimacy of the anti-Vietnamese forces in the eyes of the world community. By creating a coalition government, with a relatively broad base, would diminish the salience of the Khmer Rouge and open the way for international assistance. Moreover, Thai leaders also hoped that the non-communist elements in the coalition would grow and eventually assume greater power in a post-war Cambodia.

Finally, having a legal and internationally acceptable anti-Vietnamese Khmer government would also help to solve Thailand's problem of covertly channelling aid to the Khmer resistance forces, especially to the Khmer Rouge. As has already been noted, since the beginning of the Cambodian conflict, Thai authorities denied that they were assisting Khmer resistance groups. After the formation of the CGDK, they nevertheless campaigned for international aid to the Khmer factions. In 1987, Sarasin Viraphol, the architect of this policy, discussed this point as follows:

Thailand had since the very beginning been accused by Vietnam of providing sanctuary and aid to the Khmer resistance forces... Initially, we

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71 The "National Sihanoukist Army" was formally created in mid-1981 and comprised three separate armed groups loyal to Prince Sihanouk. (Bekaert, "Kampuchea: The Year of Nationalists?", pp. 168, 171-172.) The KPNLF was officially created on 9 October 1979 with the help of Task Force 80, a special Thai Supreme Command unit formed in 1979 to control the movement of refugees and oversee the sprawling border encampments. The KPNLF was meant to be the effective controller of the frontier camps. See John McBeth, "Resistance - a strategy for survival", FEER, 25 July, 1980, p. 12.

72 Interview, Suwit Suthanukun, Bangkok, 7 May, 1992.
had denied their accusation because we were ashamed of having done so. Nevertheless, we knew all along that we had done the right thing. We have supported the proper struggle of Cambodians. It was the rightful policy in considering the principle [of non-intervention] and our national interests... In the last few years, we have no longer denied that we have been involved in this matter because the CGDK was accepted by the world community.\(^{73}\)

The Thai proposal was compatible with those of the other ASEAN countries. Virtually all ASEAN leaders, particularly Indonesian and Malaysian, were uncomfortable with the Chinese-backed Khmer Rouge and did not want to be seen as its supporter. Moreover, Malaysian Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie perceived that if a coalition government were set up with the non-communist resistance forces playing a leading role, it might lead Vietnam to accept some sort of compromise with ASEAN on the future of Cambodia.\(^{74}\)

Publicly, Singapore and Malaysia played a leading role in establishing the CGDK, while Thailand kept a relatively low profile on the issue. For one thing, it was perceived that an active Thai role would antagonise Vietnam and possibly lead to a more severe military confrontation on the border. Therefore, a number of meetings among leaders of the Khmer factions which took place in Bangkok were kept secret at that time. For another, Sihanouk's relationship with Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was far better than with the Thai leaders.\(^{75}\)

Forming a Khmer coalition government in exile took nearly two years to complete. Apart from mutual antagonism among the Khmer leaders, the major obstacle was Chinese opposition to any move which it felt might demoralise the Khmer Rouge fighters. China believed that only military pressure could force Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia and maintained that it was crucial to keep supporting the strongest anti-Vietnamese forces.\(^{76}\) As for ASEAN's concern about the Khmer Rouge's

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\(^{73}\) Sarasin Viraphol, "Sanupsanun khmen samkol tosu vietnam" [Support to the three Khmer factions' struggle against Vietnam], in Chantima Onsuragz (ed), Noyobuy tangprathethai bontangprang [Thai foreign policy at the crossroads], (Bangkok: Rongphim mahawitayalai thammasat, 1990), p. 151 (in Thai).

\(^{74}\) John McBeth, "The coalition blues", FEER, 18 September, 1981, p. 12. After 1980, ASEAN states declared publicly that they did not want the Khmer Rouge to return to power in Cambodia. In 1980, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew stated that the backing for the DK seat at the UN was meant only to prevent a claim by the Vietnamese-backed Phnom Penh regime. See Asiaweek, 19 September, 1980, p. 20.

\(^{75}\) Interviews: Suwit Suthanukun, Bangkok, 7 May, 1992; and Khien Theeravit, Bangkok, 1 April, 1992.

\(^{76}\) In 1980, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Han Nianlong admitted the unpopularity of the Khmer Rouge regime, but said that the only reason for supporting it was the fight the Khmer Rouge were putting up against the Vietnamese. He also said that China opposed a growing move in ASEAN to halt support for the Khmer Rouge, for it would only encourage Vietnam to consolidate its power in Cambodia. See Nayan Chanda, "No peace without compromise", FEER, 18 April, 1980, p. 8.
brutal image, Han asserted that if there was no anti-Vietnam war by the Khmer Rouge, "what we would be discussing today would not be the question of Cambodia but that of Thailand." China also considered that the other two non-communist factions, the KPNLF and the Sihanoukists, were too weak to effectively resist Vietnam. Similarly, the Chinese said that ASEAN's choice—the KPNLF—had been failed to stage military operations on the scale of those of the Khmer Rouge.78

However, at the persistence of Thailand and the other ASEAN countries, Chinese leaders finally agreed to "a loose coalition government."79 At the same time, though, the final agreement gave an obvious advantage to the Khmer Rouge. It acknowledged that each faction would retain an individual identity, a separate organisation, freedom of independent action, and the right to receive external aid specifically granted it. This point was crucial in that it allowed the Khmer Rouge to receive continued Chinese aid.80

While the idea of a Khmer coalition government originally came from Thai officials at the Foreign Ministry, military leaders played a crucial role in its formation and realisation. The various Khmer factions held a number of meetings at the residence of Major General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, then army operations director. Chavalit was personally acquainted with most of the Khmer leaders.81 The KPNLF was told by a Thai envoy that it had to accept some sort of alliance with the Khmer Rouge and, as a member of the front revealed later: "if we did, we would get weapons."82 The military's threat to close the Thai border was used as a last resort against the Khmer Rouge's intransigence with few alternatives. The Khmer Rouge finally yielded to Thai pressure.83 On 22 June 1982, a declaration to form the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea was signed in Kuala Lumpur. Sihanouk was the coalition's

79 According to Siddhi, after a great deal of effort was made by Thais to convince Chinese leaders to agree with the idea of a coalition, Deng Xiaoping and Premier Zhao Ziyang finally said that they preferred "a loose coalition". Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992.
81 Some senior Thai military officials, including Major Generals Phat Akkanibut and Sunthon Kongsompong were also involved in the negotiation process. Interview, Khien Theeravit, Bangkok, 1 April, 1992. See also General Phat Akkanibut's interview in Khaophiset, 15-21 February, 1989, p. 18 (in Thai).
President, Son Sann, Prime Minister and Khieu Samphan, Vice-President in charge of foreign affairs.

In Vietnam, the formation of the Khmer coalition was viewed with displeasure. Although Thach claimed that the CGDK did not "bother Vietnam at all", Vietnam also described the coalition as "Beijing's trick". In September 1982, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Ha Van Lau also argued that the formation of the coalition government would strengthen the position of the Khmer Rouge and make a negotiated settlement in Cambodia more difficult.

Sino-Thai cooperation

During the Prem Administration, there were two major areas in the Sino-Thai cooperation: first, an agreement to strengthen the Khmer resistance forces; and second, Sino-Thai security cooperation to deter the Vietnamese threat and strengthen Thai defence capacity.

The strengthening of the Khmer resistance forces

Since all the Khmer groups had their strongholds in the area close to the Thai border, virtually all the material and military assistance received by the Khmer resistance forces was supplied via Thailand. Most of the assistance came from China, with the Khmer Rouge receiving a far greater share than the other groups. After the formation of the CGDK, Thailand not only openly campaigned for assistance to the anti-Vietnamese Khmer fighters, but also asked China to increase its aid to the non-communist factions of the CGDK. As few details are available, it is not possible to give a full account of the amount of aid from China and other countries which passed through Thailand to the Khmer resistance forces. However, the following accounts, drawn from non-official sources, suggest a rough picture of the situation.

According to Vietnam and the PRK, the amount of Chinese aid passing through Thailand to the Khmer Rouge increased from about 500 tons a month in early 1979 to 1,000 tons in 1980 and 1,500 tons in 1983.

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85 The Bangkok Post, 2 September, 1982, p. 4.

86 In a visit to South Korea in June 1985, Siddhi also tried to ask Seoul to provide financial aid to the non-communist Khmer factions on a regular basis but the outcome of his request is not clear. Prior to June 1985, South Korea had given an amount of US$100,000 to the KPNLF on two occasions. See The Nation Review, 9 June, 1985, p. 3.

87 According to Hanoi, China shipped arms supplies to the Khmer Rouge on vessels carrying foreign flags. These supplies were disguised as normal goods and sent to Bangkok where the Thai military unloaded them. "Chinese planes" were used to drop them in the area around the north of Cambodia.
The U.S. provided aid to the factions under the leadership of Sihanouk and Son Sann from 1979, but officially refused aid to the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge reportedly received covert aid and benefited from American humanitarian aid, however. A *Newsweek* report in 1983 claimed that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been working with the Chinese to supply arms to the Khmer Rouge. In response to Thailand's lobbying efforts, the U.S. officially gave some US$5 million in fiscal 1986 to be used by Thailand "for appropriate assistance" to the non-communist resistance forces in Cambodia. According to journalist John Pilger, Western support for the coalition was coordinated by a "Cambodia Working Group" run from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok.

With regard to military training for the Khmer resistance forces, the Thai weekly, *Wiwat*, reported that the Thai military's First Special Warfare Unit (*Kongphon rop phiset thi neng*) gave training to non-communist Khmer fighters under the leadership of Son Sann and Sihanouk. The Thai paramilitary Ranger unit (*Thahan phran*) were also held to have helped to train Khmer Rouge combat forces. A report in 1981 mentioned that the *Thahan phran* unit obtained weapons "covertly and overtly" from the U.S. and China, including AK and RPG rifles which were also used by Khmer Rouge forces.

There was no explanation where these "Chinese planes" came from and whether Chinese pilots were involved in these activities. (Hanoi Domestic Service, 6 April, 1984 in FBIS, 11 April, 1984, p. K5.) A similar account was given in the PRK's white book on "Thai Policy vis-a-vis Cambodia" published in 1983. (FBIS, 21 September, 1983, p. H6.) Other sources give accounts of Chinese aid at a particular time. For example, a *FEER* report in early December 1984 claimed that the KPNLF forces received about 800-900 AK47 assault rifles from China. (*FEER*, 20 December, 1984, p. 9.) A *FEER* report in May 1985 revealed that China had recently sent Khmer resistance fighters one of the largest shipments of military supplies. While most of the arms went to the Khmer Rouge, the Khmer fighters loyal to Prince Norodom Sihanouk received some 1,500 AK47 assault rifles, an assortment of grenade-launchers and anti-tank weapons and a "huge" supply of ammunition. (*FEER*, 23 May, 1985, p. 13.) A *FEER* report in November 1985 claimed that Sihanouk had revealed that since the formation of the CGDK in 1982, his faction had received a total of US$700,000 from North Korea, US$550,000 from China, US$50,000 yearly from France and US$100,000 from ASEAN. *FEER*, 10 July, 1986, p. 9.


David J. Scheffer, "Arming Cambodia Rebels: The Washington Debate", *Indochina Issues*, June 1985, pp. 2-4. According to Clymer, the U.S. had increased its direct covert aid to the non-communist factions since the formation of the CGDK. (Kenton J. Clymer, "American Assistance to the Cambodian Resistance Forces", *Indochina Issues*, April, 1990, pp. 1-2.) Another source claimed that at the early of 1984, at least one of the factions in the CGDK, the KPNLF, had been received financial aid directly from the U.S. The amount of aid was said to be "six or seven figures, in U.S. dollars." See Paul Quinn-Judge, "Coalition coalesce", *FEER*, 5 January, 1984, p.15.

The "Cambodia Working Group" headed by Colonel Michael Eiland, an officer of the U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA). Its task was to give battle plans, war material and satellite intelligence to the non-communist Khmer groups. Another DIA officer was appointed as liaison officer with the Khmer Rouge. The British Special Air Service (SAS) also secretly gave training to the Khmer Rouge in basic tactics of terror including the laying of mines and booby traps. See John Pilger, "The Return to Year Zero", *The Bulletin*, 11 May, 1993, p. 35.


Sayamrat supadawichan, 29 November, 1981, p. 20 (in Thai). The Chinese-made infantry weapons were also used by the *Thahan phran*. (*FEER*, 21 November, 1985, p. 15.) The "Thahan Phran" unit was
According to a high ranking Thai military official, the U.S. gave assistance to the Thai military for training the non-communist Khmer factions, while China gave assistance for Thai military training of the Khmer Rouge.\textsuperscript{93} Malaysia also reportedly gave military training to the Sihanouk faction.\textsuperscript{94}

\textit{Sino-Thai security cooperation}

Cooperation in this area was two-fold. Chinese military pressure on Vietnam in the north prevented Vietnam from concentrating all of its forces in the South and thus diminished the threat to Thailand. Second, there was direct Chinese military assistance to the Thai military.

Chinese military pressure along the Sino-Vietnamese border was meant to divert Vietnam's attention from Cambodia and deter any Vietnamese incursion into Thailand. For one thing, Thailand's eastern border area became a military target for Vietnam because of the Khmer resistance strongholds, and Khmer refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border led to border clashes between Thai troops and Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. For another, the number of clashes between Thai and Vietnamese troops suggested the need to strengthen Thai defence preparations.

At the end of 1980, the Khmer Rouge moved its main operational base from the northwest to the southwest of Cambodia. The new base covered the border area from Thailand's Ubonratthani province to Trat province. It was also located in the area close to the Gulf of Thailand and was thus well located to receive external assistance by sea.\textsuperscript{95} This border area became the base of other non-communist Khmer factions as well.\textsuperscript{96}

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\textsuperscript{93} Confidential interview.

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{FEER}, 10 July, 1986, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Sayamnikon}, 11 December, 1980, pp. 32-33 (in Thai). Phnom Malai mountain, the Khmer Rouge's major stronghold from 1979 until early 1985, was less than 20 kilometres southwest of the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet. It was located on a spur of land that juts into Thailand on two sides, with a steep slope facing Cambodia and a gentler slope on the Thai side allowing easy access and supply from the border. From the military point of view, "the base cannot be captured without incursion into Thailand, perhaps as far as a kilometre inside." See Paul Quinn-Judge, "The Khmer Resistance: State of the Union", \textit{Indochina Issues}, September, 1983, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Sayamnikon}, 11 December, 1980, pp. 32-33 (in Thai).
addition, Khmer refugee camps also situated on Thai territory close to the Thai-Cambodian border.  

The reason that the resistance strongholds were situated along the border areas was due to the fact that the Phnom Penh regime controlled the rest of Cambodia. At the same time, external aid to the resistance was channelled through Thailand. In particular, arms caches for the resistance forces were situated along the Thai side of the border, and controlled by the Thai military. Moreover, as noted earlier, Thailand has a "buffer mentality" when it comes to defending its border. A number of high-ranking officials of the Thai security establishment interviewed by the author, pointed out that the resistance forces acted as buffer between Thai troops and Vietnamese troops in Cambodia.

Both the resistance bases and the refugee camps became Vietnam's military targets. Occasionally, Vietnamese military operations resulted in the resistance forces retreating into Thailand. Vietnamese forces would then pursue them and inevitably clash with Thai troops. During the period of Kriangsak's government, there were times when Vietnamese forces, in pursuit of fleeing Khmer Rouge fighters, invaded Thai territory and held it for a few days. Kriangsak was silent on these violations presumably because he did not want to risk escalating the conflict into something that might be difficult to control. Prior to 1984, Vietnamese cross-border raids were neither numerous nor extensive. According to one study, during this time, Vietnam was preoccupied with establishing political institutions and the army in Phnom Penh.

The formidable Vietnamese dry-season offensive in 1984-85 against the Khmer resistance underlined Vietnam's determination to end resistance, however. Indeed this was spelled out in an article by senior general and Vice-Minister of Defence Le Duc Anh in Nhan Dan in December 1984. Vietnam employed about eleven divisions, or about one-third of its fighting force, along the border during the four-month military operation. Vietnamese troops not only overran most of the Khmer resistance groups' strongholds and refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border but also invaded Thai territory. In one incident in March 1985, some 3-4,000 Vietnamese crossed into

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97 According to one source, the 60 kilometre-long defensive trenches along the Thai-Cambodian border, dug during 1980-81, were about one kilometre inside Thai territory. Refugee camps were situated in the one-kilometre area between the border line and the trenches. See Khaophiset-Arthit, 20-26 May, 1987, p. 13 (in Thai).

98 It was reported that the caches were situated on Thai territory because there was nowhere in Cambodia that was safe enough for storing the weapons. See Arthit, 17-23 December, 1993, p. 14 (in Thai).


Thailand to attack the Sihanoukists' headquarters at Ta Tum and remained in Thai territory for more than a month in the battle over Ta Tum. Thai troops ran out of long-range artillery charges and nearly 40 soldiers were killed. In May, some 1,000 Vietnamese troops again intruded into Trat province in pursuit of fleeing Khmer Rouge fighters. After eight weeks of air and ground operations, the intruders still occupied the area.\footnote{See detail in John McBeth, "More than just bandits", FEER, 7 February, 1985, p. 12; Paul Quinn-Judge and Rodney Tasker, "Victory for all", FEER, 14 March, 1985, p. 25; and John McBeth and Rodney Tasker, "Slack in the line", FEER, 4 July, 1985, p. 36.} The fighting also drove more than 200,000 Khmer refugees into Thailand. Consequently, all the Khmer resistance factions' refugee populations were moved into camps administered by the United Nations inside Thailand.\footnote{The main KPNLF refugee camp was located at Site 2, 65 kilometres north of Aranyaprathet and 3-4 kilometres from the border, with a population of 140,000. Thai security authorities arranged another stand-by camp site for them 8 kilometres deeper into Thailand, called Site 3. The largest Khmer Rouge camp was south of Aranyaprathet at Site 8, with 30,000 refugees living only 3 kilometres from the border, but behind a mountain. Two alternative camps were arranged for the refugees, one to the north and the other south, in case of Vietnamese attack. The resistance coalition's military camps were also on the border. The Khmer Rouge was estimated to have 16 rear-base camps dotted along the border, including one just north of the Site 8 camp. Rodney Tasker, "Variations on the theme", FEER, 12 December, 1985, p. 26.}

Tension on the border continued throughout 1985. Six to eight Vietnamese and four Phnom Penh divisions were deployed in the area and between 18 November 1984 and 18 March 1985, the Thai Army reported that there were 81 known intrusions by Vietnamese troops into Thai territory. In the same period, other Thai sources indicated that there were six direct Vietnamese attacks on Thai troops inside Thailand; sixty clashes arising mostly from incursions directed against the anti-Vietnamese Khmer resistance; 200 instances of Vietnamese cross-border shelling, including 14 heavy barrages ranging as far as 17 kilometres inland; 11 attacks on Thai aircraft and 15 attempts to lay mines in Thai territory during the four months. Thai casualties were 40 killed, 233 wounded and 17 missing.\footnote{John McBeth and Rodney Tasker, "Slack in the line", FEER, 4 July, 1985, p. 36.} The Vietnamese offensive underlined the necessity for Thai forces to beef up their defence capacities. Some Thai military operations in this period indicated the shortcomings of Thailand's defence preparations. As noted earlier, problems with Thai logistics capabilities were revealed in the clash between Thai and Vietnamese forces in June 1980, and the U.S. had to send an emergency airlift of military hardware to Thailand. But the most serious shortcoming within the Thai defence system became evident in the protracted battle at the Chong Bok pass in 1987. The pass is a distant, mountainous area in Thailand's Ubonrathani province near the point where the borders of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia converge. In order to block supply routes of the CGDK forces, Vietnamese troops captured the Chong Bok pass 2-3 kilometres inside.
Thai territory where they could deal effectively with the Khmer resistance forces. They occupied the area for more than two years before the Thai military attempted, in January 1987, to recapture the area. It took the Thai military almost half a year to drive the intruders back to Cambodia. The operation caused high casualties among Thai troops, although the actual number is still unclear. The Thai military claimed that 70 soldiers were killed, while foreign military analysts and Thai politicians believed the number to be as high as 200. One source claimed that the operation was "the most devastating in the history of the Thai military." A subsequent border conflict between Thailand and Laos at the Thai border village of Ban Romklao during December 1987 to February 1988 again demonstrated the logistics problems the Thai faced. At the height of the fighting, China and a few other countries had to airlift military supplies to the battle. Thailand also requested Chinese arms during the fighting at Chong Bok.

The shortcomings of Thailand's defence preparations were due to a number of factors. From the military's viewpoint, Thailand's eastern border with Cambodia was fragile since it has no natural defensible frontiers. Vietnamese forces in Cambodia could have easily invaded Bangkok, which is less than 400 kilometres from the border town of Aranyaprathet. A senior army official, Deputy Supreme Commander General Phat Akkanibut, admitted in the late 1980s that Thailand's military had long been weak in that border area and there was in fact a fear that Vietnamese forces in Cambodia could push into Bangkok or launch a strike at Thailand's economically important eastern seaboard industrial zone.

The Vietnamese incursion in June 1980 first highlighted the vulnerability of the border. Immediately after the incursion, Thai forces dug defensive trenches parallel to the border. In the succeeding period, at least three divisions of the First Army Region were stationed along the border with Cambodia. A report in 1981 mentioned that preparations by the Armed Forces had been underway in order to cope with a Vietnamese invasion. The facilities at the former U.S. military base at the northeast

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105 Khaophiset, 24-30 April, 1992, p. 17 (in Thai).


province of Sakonnakhon had been moved to the military air base in the northern province of Nakhonsawan. At the same time, the military air base at the northern province of Phisanulok had been reconstructed. In the event that the northeast or Bangkok were occupied by Vietnam, the Thai Armed Forces would be evacuated to the north and carry out the anti-Vietnamese war from that part of the country.\textsuperscript{110}

According to a specialist on Thai military affairs, Dr. Suchit Bungbongkan, the situation within the armed forces in the early 1980s was critical for several reasons.\textsuperscript{111} One was the small size of the Thai armed forces. Thailand’s total armed forces increased slightly, from 212,000 in 1978-79 to 235,000 in 1984-85 to 256,000 in 1988-1989.\textsuperscript{112} When the CPT-led insurgency was still active and when Vietnamese troops were in Laos, forces had to be stationed not only on the Thai-Cambodian border, but all of the country’s frontiers. The other problem was that Thai weapons systems were inadequate to cope with a modern warfare. The major obstacle was the defence budget which had been increased only slightly in the early 1980s, as Table 5 shows.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount (million baht)</th>
<th>as % Gross Domestic Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>8,289.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>19,066.2</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>22,384.6</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>27,722.6</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>31,617.6</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>35,235.4</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>37,987.1</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>41,334.3</td>
<td>3.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sukhumbhand, Thailand: Defence Spending and Threat Perceptions, p. 91.

\textsuperscript{110} Sayanrat Supdawichan, 3 September, 1981, p. 4 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{111} Personal communication with Dr. Suchit Bungbongkan, Canberra, 1 November, 1993.

In the early 1980s, the Armed Forces carried out large-scale arms purchases. This was evident from that the Armed Forces' foreign military debt had increased from 9.8% in 1978 to 21.8% in 1983 of total public debt.\textsuperscript{113} The problem of the Thai military organisation, as one study argues, was that:

the Royal Thai Armed forces' organisational structure, \textit{modus operandi} and equipment have not changed in any substantive way since the days of counter-insurgency operations. The army is still divided into four regional commands and this limits the scope of trans-regional reinforcements. Though strengthened by recent acquisition of tanks and artillery pieces, its weaponry remains predominantly light. Although seemingly well planned on paper, the logistics and co-ordination of the different branches of the armed forces and the army units continue to be problematical. Another reason is that the Thai armed forces, particularly the army, are central participants in the Thai political process and hence the deployment of many units, especially the cavalry, is determined by political rather than military considerations.\textsuperscript{114}

In any case, the seriousness of the military situation increased the level of security cooperation between Thailand and China. There was apparently an understanding between Bangkok and Beijing that whenever a major Vietnamese offensive against the Khmer resistance forces occurred along the Thai-Cambodian border, or whenever Vietnamese troops entered into Thai territory, Chinese troops would launch a punitive strike along the Sino-Vietnamese border. In 1985, Chinese diplomats in Bangkok claimed that China had at least 30 divisions available for use against Vietnam, including several which had been moved into forward positions along its common frontier with Vietnam.\textsuperscript{115} There were indeed reports of Chinese troops' movement against Vietnam after the latter's incursion into Thailand and attack against the Khmer resistance forces, but all were limited operations.\textsuperscript{116}

There were also exchange visits of high-ranking Thai and Chinese officials to border areas of the two countries. This seemingly suggested some sort of consultations or cooperation between both sides on matter concerning border security. In May 1984, Supreme Commander General Arthit Kamlang-ek visited China, during which he visited an area within 4 kilometres of the Vietnamese border in China's southern

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\textsuperscript{113} Sukhumbhand, \textit{Thailand: Defence Spending and Threat Perceptions}, pp. 90, 92, 94-94.


\textsuperscript{116} In April 1984, Chinese forces were reported to have struck cross Vietnam's northern border in what both sides said was "a directly related act of retaliation." The Chinese attack took place a day after Thai troops had regained control of a Thai-Kampuchean border pass from Vietnamese incursion forces. (Paul Quinn-Judge, "Peking's tit for tat", \textit{FEER}, 19 April, 1984, p. 14.) After Vietnam's 1984-85 offensive, Hanoi claimed in early 1985 that Chinese forces had fired artillery shells into its border. See Richard Nations, "A different lesson" \textit{FEER}, 28 April, 1985, pp. 12-13.
Yunnan province. In early July 1985, Secretary-General of the NSC Prasong Soonsiri also spoke of his recent "observation trip" to the Sino-Vietnamese border, and noted that Chinese troops were deployed "intensely" along the southern border stretching about 300 kilometres in the three provinces of Yunnan, Canton and Guangxi opposite northern Vietnam. He said as well that the Chinese infantry, artillery and air forces guarding the border positions were pinning down about 27 divisions of Vietnamese troops. Chinese military leaders assured Prasong that China would keep up "heavy military pressure" on its common border with Vietnam until the latter withdrew its troops from Cambodia. In his second visit to Thailand in January 1987, Chinese Army-Chief-of-Staff General Yang Dezhi also visited the Thai-Cambodian border.

A report in early 1986 indicated that China had recently established a "Kunming Hotline"—a radio-telephone link between China's Kunming Military Region Headquarters and the Thai Supreme Command in Bangkok. Under the arrangement, the Thai military could report Vietnamese shellings or attacks on their border and expect that within 6 hours the Chinese army stationed along Vietnam's northern border would respond to the Vietnamese in kind.

China also provided military assistance to strengthen the Thai defence capacity, including Chinese "friendship prices" and free arms to the Thai military. This cooperation came after the fall of Khmer resistance strongholds along the Thai-Cambodian border in early 1985. The Chinese weapons were used primarily along the Thai-Cambodian border.

In late 1985, China gave the Royal Thai Army 18 sets of 130 mm field artillery pieces, a number of 37 mm anti-aircraft guns, 85 mm anti-tank guns and 20,000-30,000 rounds of ammunition. In late 1985, Thailand also received 24 type-59 main battle tanks as part of a military grant aid program. The Chinese offered a supply of 130 mm artillery pieces in the wake of Vietnamese attack on the Sihanoukist forces' base at Ta Tum during its 1984-85 dry-season offensive. The delivery of the Chinese aid was on the eve of the anticipated Vietnamese dry-season offensive which was expected to be more severe than the previous one in 1984-85.

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117 Rodney Tasker, "Comrades up in arms", FEER, 7 June, 1984, p. 16.
123 The Nation Review, 19 November, 1985, pp. 1, 2.
In 1987, the Royal Thai Army bought 400 armoured personnel carriers, 30 T-69 battle tanks (a modified version of the Soviet T-54 and T-55) and a small quantity of 37 mm anti-aircraft guns from China at "friendship prices". One report suggested that the tanks cost only 1,060 million baht, or about one-third of the full market price. Others have suggested that the Chinese arms were purchased at only 5 per cent of the normal market price, and China was willing to take agricultural products as payment for the purchase. Reportedly all the weapons were acquired on a long-term (ten years) grace period before payment started. In his visit to Bangkok in January 1987, Chinese Army Chief-of-Staff General Yang Dezhi agreed to provide military grant aid, more arms transfers and exchange of training.

China also gave secret financial support to an arms factory in Thailand for use by the Thai military and for supplying the Khmer resistance groups. The issue of Chinese support for arms production in Thailand first appeared in a press report in October 1982. It indicated that in August, senior Chinese officials had unofficially proposed to a visiting Thai military delegation led by then Deputy Supreme Commander General Chao Sawatdisongkhram, that a Thai-Chinese joint venture be set up to produce arms for use in Thailand. The Chinese proposal was made after the Thai delegation sounded out the possibility of buying certain kinds of arms from China. The Chinese response was that it would be more practical if the two countries set up a joint venture arms factory in Thailand. By doing so, the Chinese suggested, Thailand could save considerable foreign exchange. Nevertheless, the Chinese officials cautioned the Thai side that the move could be a sensitive one and thus Thailand should examine the proposal "from all aspects" to avoid possible misunderstanding by allies. A senior Thai military official said at that time that Thailand was not expected to pursue the matter in the near future because of the sensitivity of the issue which would require consultations with ASEAN and other allies.

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129 Confidential interview.
Growing Sino-Thai cooperation

There was a combination of factors helping to explain the growing Sino-Thai cooperation during the Prem period: China as a deterrent force against the Vietnamese threat; the collapse of the CPT; and a consensus on the anti-Vietnam policy.

China as a deterrent force against the Vietnamese threat

China's ability to alter Vietnam's policy in Cambodia during the first half of the 1980s was obviously limited. This had been evident since February 1979 when China launched a sixteen-day incursion against Vietnam's northern border. The incursion reflected China's attempt to demonstrate its credibility to its allies by teaching Vietnam "a lesson" for overthrowing the DK and to force Vietnam to withdraw some of its units from Cambodia. However, as Chanda has observed, "Vietnam clearly had learned no lesson, nor did the operation have any effect on Cambodia."\(^{131}\) Vietnam did not withdraw its troops from Cambodia and even did not send its regular divisions to the Sino-Vietnamese border. Moreover, the invasion against Vietnam was also a lesson for China, for the Chinese forces performed poorly and suffered heavy losses.\(^{132}\) Even so, China pledged that it would launch a "second lesson" against Vietnam, as Thai leaders were told after Vietnam's incursion into Thai territory in June 1980, if Vietnam created incidents on the Thai-Cambodian border and if Thailand was subjected to a large scale invasion.\(^{133}\)

In succeeding years, China put pressure on Vietnam by maintaining its troops along the Sino-Vietnamese border. According to American experts in 1982, after the 1979 Chinese incursion, Vietnam maintained about 500,000 to 700,000 troops in the area between Hanoi and the Chinese border. These included about 250,000 regulars organised into 20 fully integrated divisions—roughly a quarter of Vietnam's standing army.\(^{134}\) In 1984, the Sino-Vietnamese border was reported as "highly tense". A number of heavy clashes between Chinese and Vietnamese troops on the border were reported.\(^{135}\) Yet Vietnam successfully launched a 1984-85 dry-season offensive which wiped out most of the Khmer resistance strongholds on the Thai-Cambodian border.

\(^{131}\) Chanda, Brother Enemy..., pp. 360-361.

\(^{132}\) According to a confidential Chinese report, the Chinese army suffered heavy losses and was "not been able to conduct a modern war." See Chanda, Brother Enemy..., p. 361.


\(^{134}\) John McBeth, "Offensive build-up", FEER, 3 September, 1982, p. 12.

\(^{135}\) See for example, Paul Quinn-Judge, "Buffers on the border", FEER, 17 May, 1984, p. 52; Rodney Tasker, "Comrades up in arms", FEER, 7 June, 1984, p. 16; Paul Quinn-Judge, "Borderline cases", FEER, 21 June, 1984, p. 36; and Paul Quinn-Judge, "Three-pronged pincer", FEER, 23 August, 1984, p. 17.
After the offensive, Sihanouk revealed his talks with Chinese leaders in late 1985, that China was not planning a "second lesson" against Vietnam, but would only sustain "a permanent confrontation" along its common border with Vietnam.\textsuperscript{136} According to Western intelligence reports, sometime between late 1984 and early 1985, the Chinese leadership decided that it could no longer afford to carry out a major military operation against Vietnam, although it was realised that Chinese prestige as a regional power was at stake for failing to "punish" Vietnam. It was suggested that the main reason was Chinese "military inferiority"—evident from its 1979 incursion against Vietnam.\textsuperscript{137} China's counter-attacks against Vietnam, Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang said in November 1985, "would depend on the time and scale of Vietnamese attacks on China."\textsuperscript{138}

It would seem that China was in fact concerned about its credibility in the eyes of its allies. There were a few reports that the Chinese carried out military operations against Vietnam after the latter's attacks against the Khmer resistance on the Thai-Cambodian border.\textsuperscript{139} One of the "bloodiest incidents" between China and Vietnam was reported to have occurred in early 1987 when China sought to eliminate criticism from its allies that it had failed to counter Vietnam's 1984-85 offensive against the Khmer resistance.\textsuperscript{140}

In any case, it was clear that during the first half of the 1980s, China could do little in shifting the military balance in favour of its allies in Cambodia. Pressure from China and ASEAN only resulted in a stalemate in the Cambodian situation. In fact, by the mid-1980s when the Sino-Soviet talks had begun, China increasingly turned to diplomacy with the Soviet Union as a means to drive Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia. China's ability to change Vietnam's policy towards Cambodia increased only after the process of Sino-Soviet rapprochement began after the mid-1980s (see Chapter VII).

\textsuperscript{136} Richard Nations and Mary Lee, "Peking's pat on the back", \textit{FEER}, 26 December, 1985, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{137} According to some observers, in order to secure a good chance of success, China might have to double its troop strength, then deploying on its border with Vietnam to 1 million troops. Moreover, if the Chinese forces were sent to "another disaster", China would not only lose face internationally but also trigger "domestic opponents of modernisation, many of whom are in the army itself." See Richard Nations, "Great leap sideways", \textit{FEER}, 30 May, 1985, pp. 15-16.


\textsuperscript{139} Chinese military attaches in Washington revealed to Pentagon officials details of two Chinese attacks on the Vietnamese border in late August 1980. The attacks were reportedly confirmed by American military intelligence. See \textit{FEER}, 12 September, 1980, p. 9.

Notwithstanding these signs of Chinese impotence, Thai leaders interviewed by the author maintained that China was an effective deterrent against the Vietnamese threat. The stationing of Chinese troops in the areas close to Vietnam's northern border was held to have caused Vietnam to keep a large number of its troops in those areas which otherwise would have been sent to pacify Cambodia. Therefore, China was seen as the most crucial factor in preventing Vietnam’s complete domination of Cambodia. This notion was crucial given that Thailand’s ultimate aim was a Cambodia free from Vietnamese influence.

Chinese leaders' regular assurances that China would protect Thailand in the event of attack from Vietnam presumably comforted Thai leaders as well. In February 1983, for example, the Chinese Army Chief-of-Staff General Yang Dezhi visited Thailand, during which he declared that China would "stand shoulder to shoulder" with Thailand in the event of Vietnamese attacks. And during Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian's visit to Thailand in late January 1985, he called on Thailand to have confidence in his government, and stressed that China "reserved the right" to attack Vietnam and would not stand idle if Vietnam continued provocations along the Thai-Cambodian border.

Close contacts between security officials of the two countries also generated mutual trust between the two sides. It is significant that all Thai Supreme Commanders in the 1980s visited China: General Serm Na Nakhon in May 1981; General Saiyud Kerdphol in August 1983; General Arthit Kamlang-ek in May 1984; and General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh in May 1987 and November 1988. In addition, Secretary-General of the NSC Prasong Soonsiri also visited China in July 1985. Chinese delegations to Thailand included the visits of Air Force Commander Zhang Tingfa in March 1981; and Army Chief-of-Staff General Yang Dezhi in February 1983 and January 1987.

Thai military leaders also appreciated Chinese military assistance. Chinese arms, according to Assistant Army Chief-of-Staff Lieutenant General Panya Singsakda, were low price and quick delivering. During the battle at Chong Bok in 1987 and at Ban Romklao during late 1987 to early 1988, the Thai military was impressed by China's swift response to Thai requests for arms during the fighting. A military official said that

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the Chinese weapons arrived soon after a request while the American weapons normally came after the fighting ended and at great expense.\textsuperscript{145}

In the eyes of Thai leaders, the fact that China was the persistent and main supporter of the Khmer resistance forces, in particular, the Khmer Rouge, also confirmed China's determination to drive Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia. In fact, throughout the Cambodian conflict, China consistently maintained that it would provide aid to the Khmer resistance forces until Vietnamese troops totally withdrew from Cambodia.

In considering China's credibility in the eyes of Thai leaders, one also has to take into consideration another two factors: the reduction of Chinese aid to the CPT and the development of China's influence among key Thai policy-makers.

\textit{The collapse of the CPT}

The collapse of the CPT resulting in part from the change of Chinese policy, generated a great deal of trust and a positive attitude towards China on the part of Thai leaders.

China's reduction of support to the CPT after 1979 exacerbated internal conflict within the CPT and finally led to the collapse of the Party. After the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, China insisted that the CPT adopt the Chinese line on the Cambodian conflict. At the same time, the CPT was also given an ultimatum from Laos to stand by the Soviet Union and Vietnam. As a result, the Party was divided into three camps over the issue, with some seeking to maintain friendly relations with all parties, others seeking to formulate a "pro-Thai" line, and still others condemning Vietnamese "aggression" while supporting the goals of the Khmer Rouge to regain power in Cambodia. When party leadership finally adopted the third line, deep divisions arose. Most of those who subsequently defected from the Party, the main criticism was of the CPT's pro-Chinese policies.\textsuperscript{146}

As noted in Chapter IV, China promised that it would gradually \textit{reduce} aid to the CPT while continuing to provide moral support.\textsuperscript{147} Understandably, this still caused concern among Thai leaders, and there was a suspicion that China might reactivate its support to


\textsuperscript{146} For many among the young generation of the Party, it was seen that for the CPT leadership, "the interests of China take precedence over those of the revolution in Thailand." See Chantima, "The Communist Party of Thailand: Consolidation or Decline". \textit{Southeast Asian Affairs 1981}, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1981), p. 369.

\textsuperscript{147} An official of the Thai intelligence office stated in 1983 the amount of Chinese aid to the CPT was 200 million baht (approximately US$10 million) a year in the period after 1973 and was decreased to around 50 million baht (approximately US$2 million) a year in recent years. See Sayamrat sapdawichan, 30 October, 1983, p. 8 (in Thai).
the Thai communist movement at any time if the two countries' policies in the region diverged. Moreover, in 1982, Major General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, Director of Operations of the Army, accused the Chinese of delivering arms to Thai communists through minority factions along the Thai border with Burma in the northern provinces of Chiangmai and Maehongson.

Thai leaders repeatedly asked China to completely cut ties with the Thai communists. Recognising that the issue of Chinese support to other communist parties in the region was the other ASEAN governments' grievance against China, Thai leaders also sought to convince China to cease this support as well. Meanwhile, China grew increasingly convinced its cooperation with Thailand and ASEAN governments was vital for anti-Vietnamese policy, and thus tried to eliminate not only Thai suspicions but also those of the other ASEAN countries over its ties with communist parties in those countries. Apart from a reduction of aid, accounts of defectors from the CPT in 1980-1981 indicated that China ordered all members of the CPT who were residing in China at that time to leave China. Similarly, during Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang's visit to Thailand in early February 1981, he said that China would not allow its relations with the communist parties in the region to affect its relations with governments in Southeast Asia, and that:

we have not seen the revolution being exported, and we oppose interference in the internal affairs of other countries. The political and economic systems of any country should be chosen by the people of that country. China and the communist parties in ASEAN countries maintain only political and spiritual ties.

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148 When the Prem government reportedly cut off Chinese supplies to the Khmer Rouge during April-May 1980, the CPT broke its ten months of silence to attack the Prem government in an announcement through the Chinese-based radio of the Communist Party of Malaya. Thai officials regarded it as a possible warning from China that Chinese support of the CPT might be reactivated if Thailand distanced itself from Chinese policy in the region. See Richard Nations, "Revolving door diplomacy", *FEER*, 16 May, 1980, pp. 11-12.

149 This was the first time after 1979 that a senior military official accused China of continuing its arms supply to the CPT. See *The Nation Review*, 24 July, 1982, p. 6.


It should also be noted that the collapse of the CPT was due in part to the domestic policies of the Thai government. New strategies, introduced in the Kriangsak government and continued under Prem, emphasised socio-economic rather than military means. The most important of these was the Order of the Prime Minister's Office No. 66/2523 (1980) on "Policy of struggle to win over communism."153

All the above factors contributed to a mass exodus from the CPT in the period after 1979. Defections from the CPT in that year were three times the previous rate. An official military source reported that in the period between October 1980 to October 1981, a total of 4,321 CPT cadres and supporters turned themselves in. In the last three months of 1980 alone, the number was over 2,500. The defectors included a large number of veteran party members and former prominent student activists.154 The number of communist guerrillas, declined from a peak of 10,980 in 1979, fell to 1,805 in 1984.155 At the same time, the number of clashes between the government forces and the guerrillas went down from 1,050 in 1977 to 164 in 1984.156 Consequently, the military declared that its war against the communists was over.

While the CPT's internal problems clearly contributed to the government's success, the viewpoint of General Saiyud, the leading architect of Thailand's counter-insurgency strategy, that "events external to Thailand played a more significant role" in the government's victory over communist insurgency is noteworthy.157

There is no doubt that the change in China's policy towards the Thai communists and the consequent collapse of the CPT, generated a sense of trust toward China on the part of Thai leaders. In 1987, Prem, who had fought for more than a decade against the Chinese-backed communist insurgency, referred to China's role in the region in the following way:

China under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping has as its priority the modernisation of its economy and consequently has become an advocate for a peaceful and stable international environment... In Southeast Asia, China has perceived the threat of the encirclement of its southern flank by the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. China, however, sees in ASEAN a force of stability in the region that could enhance its security interests. China therefore has been keeping up its interest in developing friendly relations with the ASEAN countries. In this connection, Beijing has


155 Chai-anan, et al, From Armed Suppression to Political Offensive..., p. 76.

156 Saiyud, The Struggle for Thailand..., p. 186.

157 Ibid., p. 167.
mitigated its erstwhile militant ideological drive. It has significantly lessened support for the regional communist insurgency thus removing a serious obstacle to the improvement of ASEAN-China relations.\textsuperscript{158}

A consensus on Thailand's anti-Vietnam policy

A related factor helping to explain Thailand's unchanged position vis-a-vis Vietnam, i.e., a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and a neutral Cambodia brought about by an election under the auspice of the UN, was a consensus among key policy-makers.

During the successive governments of Prem, the three institutions which played a part in formulating policy towards Vietnam were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the National Security Council (NSC) and the military.

The prominent role of the MFA during this period was largely due to Siddhi. A personal friend of the Prime Minister, he was respected both by MFA officials and the public as a man of integrity and a self-confidence. Siddhi was first elected member of the parliament in 1983 and became leader of the Social Action Party (SAP) in 1986. The SAP, however, played no part in foreign policy formulation towards the Cambodian issue. Instead, Siddhi relied on his staff in the Ministry. As a consequence, a number of senior and middle-ranking officials "found more active roles to play and became more aggressive, self-confident, and ready to defend the MFA's positions."\textsuperscript{159} Siddhi's military background was important in facilitating a good working relationship between the military and the MFA during his long tenure in the Ministry.

The MFA's working relationship with the military was facilitated by arrangements made by Siddhi. One such arrangement was an appointment of General Charan Kullavanit as coordinator between the MFA and the military. General Charan not only became Siddhi's close aide throughout Siddhi's tenure in the MFA (1980 to 1991) but was also appointed to the Foreign Minister's advisory committee on Cambodia.\textsuperscript{160} A second arrangement was the creation of committees composed of high-ranking officials from both the MFA and the military on key issues whenever necessary. Consultations

\textsuperscript{158} Prem's speech given at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on 6 October, 1987, see The Bangkok Post, 7 October, 1987, p. 5 (emphasis added).


between the MFA and the military thus became a permanent practice. MFA's expertise was often useful for the military and vice versa. One obvious example was the formation of the CGDK which was initiated by the MFA officials and implemented by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and his close staff in the army as mentioned earlier.

The NSC under Prasong Soonsiri, NSC Secretary-General from 1980 to 1986, was influential in foreign policy-making on Vietnam and Indochina. In principle, the NSC is a government body which serves as a forum for debate on internal and external issues affecting national security. It comprises the Prime Minister as chairman, Deputy Prime Minister(s), Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Communication, Interior, Finance, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and Secretary-General of the NSC. The NSC only makes recommendations to the Prime Minister who may or may not utilise them. Thus, the importance of the NSC depends on the Prime Minister. Prasong was given a prominent role in the Indochina policy, for he was close to both Prem and Siddhi - he was the latter's deputy in the NSC from 1976 to 1980. Prasong was known as one of the most "hardliners" in the Vietnam policy, as has been evident from his view and remarks in the previous chapters.

The military's direct role in foreign policy formulation is through the NSC where Supreme Commander is a member. In addition, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Air Force, and Navy are normally invited to the NSC meetings. During the Prem Administration, about half of the portfolios in the NSC were occupied by military officers. In consequence, it was inevitably a policy-making body which tended to represent the military's viewpoint. Moreover, the military's control over decisions on the defence budget and arms procurement; preparations of security operations; formations of all security-related programs and organisations; and appointments of key persons on certain security positions meant that they effectively controlled security policy.161 There was no tradition of control by other institutions over security matters, as one study observes:

> In the name of national security, the military has been able to monopolise all channels of information concerning border security and accordingly, to implement measures without the MFA's or others' knowledge or approval...162

Control over such security matters enabled the military to play an instrumental role in the Thai policy towards Cambodia. Writing during the period of the Prem leadership,


Suchit pointed out that the military had been insistent on opposing Vietnam's domination of Cambodia, and that:

> It is inconceivable that the military leaders will shift their position on the Indochinese issue unless they see strategic advantages in a change. Moreover, if the MFA should want to alter its stance on this issue, it is unlikely that a shift could be made without the army's approval. The army will object to any reconciliation move which, from its point of view, would give the Vietnamese advantage. It could even create additional tension along the border to stop the move.163

At the top of the military, General Chavalit can be considered as one of the most important figures in the development of the Sino-Thai security relationship. It will be recalled that Chavalit was the one sent by Kriangsak to China before the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Chavalit was aide-de-camp to Defence Minister Prem in 1979 and later, adviser to Prem when he was Prime Minister. He became Army Commander-in-Chief in 1986 and Supreme Commander in 1987-90. Chavalit was also in charge of "HQ315"—the Thai army unit which administered the Thai government's Cambodian policy.164

Chavalit had ambivalent views on the Cambodian issue. In 1985, then Deputy Army Chief-of-Staff, he argued that:

> The war in Cambodia was one between Socialist countries. In other words, it was an internal conflict between countries in the Socialist system. Therefore, it was unlikely that the countries involved would like to drag other capitalist countries into their internal conflict... In the near future, there will be no external invasion to Thailand.165

Despite such a view, when Chavalit became Army Commander-in-Chief in 1986 and Supreme Commander in 1987, he emphasised the need to improve Thai defence capacity and pursue security cooperation with China, including the purchase of Chinese weapons. Chavalit's own view on the Cambodian issue led to his initiative on the issue during the end of the Prem period and the beginning of the Chatchai Administration (see Chapter VII).

Key policy-makers during this period largely maintained a similar public position on Vietnam policy. Among Thai policy-makers interviewed by the author in 1992, there was a high level of consensus over the demand for a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. From Thai leaders' viewpoint, such an "uncompromising"

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163 Suchit, "Domestic Political Change and Its Impact on Foreign Policy in Thailand", p. 94.

164 The status of this unit is unclear, but it is believed that the unit was operated throughout the Cambodian problem. See The Bangkok Post, 11 May, 1994, p. 4.

position was because Thailand could not compromise its vital security interest. With regard to the question of whether they had misgivings on a close security relationship with China, the dominant view was that Chinese leaders were preoccupied with their modernisation program. So long as economic development remained the top priority for Beijing, the Chinese would prefer peace and stability in the region. Hence there was little prospect that China would pose a threat to Thailand or other countries in the region. The Chinese reduction in aid to the Thai communist movement was cited as evidence for these views as well.

It is significant that key policy-makers, namely Siddhi Sawetsila, Prasong Soonsiri, and Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, were all close to Prime Minister Prem. Unlike his predecessors, Prem took a rather low profile in foreign affairs. He rarely made public comments on foreign issues except in crisis situations which normally involved military operations. But he appears to have played a central role in ensuring that Thai policy towards the Cambodian issue remained substantially unchanged. He could, to a large extent, maintain influence over the military, even after his retirement from the army. He also had good working relations with the bureaucracy, including the Foreign Ministry.  

A case which reflects Prem's political influence is Thailand's border dispute with Laos in late 1987. Although there appeared to have different views among the Foreign Ministry and the army, Prem played a prominent role in solving the problem. His involvement was important in ensuring that the policy succeeded. As noted by an expert on Thai foreign policy, the fact that Chavalit did not take any public move against official policy on the Cambodian issue during this period was largely due to Prem's political supremacy. It will be seen in Chapter VII that Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's political leadership was subsequently less outstanding and

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166 Prem never run in elections and never been a member of political parties. He retired from military service in 1981. Although there were two attempted coups against him in 1981 and 1985, he managed to survive and gain support from different factions in the military. As Suchit has pointed out: "Prem's regime has served the military's interest well - the military always gets what it wants from the government. General Prem always thinks he is still a military man and he has maintained a close link with the military establishment and worked for the military interests." See Suchit Bunbongkan, "Contemporary Thai Political Development", in Ansil Ramsay and Wiwat Mungkandi (ed), Thailand-U.S. Relations: Changing Political, Strategic and Economic Factors. (Berkeley; Institute of East Asian Studies, 1988), p. 54.

167 According to Suchit, Supreme Commander General Chavalit was forced to act by the "conservative elements" in the army in carrying out military operations against Laos. Amidst the fighting, Foreign Minister Siddhi declared that Thailand would not negotiate the conflict with Laos until the Laotian troops were withdrawn from the disputed area. Prem publicly defended both the Foreign Ministry and the military, saying that both had performed their best under unfavourable circumstances. When it appeared that the battle caused loss of public credibility for the Thai army and the government after it had cost some 700 Thai casualties and about 2 billion baht in expenses, Chavalit was ordered by Prem to settle the dispute with Laos. Chavalit then moved to negotiate a ceasefire agreement with Laos, despite the different positions taken by the Foreign Ministry and some elements in the military. See Suchit, "Domestic Political Change and Its Impact on Foreign Policy in Thailand", p. 102; The Bangkok Post, 19 February, 1988, pp. 1, 3; The Nation Review, 27 February, 1988, p. 1; 29 February, 1988, p. 1.

168 Interview, Khien Theeravit, Bangkok, 1 April, 1992.
could not obtain cooperation from the military and the Foreign Ministry on the Thai policy towards Indochina. As a result, his government's policy was far more chaotic.

The longevity of the Prem leadership, eight years and five months, also contributed to a consistent policy towards the Cambodian issue, for it also enabled other key policymakers to stay in positions influencing the policy. Siddhi maintained his Foreign Minister portfolio throughout this period. Prasong was the NSC chief until 1986 when he was appointed Prem's secretary, the position he retained until the end of the Prem leadership in August 1988. Chavalit's close relationship with Prem and his control over the Thai-Cambodian border enabled him to rise from an obscure position to the post of Army Commander-in-Chief and subsequently Supreme Commander, within a mere seven-year period.

Thailand's policy towards Vietnam during this period was not without its critics, however. Misgivings over the policy came from other branches of the government; factions within the military; and the public. However, these groups were never in a position to bring about a change in policy.

Parliament under the successive governments of Prem lacked significant impact on the policy towards Vietnam and the Cambodian issue.169 This was partly because of its own weakness and partly because it was prevented from taking part in the policy.

The lack of continuity of the parliamentary system—due to military intervention—meant that political parties which existed in the 1980s were far from being institutionalised and organised. Moreover, neither the parliament's committee system nor its MPs were able to function effectively and independently because of the inability to gain full access to information from the executive branch or the bureaucracy. In consequence, parliament lacked any effective means to check and control the government's performance. Even so, there were a few cases which reflected attempts by members of the parliament to exert control on the government's Indochina policy. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives during the chairmanship of the former Prime Minister, General Kriangsak Chamanand (1983) and Boonchu Rojanasathien (1986) was active in presenting alternatives to the government's Indochina policy. However, the views of the Committee were largely ignored by the government.170 A case in point involved General Kriangsak Chamanand who, as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Representative, was

169 Writing in 1983, Chai-anan observed that the Indochina issue received little attention from political parties and the parliament, as "politicians take it for granted that the military and the government have so far handled the problem effectively." Chai-anan Samudavanija, "Implications of a Prolong Conflict on Internal Thai Politics", in William S. Turley (ed), Confrontation or Co-existence: The Future of ASEAN-Vietnam Relations, (Bangkok: Institute of Security and International Studies, 1985), p. 84.

170 Suchit, "Domestic Political Change and its Impact on Foreign Policy in Thailand", pp. 87-91, 98.
invited by the Vietnamese Foreign Minister to visit Vietnam in October 1983. At the
time, Kriangsak was openly critical of the government's policy towards Cambodia and
called for a "face-saving" resolution for all parties in the conflict. As a result, Siddhi
was concerned that the visit might be taken by the public and Vietnam as a sign of
policy division among Thai leaders. He thus opposed the visit on the grounds that:
"every party concerned should bear in mind that foreign policy is national policy and
should speak and act along the same lines." When Kriangsak insisted on going, he was
asked to postpone the trip to Vietnam until after the United Nations voted on the
ASEAN-sponsored resolution on Cambodia. Ultimately, Kriangsak complied and his
view on the Cambodian issue was apparently not taken into consideration by the
government.

The inability of the parliament to control security issues was revealed by the response to
the effort in 1987 by a member of the House of Representatives to table a motion in
parliament questioning the Defence Minister on the military's operation to drive the
Vietnamese troops out of Thai territory at Chong Bok pass. The motion was blocked
and the then Army Commander General Chavalit said that those questioning the army's
operation "should be warned to be careful because they were impinging on national
security."

The most prominent military critics were a group of military officers who called
themselves the "Democratic Soldiers". In January 1979, the group issued a declaration
on the "Means to prevent impact from the war in Indochina" which called for Thailand's
neutral policy on the Cambodian conflict as follows:

The principle of Socialist states' foreign policy is peaceful co-existence
with countries with different political system but not necessarily with
fellow Socialist countries. This means that this principle allows Vietnam
to invade Cambodia, but not Thailand. Therefore, the situation in
Indochina will not effect Thailand if the Thai policy is strictly neutral.

171 The Bangkok Post, 29 May, 1983, pp. 1, 3.
174 Khoksanae nautical kaepan koongchat koong thahan prachatipratai. [Solving the nation's
problems: recommendations of the "Democratic Soldiers"], (Bangkok: Chutima kaphim, 1987), pp. 40-
47 (in Thai). The informal "Democratic Soldiers" group was formed soon after the October 1973 student-
led uprising which overthrew the military regime of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. It was formed
by some staff officers, including General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, who were involved in the suppression
of communist insurgency with an aim to promote a democratic system. The group's major activity was
the production of documents in order to generate their ideas among the public. It was disbanded in late
1981. See Chai-Anan Samudavania and Suchit Bunbongkan, "Thailand", in Zakaria and Harold Crouch (eds),
Military-Civilian Relations in Southeast Asia, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 100-
104.
A call for a neutral policy was also voiced in 1983 by Lieutenant General Han Leenanon, Commander of the Fourth Army Region. According to Han: "Vietnam will not invade Thailand because of many factors which tend to put restraints on them." But Thailand should not get involved in the Cambodian conflict and provoke Vietnam, otherwise, "there would be war between the two nations."175

As support for a Khmer coalition government (CGDK) was, in Siddhi's words, a means "to protect the sovereignty of the country",176 these remarks caused concern among a group of high ranking military leaders. During a monthly meeting of top officers from the three Armed Forces and Border Patrol Police Office in July 1982, it was argued that the formation of the CGDK might provoke Vietnamese troops in Cambodia to accelerate their military actions against the resistance forces. Such a situation would have a negative impact on Thai villagers in the border areas.177

The formation of the CGDK in 1982 was also criticised by Kraisak Choonhavan, then a university lecturer:

The current Thai policy on Cambodia indicates clearly that Thai leaders employ military measures in solving the conflict [with neighbouring countries] and prefer the prolongation of war in Cambodia. The policy of Thailand, ASEAN and China in supporting the three Khmer factions of the CGDK is unrealistic. Sihanouk has no power base inside the country but relies mainly on Chinese support. Son Sann's faction has no legitimacy in the eyes of Cambodians because it is only interested in doing business in black markets on the border. The Khmer Rouge is just a murderous group and the Cambodians will never forget the horror they had been through under that regime. Therefore, the three groups will never be accepted by Cambodians.178

Sukhumbhand Paribatra, then a university lecturer, questioned the wisdom of at least three major assumptions of the policy. First, the policy of "bleeding" Vietnam in order to force it to comply with the Thai conditions in solving the conflict. This was wishful thinking on the part of Thailand and ASEAN. Instead, "what we have now is not a tiger [Vietnam] in distress as hoped for, but a tiger in distress and on the rampage as long feared." Second, he questioned the Thai leadership's assumption that China provided a credible deterrent to Vietnam in all scenarios. Instead, Sukhumbhand suggested that

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177 The meeting was chaired by Supreme Commander General Saiyud Kerdphol with participants including Deputy Army Commander-in-Chief General Sak Buntarakul, Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Somboon Chuhipul and Air Force Commander-in-Chief Air Chief Marshal Daklew Susilavorn, see The Nation Review, 14 July, 1982, p. 6.
"far from being a reliable force of deterrence, the PRC has a vested interest in keeping the Thai-Kampuchean border in a state of turmoil and in this respect the costs to Thailand arising from this state of turmoil are largely irrelevant to its calculations." Sukhumbhand also viewed Thailand's "unholy alliance" with China and the Khmer Rouge with scepticism. From his viewpoint, an end of this alliance would significantly restore real peace in Cambodia.

The Thai policy towards Indochina during this time was also criticised by some business persons who believed that economic relations should be separated from political ones. There was also a call from this group that the government facilitate the private sector's trade with those countries. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter VII.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, I have discussed the history of Thailand's alignment with China against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. It has been argued that this alignment enabled Thailand to pursue an "uncompromising position" vis-a-vis Vietnam on the Cambodian issue for almost a decade. It is difficult to imagine what Thai policy towards the Cambodian issue might have been without the "China factor". For one thing, if there had had no Chinese military pressure on Vietnam and no Chinese support to the Khmer resistance forces, there is little doubt that Vietnam, at some stages, would have been able to pacify Cambodia.

However, without the "China factor", it is doubtful that compromise could have been made between Thailand and Vietnam. Given that Vietnam considered Cambodia vital to its survival, one could rule out the possibility that Vietnam would compromise, in any form, with Thailand on this issue. For Thai military leaders, Laos and Cambodia formed a crucial part in the Thai defence planning. Among other thing, the anti-Vietnam policy during the governments of Kriangsak and Prem was largely based on the military's assumption that the loss of Thailand's traditional "buffer zone" threatened Thai national security. In this respect, with or without China's assistance, accepting Vietnam's domination of the entire Indochinese regimes would seem unlikely. Had Thailand opposed Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia on its own, the military would still have provided large-scale support to the Cambodian anti-Vietnam movement - a scenario somewhat similar to the actual situation during the 1980s. It will be seen in Chapter

179 Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Farewell to the sacred cows?", The Nation Review, 1 July, 1985, p. 4.


181 This view has been suggested by Sukhumbhand Paribatra, From Enmity to Alignment: Thailand's Evolving Relations with China, and Tawanai N. Xoomsai, China's Role in Thai-Vietnamese Tensions.
that after the settlement of the Cambodian conflict in late 1991, certain elements in
the Thai military continued their support for the Khmer Rouge, partly because of their
suspicion of Vietnam.
Chapter VII

The Policy of Turning Indochina From a Battlefield Into a Marketplace

On 4 August, 1988, after being appointed by the Royal Command as Thailand's newly elected Prime Minister, retired Major-General Chatchai Choonhavan announced that his government would promote trade relations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. He also said that the three countries should be Thailand's "economic markets and not battlefields." The catch-phase became subsequently known as the policy of turning Indochina from a battlefield into a marketplace.

It is evident from the previous chapters that throughout the eight-year Prem administration, Thailand was strongly against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. The political and economic isolation of Vietnam and its allies, Laos and the PRK, had been at the forefront of the Vietnam policy. During his short reign in government, Chatchai attempted to reformulate Indochinese policy, to one which emphasised the building of commercial relations with the three countries. Moreover, he pursued a policy of reconciliation with Vietnam, over the Cambodian conflict—notable was his initiative to establish a direct dialogue with the long-isolated Phnom Penh regime.

This chapter looks first at the three major factors which brought about Chatchai's Indochinese policy: the evolving external dimension of the Cambodian conflict; domestic political developments in Thailand during the Prem leadership; and the role of key Thai policy-makers and their perceptions of Thailand's relations towards Indochina. Second, the chapter focuses on Chatchai's policy on economic relations with Indochinese countries and his initiatives on the Cambodian issue.

Background of the Chatchai policy

1. External dimension of the Cambodian conflict (1981-88)

Since 1981, Thailand and the other ASEAN states had called for a comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia. Such a settlement should encompass both an external aspect, that is, a total withdrawal of Vietnamese forces and an internal aspect, that is, a truly independent Cambodia brought about by free elections under the auspices of the United Nations. However, during the first half of the 1980s, external military and economic pressure led by China and ASEAN, only succeeded in preventing complete Vietnamese control over Cambodia, but did not prevent Hanoi's policy of building a

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1 The Bangkok Post, 5 August, 1988, p. 1. Chatchai was promoted to the rank of General in October 1988.
Cambodia that would no longer turn against Vietnam. In 1984, Vietnam declared that its military presence in Cambodia was intended to prevent a return of the Khmer Rouge regime. This goal required re-building a Cambodian army, which would take at least five years. In 1985, following the success of its dry-season offensives against the Khmer resistance during 1984-85, Vietnam announced that all its troops would withdraw from Cambodia by the end of 1990.

In the period after 1986, Vietnam began to change its stance on Cambodia. Previously, it had insisted that there was no Cambodian problem and thus refused negotiations with any country on Cambodia. The change in Vietnamese policy led to its willingness to talk, and eventually seek political settlement with countries concerned over the Cambodian issue. There were at least three major factors which brought about the change in Vietnamese policy. First, by the end of 1986, it was clear that the war in Cambodia had reached a stalemate, with neither Vietnam nor the resistance forces being able to achieve a decisive victory. The human cost for the war was also high. In mid-1988, Hanoi admitted that it had lost a total of 55,000 soldiers in the war, with an equal number of men wounded.

The second factor for the change in Vietnam's policy was its need for economic renovation. By the mid-1980s, the Vietnamese leadership had recognised that the regime's legitimacy had been greatly weakened by the deteriorating economy. Chronic budget deficits, low production, high rates of inflation and unemployment, and worsening living conditions were endemic. After the sixth National Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in December 1986, a new economic policy was

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4 Since 1982, Vietnam conducted annual partial troops withdrawals from Cambodia, but the number of troops withdrawn at each time was not revealed. Western sources estimated that the number of Vietnamese forces remaining in Cambodia at the end of 1986 was around 140-150,000. Therefore, some 40-60,000 troops might have been withdrawn during 1982-1986. See "Is Pol Pot Dying?", *Asia Week*, 14 December, 1986, p. 39 and *The Nation Review*, 26 September, 1987, p. 5.


announced which called for liberalisation and reform. One of the crucial features of the reform program was an "open-door" policy towards investment from non-communist countries. But for this policy to be succeed, Vietnam's economic isolation—largely derived from its occupation of Cambodia—had to end.9

The crucial factor which had a major impact on Vietnam's policy towards Cambodia, was the change in Soviet foreign policy, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev's new policy was designed to create a peaceful international environment for his internal reform program. For both economic and strategic reasons, it was clear by 1988, that the Soviet Union's interest in maintaining military relations with Vietnam had declined considerably.10 Most notably, it was Gorbachev's unprecedented effort in normalising Sino-Soviet relations, that brought about direct impact to the Cambodian issue. In the period prior to Gorbachev's leadership, the Soviet Union had maintained that the Cambodian conflict was a Sino-Vietnamese affair and had thus, declined to take any formal involvement in the conflict. This position was reaffirmed in Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech in July 1986 when he made overtures for normalisation of Sino-Soviet relations.11 However, China had long outlined the Cambodian issue as a key obstacle in the normalisation of relations between the two countries. In response to Gorbachev's overture, Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping reiterated that the Soviet Union "had to take a firm step" in bringing an end to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. Deng also said that a summit between him and Gorbachev could take place only after the Soviet Union ended its support for Vietnam's military presence in Cambodia.12

China's persistent pressure was a major factor in bringing about a greater Soviet role in the search for a political settlement in Cambodia. From early 1987, Moscow's new

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9 The U.S.-led embargo which had been imposed since 1975, was respected by most Western nations, Japan and ASEAN following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. As a result, Vietnam had been denied access to loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The embargo had also blocked Vietnam's access to foreign investment and advanced technology. One of the two conditions, set by the Reagan administration for normalising diplomatic relations and for easing the economic embargo, was a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. See John H. Esterline, "Vietnam in 1986: An Uncertain Tiger", Asian Survey, January, 1987, pp. 101-102.

10 The value of Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay, as a transit point for the Soviet fleets, declined greatly after a reduction in Soviet overseas military deployment. Gorbachev also found that the presence of Soviet military at Cam Ranh was an obstacle to closer relations with non-communist Southeast Asian countries. See Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam 1945-1992, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 130-131.

11 Gorbachev's Vladivostok speech aimed mainly to seek normalisation of Sino-Soviet relations. Regarding the Cambodian issue, he said that it was the sovereign affair of China and Vietnam and that solutions to this issue depended on the normalisation of Sino-Vietnamese relations. See Gary Klintworth, "Gorbachev's China Diplomacy", in Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer (eds), The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), p. 42.

12 Klintworth, "Gorbachev's China Diplomacy", pp. 42, 44.
policy was evident from its direct discussion with Thailand and ASEAN countries on the Cambodian conflict. During the process of Sino-Soviet rapprochement, Vietnam was persuaded by the Soviet Union to seek a direct dialogue with China over the Cambodian issue. Moreover, from late 1986, both Vietnam and the PRK were under Soviet pressure to adopt a more flexible policy on the issue of a government of national reconciliation in Phnom Penh.

Soviet pressure put Vietnam in a dilemma. On the one hand, without Soviet military and economic assistance, Vietnam could not maintain its occupation of Cambodia. On the other hand, without Vietnamese support, the survival of the PRK regime was at risk. The concern thus caused caution within the Vietnamese leadership, as was evident from the report of the Party to the sixth Congress of the Communist Part of Vietnam in late 1986, regarding the pledge of a total withdrawal of troops from Cambodia by 1990. Nevertheless, while Soviet pressure helped bring about the change in Vietnam's posture on the Cambodian conflict, Vietnam was not prepared to end to its military presence in Cambodia before it was assured of the survival of the PRK and that the Khmer Rouge would not be returned to power. This was evident from 1986, when Vietnam made various offers for negotiations with various countries concerned over the issue of the Khmer Rouge.

Vietnam first put forward its new policy on the Cambodian issue to Thailand in late 1986, which announced that it would accept "anything coming out of national

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13 The visits of Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to six countries in the Asia-Pacific region in March 1987 signified a change of Soviet attitude over the Cambodian conflict. It was the first time the Soviet Union entered into formal discussions with Thailand on this issue. In Bangkok, Shevardnadze suggested that some aspects of the pending withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan could be used as a model for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. See The Nation Review, 3 March, 1987, pp. 1, 2; 5 March, 1987, p. 6; and 18 June, 1987, p. 3.

14 In late 1986, then Soviet President, Andrei Gromyko, told his PRK counterpart, Heng Samrin, that Moscow preferred a political solution to the Cambodian conflict, and that such a solution should come from a dialogue with China and ASEAN. (The Nation Review, 13 March, 1987, p. 4; and "A Thaw Between Two 'Brothers'", Asiaweek, 19 October, 1986, p. 18.) In a meeting with Vietnamese Party Secretary Nguyen Van Linh in May 1987, Gorbachev said that the Cambodian problem could be resolved only "on the basis of the unification of all [Cambodian] national patriotic forces."(Nayan Chanda, "Marriage made in Moscow", FEER, 9 June, 1988, p. 17.) In his subsequent interview with an Indonesian newspaper, Gorbachev stated that the idea of national reconciliation in Cambodia was "slowly but surely is making headway." See The Nation Review, 8 August, 1987, p. 4.

15 Even as late as 1987, there was still no credible regular armed PRK forces to ensure the viability of the Heng Samrin's regime. See Jacques Bekaert, "A look at the battlefield", The Bangkok Post, 20 November, 1987, p. 4 and FEER, 6 March, 1986, p. 13.

16 During the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in mid-December 1986, the Party report on Cambodia mentioned: "we stand for continued withdrawal of Vietnamese volunteers from Cambodia," but did not mention the 1990 deadline. According to Chanda: "the silence on such a key plank of Vietnamese policy may reflect prudence on the leadership's part." See Nayan Chanda, "Not soft on Cambodia", FEER, 1 January, 1986, p. 12.
reconciliation talks."\textsuperscript{17} Up to this time, Vietnam had rejected any negotiation with the Khmer resistance government. The new policy suggested that, although Vietnam would not hold direct talks with the anti-Vietnamese Khmer factions, as ASEAN had called for, it agreed that the PRK could hold such talks. Vietnam also proposed to Thailand that a withdrawal of Vietnamese troops could take place once there was a cessation of all external assistance to the Khmer Rouge. Previously, Vietnam had insisted that "the exclusion of the Pol Pot clique" was necessary before Vietnamese troops could be withdrawn.\textsuperscript{18} In March, 1987, Thach proposed that Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos open dialogues with China and ASEAN, in order to settle the Cambodian conflict.\textsuperscript{19} A month later, Nguyen Van Linh said that if China stopped supporting the return to power of the Khmer Rouge, Vietnam would immediately withdraw all of its troops from Cambodia.\textsuperscript{20}

On 26 May, 1988, in response to Soviet pressure, Vietnam announced a withdrawal of 50,000 troops from Cambodia beginning from June to December 1988. In addition, Vietnamese forces would be pulled 30 kilometres back from the Thai-Cambodian border.\textsuperscript{21} Shortly after, Radio Hanoi called for ASEAN, China and the U.S. to help find a solution which would ensure that the Khmer Rouge would not return to power after Vietnamese troops were completely withdrawn from Cambodia. It also hinted that the withdrawal pledge could be halted if the Phnom Penh regime suffered military reverses.\textsuperscript{22}

Both China and Thailand considered the Khmer Rouge a crucial bargaining chip for a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and for a political settlement in that country. China insisted that support to the Khmer resistance groups would end only after Vietnam completely withdrew its troops.\textsuperscript{23} But it softened its stance in mid-1988 by accepting the inclusion of the PRK in a coalition government under the leadership of Sihanouk.

\textsuperscript{17} Thayer, "Kampuchea: Soviet Initiatives and Regional Responses", p. 182.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 182.

\textsuperscript{19} The Nation Review, 13 March, 1987, p. 4.


\textsuperscript{21} Nayan Chanda, "A troubled friendship", FEER, 9 June, 1988, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{22} The Bangkok Post, 28 May, 1988, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{23} China believed that without the Soviet support, Vietnam would eventually have to withdraw its troops from Cambodia. Therefore, China chose to put pressure on the Soviet Union to end its military assistance to Vietnam during the process of Sino-Soviet normalisation. See Friedemann Bartu, "Kampuchea: The Search for a Political Solution Gathers Momentum", Southeast Asian Affairs 1988, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), p. 176.
For Thailand, the Khmer Rouge was a crucial bargaining chip because the Thais did not see Vietnam as wanting a rapid settlement in Cambodia. A number of Thai officials responsible for foreign policy and security issues expressed doubt that Vietnam would actually withdraw 50,000 troops, by 1988, and all the remaining troops, by the 1990 deadline. An official of the MFA pointed out that Vietnam's diplomatic moves were motivated, not so much by a desire to settle the conflict, but more for gaining international recognition for the PRK regime and undermining the Khmer Rouge. Therefore, in response to Vietnam's call for an end of support to the Khmer Rouge, Siddhi declared that Thailand would not act to keep the Khmer Rouge from regaining power, because it was one of the Cambodian factions and therefore, had "the right to be involved in the affairs of Cambodia." In June 1988, Thach proposed to Prem, that Vietnam would totally withdraw its troops from Cambodia, one year in advance of the 1990 timetable, if the Khmer Rouge forces were "liquidated", but the proposition was rejected straightaway.

In October 1988, Vietnam again declared that it would totally withdraw its troops from Cambodia, by the end of 1989, or within the first quarter of 1990 at the latest. The withdrawal would take place outside the framework of the United Nations and would be linked to two issues: the simultaneous cessation of external military assistance for Khmer resistance forces; and the removal of all Cambodian refugee camps from the Thai-Cambodian border. Vietnam also reiterated that the Pol Pot regime must be permanently dismantled. Thailand and ASEAN rejected Vietnam's call and insisted on a comprehensive solution to the conflict, that is, a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and self-determination for Cambodia. ASEAN also stated that external military assistance to the Khmer resistance groups would end, only after a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.

By the end of 1988, although the issue of Vietnamese troop withdrawal was still problematic and the Khmer parties had not reached any agreement on a solution to the internal aspect of Cambodia, it was clear that a peace process had begun. The first Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM) in July 1988 in which the ASEAN states, Vietnam and


25 See the address by Sarasin Viraphol, Deputy Director-General of the Political Division of the MFA, at Thammasat University in *The Bangkok Post*, 30 January, 1988, p. 3.


29 Ibid., p. 2.
the four Khmer factions met and discussed the Cambodian issue for the first time, was in itself an achievement given that previously, a number of similar initiatives had failed.

2. Thailand during the Prem leadership

During the period of the Prem leadership, Thailand witnessed rapid socio-economic changes. The Thai economy grew at a remarkable rate, the average growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) during 1980-85 was 5.3%. It then increased dramatically during the last half of the 1980s, reaching 12.0% and 10.5% in 1988 and 1989 respectively.\(^{30}\) By the end of the Prem leadership, it was widely considered that Thailand was soon to be a Newly Industrialised Country (NIC). This was a dramatic change from the situation in the early 1980s, when the economy was indeed considered to be in a "deepening crisis", following the second oil shock in 1979, the subsequent world recession and a number of severe structural difficulties within the economy.\(^{31}\)

The period also witnessed two-pronged economic development. One was a transformation of the structure of production. By the mid-1980s, the agricultural sector was no longer the mainstay of the country's GDP and the country was rapidly industrialising. Since the early 1980s, manufactured products had become a major part of exports.\(^{32}\) Thai manufactured products were becoming highly competitive in the world markets. As a result, since the mid-1980s, Thailand had experienced increasing trade friction with its major trade partners—the U.S., Japan and the European Community. Trade protectionism and the threat of trade retaliation, from its trading partners, had driven both the government and the private sector to actively seek out new markets in various parts of the world. The second prong was the prominent role of the private sector in the economy. Thailand's booming export sector, one of the major factors contributing to the rapid economic growth, was largely a creation of the private sector.\(^{33}\)

The private sector was increasingly interested in trade with Indochinese countries while Thailand had been at the forefront of the policy of isolating Vietnam and its allies, Laos

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30 National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), Thailand.


and the PRK, politically and economically. Private trade with Indochina was actively discouraged, although it was permitted, in principle. As a result, private trade with the three countries in the early 1980s involved mainly exports of consumer products and imports of raw material.\(^{34}\) The volume of official trade between the two sides was small, as Tables 6, 7 and 8 show.

\(^{34}\) According to former Secretary-General of the NSC, Suwit Suthanukun, only a few business persons conducted business in Indochina during the Prem governments. The NSC mostly allowed small businesses to conduct import raw materials from Indochina. Large-scale business was actively discouraged while business persons were reluctant to risk. Interview, Suwit Suthanukun, Bangkok, 7 May, 1992.
### Table 6

Thailand’s Volume of Trade with Vietnam: 1978-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Export</th>
<th>Import</th>
<th>Total (million US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>11.81</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>12.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>22.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>12.47</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>13.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>9.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>7.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>4.70</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>45.83</td>
<td>62.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>18.32</td>
<td>93.68</td>
<td>112.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

Thailand's Volume of Trade with Laos 1978-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Export</th>
<th>Import</th>
<th>Total (million US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>17.81</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>20.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>34.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>44.68</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>46.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>26.97</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>27.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>30.48</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>32.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>33.28</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>34.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>17.34</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>18.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>19.14</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>20.31</td>
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<td>1.28</td>
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<td>22.41</td>
<td>74.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>64.24</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>114.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>66.05</td>
<td>44.27</td>
<td>113.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8
Thailand's Volume of Trade with Kampuchea 1978-1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Export</th>
<th>Import</th>
<th>Total (million US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>11.57</td>
<td>12.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Since the mid-1980s, business groups had increasingly called upon the Prem Administration to lift trade restrictions and to facilitate trade with Indochina. Some of the more active voices included business groups and the chambers of commerce in the northeast region. Since border trade with Laos and Cambodia had traditionally been a major part in the economy of many northeastern provinces, this region had been most affected by the banning of the export of 273 so-called "strategic goods" to Indochina and by the restrictions on the location of trading posts, with Laos and Cambodia. The fishing industry sought a government-to-government agreement to guarantee Thai companies' joint ventures with the three Indochinese countries. In response to the pressure, the Prem government reduced the number of goods on the banned list to 61 items. In early 1988, the government announced that it would adopt a "hands-off" policy towards the private sector's business with Vietnam, as long as such deals did not

35 Various attempts were made to lift the government's trade-restriction policy. For example, in the Third Joint-Private Consultation Committee (JPPCC) Regional Meeting in 1986, the chambers of commerce, in the border region, requested Prime Minister Prem to lift trade restriction with Indochina. In April 1987, a conference on Thai-Laos border trade was organised by 16 northeastern Chambers and was attended by a number of high-ranking officials. In July, a conference on Thai-Cambodian trade was held, by the Ubol Chamber, and attended by a number of Chambers in the region. The JPPCC was a co-ordination organ between the government and the private sector, and served as a venue for the business community to have a dialogue with the government over issues concerning their business. See Anek Laothamatas, *From Bureaucratic Polity to Liberal Corporatism: Business Associations and the New Political Economy of Thailand*, Ph.D Thesis, Columbia University, 1989, pp. 169-170.

36 In 1988, Thailand was the world's third largest exporter of fisheries products. Fishing in overseas waters constituted a major part of the industry. A report in *The Nation Review*, 10 February, 1988, indicated that on a given day, some 600-700 medium-sized Thai trawlers encroached on Vietnamese and Cambodian waters. In the hope of resolving this problem, requests were made by the fishing industry, to the Prem government, to facilitate legal fishing cooperation with Vietnam.
directly strengthen the Vietnamese economy and, thus, hinder the policy of pressuring Vietnam into withdrawing its troops from Cambodia. While major restrictions remained, the private sectors' business links with Indochina could only grow on a small-scale as is evident from the volume of official trade with Vietnam and Laos (see Tables 6, 7 and 8). A small number of joint ventures, with Vietnam and Laos, were established in the areas of fishing, logging and trading.

But the policy of restricting trade with Indochina became increasingly ineffective, not least because it resulted in illicit Thai trade with the three countries. Black market trade with Cambodia and Laos, and cross-border smuggling were reportedly common in most of the border provinces and thus generated corruption among officials in charge of the policy. It was also widely known that "strategic goods" and other consumer products were being sent from Thai companies to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos through indirect transactions or through third countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

In the area of politics, Thailand experienced an unprecedented period in which the military was unable to carry out a successful coup d'etat. Given that Thailand since the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy witnessed 14 military coups, 12 constitutions and 40 governments, it was remarkable that the period between 1977 to 1988 saw only two attempted coups, while three relatively fair general elections were held. Two aspects of the political development should be noted here. One was a greater direct participation of business persons in politics. The relative longevity of the parliamentary system under the 1978 constitution provided a rare opportunity for the development of political parties and bankers, exporters, importers, wealthy farmers and other businessmen began to participate directly in politics. The increase in the number of business persons in the House of Representatives increasing from 37.2%, in the April 1979 election, to 68.1%, in the July 1988 election points to this. The number in the cabinet increased from 45.9%, in the Prem I government (March 1980-January 1981), to 73.3%, in the Chatichai I government (August 1988-August 1990).

38 The Nation Review, 2 February, 1988, pp. 1, 2; 23 February, 1988, p. 6; The Bangkok Post, 1 August, 1988, p. 13; and 1 September, 1988, pp. 1, 3.
40 The Nation Review, 18 January, 1988, p. 4 and Thanasetakiti, 6-11 February, 1989, p. 23 (in Thai). A 1989 report indicates that about 50% of consumer goods sold in Cambodian urban area, were Thai products, and most had been sold to Cambodia via indirect transactions with Japanese, Taiwanese and Singaporean serving as middlemen. The Nation Review, 10 September, 1989, p. 7.
Recent studies have suggested that politicians, with business backgrounds, actively protected and promoted their interests through the legislature, political parties and in government. Their role in formulating economic-related policy became more pronounced and bureaucrats no longer monopolised policy formulation.\textsuperscript{42} The influence of politicians and political parties was still limited, however, in the case of issues relating to national security. These issues included allocation of the defence budget; purchases of weapons; and information on security issues.\textsuperscript{43} This was partly due to the lack of interest on the part of the political parties because these issues were not a major concern of most voters. It was also due to the fact that security-related issues had been considered as the realm of the military, as will be discussed below.

The other feature of Thai politics, during the Prem period, was the dominance of the military. In the first place, the military's influence was decisive in selecting the country's prime ministers, in protecting its choices from all opposition, and in bringing down governments if it thought this necessary, as was seen from the cases of Kriangsak and Prem.\textsuperscript{44} During 1980 to 1988, three general elections were held, but all the political parties succumbed to the influence of the Armed Forces and accepted the military-endorsed Prem political leadership.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover, various attempts by the parliament to censor Prem failed, because of intervention from the Armed Forces. In 1988, Army Commander-in-Chief General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was again instrumental in setting up the Chatchai government. In 1990, Chavalit was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister after his resignation from military service. Chatchai hoped that Chavalit's appointment would strengthen the stability of the government.

3. Key policy-makers' roles and perceptions


\textsuperscript{44} Kriangsak came to power via the 1977 coup and was forced to resign in early 1980 when the group of middle-ranking army officers, the "Young Turks", withdrew their support for him and turned to Prem. Prem enjoyed support from the Armed Forces until mid-1988 when he decided to step down reportedly because Supreme Commander General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh showed signs of turning against him. See \textit{The Bangkok Post}, 17 April, 1988, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{45} In 1982, Bichai Rattakun, then leader of the Democrat Party, said: "In principle, we fully support the amendment that the prime minister should come elected. But at the same time, we also have to see the reality of Thai politics; the military has to play an important role." At the same time, Samak Sundaravej, leader of the Prachakon Thai Party, said: "Half a glass of water is better than no water at all. It is not a real democracy but we don't want to push too hard." See John McBeth, "The politicians' problem: soldiers over their shoulders", \textit{FEER}, 9 July, 1982, p. 36.
The change of Thailand's policy towards Indochina, during the Chatchai government, was brought about by Chatchai and three, of his six, personal advisers—Pansak Winyarat, Sukhumbhand Paribatra and Kraisak Choonhavan. To understand Chatchai's Indochina policy, it is necessary to look both at his background and his perceptions on the direction of Thailand's economic development and foreign policy.

Chatchai's leadership style was a result of his extensive experience as a soldier, a diplomat, a businessman and a politician.\textsuperscript{46} When he assumed the prime ministership in 1988, he perceived that the world had witnessed two major developments: a decline of ideological rivalry among superpowers; and an increasing importance of economic issues in states' affairs. For Chatchai, the latter development—and particularly trade competition—had become the major issue in international relations. In order to increase Thai bargaining power, he believed that it was necessary that close economic cooperation be established among the six ASEAN members, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Burma. Chatchai believed that because of the Thai economy's rapid progress and its geographic position in mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand must take a leading role in encouraging Southeast Asian economic cooperation.\textsuperscript{47}

To play this role, Chatchai believed that Thailand should down play the importance of ideological factors in foreign policy formulation and adjust foreign policy to a new environment, as evident in this statement:

\textit{The world is different today... Everybody is talking about peace and economic reform. Thailand has to catch up with the rest of the world and without doubt, we have dramatically moved into industrialisation. Our foreign policy has to be adjusted to cope with the new reality.}\textsuperscript{48}

After taking office, Chatchai said that his immediate task was to bring an end to fighting in Cambodia because the "war zone" in Indochina damaged the region's prospect for economic prosperity—particularly Thailand's. As a country next to the war zone and often affected by the spill-overs of conflict, Thailand was naturally seen as

\textsuperscript{46} After the 1957 coup, Chatchai—a cavalry officer and the coup's leaders' opponent—was sent to be an ambassador for about 15 years. He was recalled to the Foreign Ministry in 1972, and appointed Deputy Foreign Minister during the last Thanom regime (December 1972-October 1973) and the Sanya government (October 1973-March 1975). After the Sanya government, Chatchai became a career politician. He was appointed Foreign Minister in the Kukrit government (March 1975-April 1976), Industry Minister in the governments of Seni Pramoj (April-October 1976), Kriangsak Chamanand (May 1979- March 1980), and Prem Tinsulanond (March 1980-March 1983), and Deputy Prime Minister of the Prem government (August 1986-August 1988). Chatchai was involved in his family's large-scale businesses, including banking, finance and the construction industry. He played an instrumental role in the establishment of Thailand's diplomatic relations with China and North Vietnam, during the governments of Sanya and Kukrit, when he was Foreign Minister (see Chapter II and III).

\textsuperscript{47} Sayanrat, 21 June, 1989, p. 5; 24 June, 1989, pp. 1, 2; Thai Rat, 24 April, 1989, pp. 1, 18 (in Thai) and FBIS, 17 February, 1989, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{48} FBIS, 17 February, 1989, p. 51.
part of an unstable region and this perception thus discouraged foreign investment.\textsuperscript{49} Chatchai also believed that Thailand's relations with Indochina, should be focused on economic matters. Politics, he argued, should be separated from economics and it was his government's policy "to do business wherever possible..., wherever we can trade, we will do it."\textsuperscript{50} By doing so, he saw the prospect that Thailand not only could restore its friendship with Indochina, but also gained new export markets. Shortly after taking the office, he stated that:

Economic relations will reduce tension between the two sides. Moreover, it will also assure our exporters that we will have new markets. My goal is that by 1990, Thailand should be able to penetrate into the Indochinese markets and to be a centre for these markets... There were many times in the past that we missed out on opportunities in obtaining new exporting markets. But this time, I will not let this opportunity pass us by again...\textsuperscript{51}

Chatchai and his foreign policy advisers shared essentially identical views towards Indochinese affairs. Since the advisers were given a high free-hand in dealing with the Indochinese policy, their perceptions were crucial in policy formation. For the advisers, the past Thai policy on Indochina was a mistake because Thailand adopted a no-compromise position vis-a-vis Vietnam over the Cambodian conflict. The advisers perceived that the policy of isolating Vietnam gave no incentive and motivation for Vietnam to comply with the terms of settlement, proposed by Thailand and ASEAN, resulting in a stalemate of the conflict. Moreover, the conflict between Thailand and Vietnam was further complicated by the Sino-Thai alignment which saw the two countries forming a \textit{de facto} military alliance, against Vietnam. This alliance had the effect of hardening Thailand's "no-compromise" position on the Cambodian conflict while making Vietnam feel more threatened.\textsuperscript{52}

According to the advisers, reduced Soviet support and mounting economic problems meant that Vietnam no longer posed a security threat to Thailand. Moreover, as Vietnam was in the process of ending its military occupation of Cambodia, Thailand should seize the opportunity to "offer an incentive" to Vietnam to hasten the process of troop withdrawal. The best "incentive" was a resumption of economic relations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to which Thailand was in a position to give economic assistance. Sukhumthand, for one, hoped that by ending Vietnam's economic isolation


\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The Nation Review}, 21 July, 1990, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{51} Chatchai's speech to the Thai Chamber of Commerce on 9 November, 1988. See Matichon, 10 November, 1988, p. 22 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{52} Interviews: Pansak Winyarat, Bangkok, 28 April 1992; Sukhumthand Paribatra, Bangkok, 4 April, 1992; and Kraisak Choonhavan, Bangkok, 16 March, 1992.
and bringing it into the process of economic development in the region, goodwill between the two countries would be restored, and the Vietnamese would be gradually convinced that: "a firm socio-economic foundation brings national security and well-being and no nation could develop this foundation in isolation." It was also seen that re-establishing trade with Indochina was also based on the fact that the policy of restricting trade with Indochina had already been ineffective.

It should be noted that the three advisers had long been critics of the Khmer Rouge's "genocidal history" and were strongly against the return to power of the Khmer Rouge. Chatchai had never publicly voiced his viewpoint on the Khmer Rouge's history, but had focused more on what he perceived as "the reality" of the Cambodian situation—the Phnom Penh regime's control of most of Cambodia—and the need for a realistic solution to the problem which included the biggest faction. As the advisers played an instrumental role in Chatchai's policy towards the Cambodian issue, the anti-Khmer Rouge sentiment was a crucial factor in the policy.

It is relevant to ask whether Chatchai's Indochinese policy was driven by the particular interests of his Chat Thai Party. In fact, the Indochina policy was not mentioned in the party platform. However, this does not necessarily mean that the business interests of Party members did not play a role in shaping the policy. Chatchai and members of Chat Thai had interests in various large-scale businesses, and this factor played a crucial role in the new government's Indochina policy. A case in point was Chatchai's plan to develop the northeast region into a trading centre with Indochina (see further discussion below). The plan was partly derived from the region being a major base of the Chat Thai Party. Chatchai was also MP of the northeast province of Nakhon Ratchasima. But it was not only the Chat Thai Party that stood to benefit from economic relations with Indochina. Within the government, the leadership of three out of the six coalition parties—Chat Thai, Social Action and Democrat—was controlled almost exclusively by big business. All the parties therefore stood to gain, in one way or the other, from economic ties with Indochina. For example, one of the very first areas about which the Chatchai government entered into negotiations with Vietnam was the joint fishing agreement. Key members of Social Action, Democrat and Chat Thai, had business in

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54 Interview, Kraissak Choonhavan, Bangkok, 16 March, 1992.

55 See the business of key members in the Chat Thai Party in *Kukhang turakit*, 29 June-5 July, 1992, p. 6 (in Thai).

the fishing marine product industries and so stood to gain from the joint fishing agreement.\textsuperscript{57}

Chatthai's intention to turn Indochina into Thailand's trading market, immediately drew him into conflict with Foreign Minister Siddhi Sawetsila. Siddhi made known publicly that he considered the remark as Chatthai's personal desire and that: "a personal wish must be distinguished from a government policy."\textsuperscript{58} In response to questions from a joint session of the National Assembly in August 1988, Siddhi said that expansion of trade with Vietnam would be based on Vietnam's response to Thailand's and ASEAN's demand for troops withdrawal and negotiations for a political settlement in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{59}

Siddhi's opposition to Chatthai's reconciliatory policy towards Vietnam, was largely due to his belief that it was necessary to keep pressure on Vietnam, until all its troops were withdrawn from Cambodia. As long as Vietnam retained its troops in Cambodia, he perceived that it still posed a threat to Thailand.\textsuperscript{60} This standpoint was understandable considering Siddhi had been in charge of the policy for almost a decade. The abrupt announcement of a new policy by Chatthai, in a way, implied that his decade-long policy was wrong. Nevertheless, Siddhi was also aware of criticism that his Vietnam policy was somewhat inflexible, especially when it was clear that Chatthai's economic policy, had gained strong support from the business community. In late December 1988, Siddhi unexpectedly announced that he would visit Vietnam. Previously he had asserted that he would not visit Vietnam, as long as Vietnam retained its troops in Cambodia. In early January, 1989, Siddhi became the first Thai Foreign Minister, in 13 years, to visit Vietnam.

One of the crucial reasons that brought about the lack of credibility in the Chatthai policy, in the eyes of some officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), was what they perceived as Chatthai's "business-oriented diplomacy". Anonymous officials of the MFA spelled out their disagreement with Chatthai's policy in a series of articles on "Problems in the Thai Foreign Policy Process" in The Nation Review in late 1989, claiming that the change of the policy towards Indochina, was motivated largely by Chatthai's Chat Thai Party's business interests.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{57} The Nation Review, 25 August, 1988, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{58} The Nation Review, 25 December, 1988, pp. 1, 2.

\textsuperscript{59} FBIS, 1 September, 1988, p. 54.


\textsuperscript{61} The Nation Review, 21-24, November, 1989, p. 10. This view was also pointed out in the author's interviews with Suraphong Chaivayan, Bangkok, 30 April, 1992, and with Don Pramudwinai, Bangkok, 11 June, 1992.
The policy preferences of Chatchai's personal advisers were another source of controversy. It was widely known that, four out of the six advisers, had been major critics of the MFA's policies on various issues. Siddhi and some MFA officials, were angered by their appointments and immediately asked for a clarification from Chatchai, over what role they were to play in formulating policy. Senior MFA officials also perceived that the new policy was the result of the advisers' anti-Khmer Rouge sentiment while ignoring other crucial factors in the policy formulation.

The relationship between Chatchai and Siddhi was thus problematic since the beginning. It steadily worsened and made regular headlines in the press, throughout Siddhi's tenure in the MFA. Chatchai must have recognised the critical difference between his approach and Siddhi's ten-year policy towards Indochina, but there was little he could do about it. Siddhi was leader of the Social Action Party, the second largest party in the coalition, and as such could insist on the foreign ministry portfolio. Siddhi also refused to resign, despite his growing conflict with Chatchai, because he wanted to ensure that his Cambodian policy was not undermined. In the interest of preserving the stability of the government, Chatchai could not remove Siddhi, so he relied instead mainly on his own advisers. The advisers were in fact given a relatively free hand in dealing with the Indochinese policy. This only exacerbated the situation, since Siddhi insisted that the MFA was "the legal and official agency" handling the implementation of foreign policy.

The Secretary-General of the National Security Council (NSC), Suwit Suthanukun, adopted a low-profile compared to his predecessor, Prasong Soonsiri. Interview in 1992, Suwit said that he agreed with Chatchai's new initiatives towards Indochina. Suwit perceived that the time was right for Thailand to reassess its view of a "Vietnamese threat". For one thing, he was confident that Thailand had come a long way, militarily and economically, since the early 1980s. Suwit believed that Vietnam's military capacity, early in the decade, was so formidable that it was in Thailand's vital interest that Cambodia served as a buffer state. However, given the strength of the Thai economy and an improved defence system at the end of the decade, compared to Vietnam's mounting economic difficulties, Suwit believed that: "it did not make any


63 Interviews: Suraphong Chaiyam, Bangkok, 30 April, 1992; and Don Pramudwinai, Bangkok, 11 June, 1992. A "senior official" of the MFA stated publicly that some advisers criticised foreign affairs without understanding the difficulties of policy implementation. Their views, he said, were narrow-minded and were only the "views of the minority." See The Bangkok Post, 18 August, 1988, p. 1.

64 Siddhi was dropped from Chatchai's cabinet following a reshuffle in August 1990 apparently because of infighting within his Social Action Party. (Khaophiset, 27 August-2 September, 1990, pp. 24-25, in Thai) He subsequently resigned from politics.

difference whether Cambodia was under the Vietnamese-backed PRK or three Thai-supported Khmer factions of the CGDK.\textsuperscript{66}

\textit{The military and the Indochina policy}

While Chatchai proposed to turn Indochina into Thailand's trading market, a very similar plan was also put forward by acting Supreme Commander and Army Commander-in-Chief General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh. In a speech on Armed Forces Day—25 January 1989—Chavalit called for a transformation of the Southeast Asian peninsula into a prosperous \textit{Suwannaphume}, or golden land, with Thailand as its centre. He said that the situation all along Thailand's border was much more secure than it had been two decades ago. In this situation, he pledged that the Thai Armed Forces would seek durable peace to enable "for the development of economic cooperation, solidarity and prosperity in this \textit{Suwannaphume}—with Thailand at its centre."\textsuperscript{67} Chavalit had earlier mentioned the idea of creating a \textit{Suwannaphume}, as a guideline for Thailand's economic development. In order to achieve this plan, he said, it was necessary that Thailand's neighbouring countries—especially Burma, Cambodia and Laos—be peaceful and that Thailand pursue a policy of peaceful co-existence with these countries.\textsuperscript{68}

Chavalit also made a positive reference to Chatchai's remark of turning Indochina from a battlefield into a marketplace. He said that trading with Indochinese countries was essential as it would expand Thailand's export market and bring about "compromise between countries with different political ideologies."\textsuperscript{69}

The Thai military leaders' conception of the role of Thailand, in the changing external and domestic environments, was much in line with Chatchai's policy. In fact, Chavalit had initiated new policies towards Thailand's neighbours, as early as the last year of the Prem leadership. It is useful to look at his initiatives, particularly in the case of Laos and Cambodia.

\textsuperscript{66} Interview, Suwit Suthanukun, Bangkok, 7 May, 1992.

\textsuperscript{67} Paisal Sriracharachnya, "The Golden Land", \textit{FEER}, 23 February, 1989, pp. 11-12. In February, 1989, the \textit{Suwannaphume} idea was also mentioned by Deputy Supreme Commander General Phat Akkanibut, who was a most trusted adviser of Chavalit. In his talk on "The role of the military and the new path of Thailand", Phat gave a vague explanation on the concept that Thailand's economic force was enormous and that it could be used to boost the country's relations with other regional countries. He further asserted that: "we would like to turn this region into a Suwannaphume, or to bring prosperity and well-being to peoples in this region. Thailand will not use power to dominate other countries but rather it will serve as a centre for them to rely on. In this respect, we will pursue friendly relations with all regional countries regardless of different political ideologies." See \textit{Khaophiset}, 15-21 February, 1989, p. 17 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Khaophiset}, 3-9 November, 1989, pp. 38-41 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{FBIS}, 1 December, 1988, pp. 66-67.
Chavalit's manner of dealing with Laos, after the protracted border fighting between Thailand and Laos, over the disputed Rom Klao village in Thailand's Phisanulok province during May 1987 to February 1988 was remarkable. Amidst the fighting, Chavalit was assigned, by Prem, to negotiate with Laos for a ceasefire. The move was against the MFA position which insisted that there would be no negotiation, until Laos withdrew all its troops from the area. The MFA also stated that relations with Laos would be kept at a normal stage until the settlement of the conflict. But following the ceasefire, Chavalit moved on to pursue close relations with Laos, even though the conflict had not been resolved. A number of highly-publicised exchange visits of military leaders of the two countries were made. In September 1988, Chavalit, as chairman of border committee, set up eight committees on education, sports, culture, technology, trade, investment and communication, with an aim to promote closer ties with Laos. The committees were assigned under the responsibilities of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Commerce, Industry and Communication, with its headquarters in the Office of the Supreme Command, under General Phat Akkanibut, Deputy Supreme Commander. While the task was obviously beyond the conventional role of the military, the military leaders had in fact brought about a major shift of Thai policy towards Laos. For most of the period after 1975, Thailand's policy towards Laos had been conducted in the context of Thai-Vietnamese relations. This was due to Thai leaders' perception that, because of the stationing of some 40,000 Vietnamese troops in Laos, Laos was no more than Vietnam's "satellite state".

Chavalit's overture was designed to draw Laos, away from Vietnam, and closer to Thailand. It arose, in part, from the perception that Vietnam's power had declined. According to General Sanan Sawetseranee, a close associate of Chavalit, after Chavalit's appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Army in late 1986, there had been a reassessment of the "Vietnamese threat" to Thailand. The Army leadership was convinced that because of the protracted war in Cambodia and Vietnam's inability to gain absolute control over Laos, the possibility that Vietnam could use Cambodia and Laos to launch a large-scale war into Thailand, had greatly declined. In a series of NSC meetings on Chatchai's proposal of a resumption of trade relations with Indochina in late 1988, the military was reported to have suggested that formal economic ties with

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71 Sayamrat supdawichan, 16-22 October, 1988, pp. 8-9 (in Thai).

72 The prohibition on the export of 273 Thai "strategic goods" to Laos, for example, was part of the Thai policy of Vietnamese economic isolation. The reason for the restricted trade policy towards Laos, according to then Secretary-General of the NSC Suwit Suthanukon, was because of the "special relations" between Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. See *The Nation Review*, 26 April, 1987, p. 1.

Laos should immediately be resumed, since this would help to move Laos from Vietnam's sphere of influence.74

In addition to the new policy towards Laos, Chavalit had also pursued secret contacts with the Phnom Penh regime. According to one source, such contacts were made after the visit to the Soviet Union by Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanon in May 1988 and with the knowledge of the MFA.75 A Thai military account hinted that Chavalit had met with Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the PRK, and General Tea Ban, Defence Minister of the PRK, "several times" before the Chathai government was formed.76 Chavalit's numerous secret meetings with leaders of the PRK were said to be part of his plan "to step up the peace process" in Cambodia."77 It is unclear whether the MFA agreed to this approach. According to one source, the MFA believed that quiet diplomacy with the PRK would not hurt Thailand's overall policy towards the Cambodian conflict, although MFA officials thought that emphasis should be placed on talking with the "master" of the PRK: Vietnam.78 Chathai's advisers pointed out that Chavalit in fact had long had contact with certain leaders of the PRK regime, and had even provided "covert assistance" to the PRK since the Prem Administration.79 According to one source, close to the advisers, "covert assistance" meant military assistance.

For Thai military leaders, the decline of Vietnam's power meant that Thailand could diversify its options on the Cambodian conflict. After a decade of supporting the

74 The Nation Review, 8 May, 1989, pp. 1, 2 and Sayamrat supdawichan, 16-22 October, 1988, p. 9 (in Thai). In early 1989, General Phat argued that since Laos had turned to focus on national development and ideology had become less important in conducting state affairs, Thailand should seize the opportunity to offer Laos development assistance. He implied that this would increase Thailand's influence in Laos. See General Phat's talk on "The role of the military and the new path of Thailand", in Khaophiset, 15-21 February, 1989, p. 18 (in Thai).

75 Khaophiset, 2-8 October, 1989, p. 23 (in Thai). In May 1988, when Prem was in Hungary on his last leg of his visit to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, he was informed in advance by Karoly Grosz, General-Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, of Vietnam's decision to withdraw 50,000 troops from Cambodia in the period from June to December 1988. According to Siddhi and Kasem, it was from this time onwards that Thai leaders perceived that the "Vietnamese threat" had greatly diminished and that Vietnam would eventually withdraw all its troops from Cambodia. Interviews: Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992; and Kasem S. Kasemrsri, Bangkok, 6 July, 1992.

76 Nai jew, p. 102 (in Thai). In his visit to Thailand in mid-1991, Hun Sen reported to newsmen that he had called on General Chavalit who was then out of the government, as "a close friend." See FBIS, 7 June, 1991, p. 55.


78 The Nation Review, 20 January, 1989, p. 4. According to Suraphong, he had suggested to Siddhi since 1987 that it would be useful to establish secret contact with the PRK and Vietnam, so that Thailand had more options on the Cambodian issue, however, the idea was rejected. Interview, Suraphong Chaiyanam, Bangkok, 30 April, 1992.

Khmer resistance government of CGDK, Thailand still could see no sign that the CGDK could overthrow the Phnom Penh regime. In 1987, Sihanouk, President of the CGDK, began direct dialogues with the PRK and there was a possibility of a four-party coalition government in Cambodia. Given this possibility, military leaders presumably found it useful for Thailand to have some sort of contact with the PRK.

Chavalit's position on Chatchai's policy towards the Cambodian conflict, as will be discussed below, was ambiguous. He had been consulted by Chatchai in advance on the latter's initiatives on the Cambodian conflict, and had arranged and participated in all the meetings in 1989 and 1990 between Chatchai and his advisers, and leaders of the four Khmer factions, including the PRK. But Chavalit opposed Chatchai's proposals to replace a "comprehensive approach" with a "step-by-step approach" to the Cambodian conflict and an end to foreign military aid to the Khmer resistance (see below). In fact, it is unclear what Chavalit's real position was. Chatchai's advisers claimed that Chatchai could not have made any major shift on policy towards Cambodia without the military leaders' consent. The advisers claimed that Chavalit supported, and even encouraged, Chatchai's new policy towards Indochina. But it was only Chavalit, and his faction within the armed forces that wanted to change the policy. Therefore, Chavalit could not afford to go on with Chatchai's initiatives wholeheartedly.

However, Dr. Khien Theeravit, an expert on Thai foreign policy, has argued that Chavalit did not commit himself, with either Chatchai, or the MFA. Instead, Chavalit realised that during the Chatchai government, the Cambodian conflict had entered a "peace process" and thus tried to play a leading role in bringing about a settlement in the conflict. The move was part of his political ambition. Suwit Suthanukun, former Chief of the NSC, believed that Chavalit intended to play a leading role in Thailand's relations with its neighbouring countries, including Cambodia. Apart from his political ambition, this stance was due to the fact that Thailand by the late 1980s was relatively

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80 The only case, which was unclear whether Chatchai had consulted Chavalit in advance, was Chatchai's invitation to Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Phnom Penh regime, to visit Bangkok in January 1989. See discussion below in this chapter.

81 Interviews: Kraissak Choonhavan, Bangkok, 16 March, 1992; and Pansak Winyarat, Bangkok, 28 April 1992. See also Kraissak's claim that Chavalit supported Chatchai's new policy towards Indochina, in Khaophiset, 4-10 November, 1991, p. 15 (in Thai).

82 Interview, Dr. Khien Theeravit, Bangkok, 1 April, 1992. It was well-known, since the last years of the Prem Administration, that Chavalit expected he would be Prem's successor. However, during the last few years of the Prem leadership, there was a growing call, from the public, for an elected prime minister. One of the major reasons for the erosion in Prem's popularity, was his refusal to run in elections. Chavalit seemed to have caught by such democratic sentiment and, thus, gave support to Chatchai to form a government in August 1988. In pursuit of the prime ministership, Chavalit continued to keep a high profile in politics.
secure from external threat and internal armed insurgency, it was thus natural that Chavalit seek to achieve, outside the Armed Forces.  

Be that as it may, it will be shown that Chatchai's initiatives on the Cambodian issue were mostly rejected by the country's military leaders. This resistance was caused by various factors, principle among them was a different perception on the threat from Vietnam. While Chatchai's conciliatory policy towards Vietnam and its ally—the Phnom Penh regime—was based on the assumption that Vietnam no longer posed a security threat to Thailand even though its troops were stationed in Cambodia, military leaders perceived that the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia, was a pre-condition before any settlement.

Resistance to Chatchai's initiatives was also born of the fact that the military's corporate interests. As noted in Chapter VI, in the eight-year period preceding the Chatchai Administration, the formulation of Indochinese policy was mainly left in the hands of the military. In fact, security-related issues had long been considered the realm of the military. As a result, Chatchai's effort to launch a new Indochinese policy was seen as an encroachment upon an area of policy traditionally left to the military.

Another factor which appears to have played a role in the military's opposition, was individual officers' interest in trade relations with Cambodia and Laos. As noted above, the policy of restricting trade with Indochina, under the Prem Administration, generated corruption among officers in charge of the border. Top military officers were said to have developed lucrative business interests with the Phnom Penh regime and the Khmer Rouge. Chatchai's policy of facilitating trade with Indochina would lessen the role of officers, who provided protection to illegal and legal businesses. The policy also meant that politicians who were also business persons or were supported by business persons, penetrated into the area which until now, had mainly belonged to the military.

Thus far, I have shown the three factors which brought about Chatchai's Indochinese policy: first, the evolving external dimension of the Cambodian conflict; second, domestic political development in Thailand during the Prem leadership; and third, the

83 Interview, Suwit Suthanukun, Bangkok, 7 May, 1992.

84 It should be noted that there was no unity within the military, as it appeared there were different positions taken by different factions within the military over the Cambodian issue not only during the Chatchai government but also right through to the period after the peace settlement in Cambodia. (For further discussion see below in this chapter and in Chapter VIII.)

85 In 1980, Colonial Prajak Sawangjit, Commander of the Second Infantry Regiment, based in Prachinburi—a province on the Thai-Cambodian border—admitted that "all government officials, including army and police officers, have benefited from black markets [on the Thai-Cambodian border]." See Patinya, 31 October, 1980, pp. 23-28 (in Thai). See also a report on military's involvement in black market trade in Sayamrat supdawichan, 4-10 August, 1991, pp. 12-13 (in Thai).
role of key Thai policy-makers and their perceptions of Thailand's relations towards Indochina. In the next section, I will look at Chatchai's economic policy towards Indochina.

Economic relations with Indochina

It has been noted that, during the Prem Administration, the policy of economic isolation of Vietnam, Laos and the PRK was a major part of Thailand's anti-Vietnam policy. Immediately after taking office, however, Chatchai undertook various measures in order to reestablish Thailand's economic ties with the three countries. In November 1988, the National Security Council announced guidelines concerning the private sector's trade with the three countries. The new emphasis envisaged that the private sector's economic ties with Indochina would be fully supported by the government and not be affected by political relations between the governments. The National Economic and Social Development Board was assigned to draft a comprehensive development plan for turning the drought-stricken northeastern region into a trading centre with Indochina.

The Chatchai government also facilitated border trade with Cambodia and Laos by removing various trade restrictions and opening more cross-border trading posts. The number of "strategic goods" on the banned list was reduced immediately, from 61 to 29 items, and was totally eliminated at the end of 1989. As for government-to-government economic relations, the military suggested that formal economic ties with Laos should immediately be resumed, but both the military and the MFA voiced their opposition to the case of Vietnam because of its troops in Cambodia. Chatchai finally declared that government-to-government trade relations with Vietnam and the PRK would not resume as long as Vietnam maintained its troops in Cambodia. As a result, Laos in particular, received a great deal of Thai economic assistance as both the government and the military undertook various projects of economic cooperation with Laos.

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86 Thanettakit, 7-12 November, 1988, pp. 1, 23 (in Thai). The term 'private sector' refers to the organised formal and informal economic activities handled by individual and corporate private entities, as opposed to those handled by the state. See Suchart, (ed), Thailand's National Development: Social and Economic Background, p. 100.


89 The Nation Review, 8 September, 1988, p. 1.

90 As has been noted, General Chavalit set up eight committees to promote economic and development cooperation with Laos. His numerous visits to Laos included a large number of business persons and the visits not only focused on military affairs, but also on economic ties. In April 1989, for example, Chavalit visited Laos with an 80-member delegation composing of seven teams of military and civilian officials responsible for legal affairs, academic and public health, agriculture and rural development,
In his frequent public meetings with the business community, Chatchai emphasised his government's full support for Thai business links with Indochina. A large number of official visits to Vietnam and Laos were made by ministers in charge of economic policy, aimed at facilitating the Thai private sector's business links, especially negotiations on the protection of Thai enterprises and investments in the two countries. It was not unusual for the ministers to be accompanied by a large group of business persons. Siddhi who initially disagreed with an expansion of trade with Vietnam, also had twelve representatives from the private sector accompanying him to Vietnam in January 1989.

Thai business community immediately responded to the government's blessing of business links with Indochina. A survey conducted by the author of a weekly economic newspaper, Thansettakit, from August 1988 to the end of 1990, indicates that a large number of business groups, from all sectors, wanted to exploit trade and investment opportunities in the three countries, particularly in Laos. This was due to the close ethnic and cultural ties between Thailand and Laos, and the relatively peaceful situation in Laos. As a result, Thailand's business links with Laos grew faster than links with Vietnam and Cambodia.

Political insecurity and instability in Cambodia confined trade between Thailand and the PRK occurring only in few sectors and on a small-scale. When Hun Sen visited Bangkok in January 1989, he declared his government's full cooperation in pursuing economic relations with Thailand. His visit brought about an agreement between the two countries over the formation of committees on economic relations. The committees served to facilitate trade, in the absence of diplomatic recognition between the two countries.

Vietnam's response to Chatchai's economic policy was enthusiastic. For Vietnam, the need for economic ties with Western countries and non-communist Southeast Asian countries, had become a matter of urgency following the shift in Soviet-Vietnamese

communication, energy and industry, investment and tourism and border passes. In mid-1989, the Thai Military Bank was the first Thai bank to open in Laos. (The Nation Review, 9 April, 1989, p. 1.) There was also an agreement between Thailand and Laos concerning the construction of a cross-Mekong "Kangaroo bridge" to be financed by the Australian government.

91 See, for example, The Nation Review, 9 September, 1988, p. 1; and 31 January, 1989, p. 3.

92 In 1989, Thai investors were the most active in Laos. They invested in 40 out of Laos's total 104 investment projects. See The Nation Review, 19 March, 1989, pp. 6-7.

93 Apart from fishing, Thai business persons' main investment in Cambodia, was in logging and gem-mining with both the Phnom Penh regime and the Khmer Rouge. See Thanathip, et al, Kanka thai-indochine, pp. 149-150, 155-156, 165.

economic relations, stemming from the economic crisis in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s. The Soviet Union required Vietnam to pay a debt of 8.9 billion roubles, within five years, starting from 1991 and mutual trade from 1991 would be calculated in hard currency, instead of roubles. Moreover, the Soviet Union and Eastern European companies also backed out of contracts to buy Vietnamese products. As two-thirds of Vietnam's foreign trade had been with the Soviet Union, the change thus prompted an anxious Vietnam to seek new export markets and new sources of supplies for its industry.95

During Siddhi's visit to Vietnam, Vietnam proposed the formation of a joint committee to facilitate economic relations, between the two countries. Vietnam sent a high-ranking delegation, led by Foreign Minister Thach, to a seminar on "Indochina: from a battlefield to a marketplace" organised by the Nation Review, in Bangkok, in April 1989. Thach proposed in the seminar, which was presided over by Chatchai, that Thailand be the centre of economic cooperation in the region.96

Initially, Thai business persons responded enthusiastically to trade opportunities in Vietnam.97 However, it was later evident that they were still reluctant to take business risks in Vietnam because of its unfavourable foreign investment conditions.98 They therefore preferred import-export business with Vietnam, over long-term investment in that country. As a result, the volume of trade between the two countries increased considerably, from US$13.38 million in 1988, to US$112.00 million in 1990 (see Table 6). But Thai investment in Vietnam, despite encouragement from the Thai government, mostly focused on small-scale projects.99 By June 1991, Thailand's joint venture


97 This was shown by the a large number of business groups visiting Vietnam, including a trip in May 1989, by a 70-member delegation, representing Thailand's three most influential business groupings: the Board of Trade of Thailand, the Federation of Thai Industry and the Thai Bankers' Association. The trip resulted in the setting up of a Thai-Vietnamese trading company which would facilitate investment and trade between the two countries. See The Nation Review, 28 May, 1989, p. 3; and 29 May, 1989, p. 4.

98 The final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia did not lead to the removal of the U.S.-led embargo. As a result, Vietnam was still denied access to loans from Western sources, and large-scale foreign investment was not forthcoming. By the end of the 1980s, Vietnam still lacked basic infrastructural amenities such as, roads and ports; there was a serious shortage of foreign exchange; and the inflation rate was extremely high. In 1988, the official inflation rate was estimated at around 200% per month, but according to foreign economists, it was more like 700% per month. In 1990, the rate was down to 30% per annum. See Kim Ninh, "Vietnam: Renovation in Transition?", Southeast Asian Affairs 1989, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990), p. 388 and Douglas Pike, "Vietnam in 1990", Asian Survey, January, 1991, p. 82.

99 In 1990, the government considered that the growth of Thai business links with Indochina, was far from satisfactory. The Ministry of Commerce thus set up a centre for economic relations with the three countries, in early 1990, with representatives from both the public and the private sectors. See Sayanrat supdawichan, 4-10 March, 1990, p. 15 (in Thai).
investment in Vietnam accounted for only US$36.80 million, or 1.70% of total foreign investment, in Vietnam.100

Although trade relations between Thailand and the three Indochinese countries did not increase substantially, Chatchai's policy to reestablish economic relations with Indochinese neighbours, served as a goodwill gesture—on the part of Thailand—towards the three countries, after a decade-long conflict over the Cambodian issue. Moreover, it encouraged Thai business persons to pioneer involvement in the massive potential Indochinese markets, at a time when most Western countries still refrained from doing business in the three countries because of the U.S.-led economic embargo. Although Chatchai's initiative was cut off by the February 1991 military coup, his economic policy towards Indochina was continued by the government of Anand Panyarachun.

Chatchai's policy towards the Cambodian conflict

During his tenure in office, Chatchai attempted to bring a major shift of Thai policy towards the Cambodian conflict. The main thrust of his policy was to bring about a peace settlement in Cambodia, which would leave the Khmer Rouge with a minimal role. This section examines Chatchai's two major initiatives: first, an invitation to the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), to visit Thailand; and second, a proposal for a "step-by-step" solution to the Cambodian conflict.

Visit to Thailand by the Prime Minister of the PRK

At the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand in late December 1988, Chatchai was asked if Thailand would welcome the visit of Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of the Vietnamese-backed PRK. He responded: "it's good news if Hun Sen comes. Thailand welcomes everybody."101 Consequently, Hun Sen paid "an unofficial visit" to Bangkok during 25-27 January, 1989. According to Chatchai, Hun Sen visited Thailand as his "personal guest" and the visit did not therefore indicate Thai diplomatic recognition of the PRK. Chatchai said he wanted Hun Sen to join the upcoming peace talks on Cambodia—the second Jakarta Informal Meeting—in February, and for Hun Sen to see how under conditions of peace Thailand had developed over the years. He hoped that after seeing Thailand's progress, Hun Sen might be inclined to adopt a more compromising attitude—one that could "eventually lead to a reconciliation" between warring parties in Cambodia.102


During his visit, Hun Sen had two meetings with Chatchai on the Cambodian conflict at which he reiterated his position on the conflict—put forth since November 1988—he rejected the idea of an international peacekeeping force to oversee a settlement in Cambodia and insisted that Chinese and Thai aid to the Khmer Rouge stop when Vietnamese troops withdrew. He praised Chatchai’s policy of turning Indochina into a marketplace and was enthusiastic about pursuing trading relations with Thailand. In meetings with representatives of the Thai private sector, he offered concessions in gemstone, forestry and fisheries. Hun Sen and the Thai business group also agreed to set up a joint committee to study the expansion of bilateral trade and investment in Cambodia.103

Hun Sen’s visit represented one of the few occasions when a foreign policy issue generated a major public debate in Thailand. Advocates of Chatchai’s policy of making direct contacts with the PRK, believed that Thailand had to take a leading role in bringing an end to the Cambodian conflict, and that Chatchai’s abandonment of Thailand’s previous "rigid diplomacy" stance could create the conditions for real progress. Opponents denounced the idea of a direct dialogue with the PRK, because it was tantamount to giving de facto recognition to the “invaders”. They also claimed that Chatchai’s policy would destroy an informal united front pursued by Thailand and its allies against Vietnam, for over a decade.104

In fact, Chatchai’s decision to invite Hun Sen to Bangkok and his institution of direct dialogues with the PRK, in the succeeding period, represented a fundamental change in Thailand’s policy towards Cambodia. Chatchai replaced the policy of military leaders who had pursued secret contacts with the PRK, with one of openness.105 His shift in policy arose from the recognition that the PRK controlled most of territory and was, thus, the strongest among the Khmer warring factions.106 He believed that a political


105 This practice still continued, as it was evident that Chavalit arranged a secret meeting between Hun Sen and the three factions of the CGDK in Bangkok on 7 January, 1989. Chavalit also had a secret meeting with Hun Sen when he visited Laos on 12 January 1989. See The Nation Review, 20 January, 1989, p. 4 and Khaophiset, 2-8 October, 1989, p. 33 (in Thai).

106 The Bangkok Post, 1 September, 1989, pp. 1, 3; and Matichon Sudsupda, 29 October, 1989, p. 11 (in Thai).
settlement in Cambodia must include the PRK and that the previous Thai policy of ignoring the Phnom Penh regime, was "outdated". In February 1989, he argued that:

> There are four factions in Cambodia, but for the past ten years we have only talked to three of them. And what came out of it? Nothing... We have spent ten years talking with the three factions. How many more years do we have to continue to see the situation drag on like this?... What has been achieved over the past ten years? It has been a waste of time for Thailand."

Chatthai was confident that direct talks with all the Khmer warring factions could help bring about a rapid peace settlement. Under the previous Prem administration, Thailand had refrained from taking a leading role in the peace talks, at least publicly. It was Indonesia which served as ASEAN's interlocutor in peace talks between ASEAN and Indochina. Chatthai believed that Vietnam was now showing greater willingness to make a compromise on the Cambodian conflict and that the time was opportune "to approach Vietnam, talk with Vietnamese leaders and leaders of the Phnom Penh regime."

For Chatthai's advisers, the PRK was seen as the preferred choice to lead a post-war Cambodian government, because they did not want to see the return of the Khmer Rouge to power in Phnom Penh. Kraissak, for one, perceived that, since 1979, the Khmer Rouge had "used Thai territory to kill Cambodians" and this "linkage" between Thailand and the Khmer Rouge was a "horror" and must be cut off. In an interview after the Chatthai government, Kraissak said that the main thrust of Chatthai's policy towards the Cambodian conflict was to bring about a peace settlement between Sihanouk and the PRK. He emphasised that a post-war Cambodian government had to be a coalition only between these two leaders without the Khmer Rouge. Because of the Khmer Rouge's "terrifying nature", it should not be allowed to participate in a "peace process" in Cambodia.

Hun Sen's visit to Bangkok took place at a time when one of the major impasses of the "internal aspect" of the Cambodian conflict was stalled by failure to agree on the question of dismantling the Phnom Penh regime. In December 1988, Sihanouk had issued a five-point peace plan which called for a simultaneous dismantling of both the

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111 Interview, Kraissak Choonhavan, Bangkok, 16 March, 1992 (emphasis added).

112 Khaophiset, 11-17 December, 1992, p. 28 (in Thai).
PRK and the CGDK before an election and the establishment of a government of national reconciliation which would also include the Khmer Rouge. Sihanouk had mentioned that he did not mean to disband the administrative structure of the regime, but aimed to remove "the PRK's legitimacy". In this context, it is not surprising that Sihanouk immediately denounced Chatthai's move as bestowing an unwanted "gift" of legitimacy to the Phnom Penh regime, thus indirectly assisting Vietnam's "colonisation of Cambodia". He also cancelled his participation in the second Jakarta Informal Meeting and his planned visit to Thailand—both events having been scheduled for February 1989. Sihanouk's reaction caused concern among ASEAN leaders, including Siddhi, that the peace talks at Jakarta might collapse.

Interviewed in July 1992, Siddhi revealed that, at the time, he believed Chatthai's initiative had "disrupted" the peace process in Cambodia. Siddhi and the MFA had been working closely with ASEAN and China in pressuring Vietnam and the PRK to accept a comprehensive settlement in Cambodia. From Siddhi's viewpoint, the visit of Hun Sen suggested that Thailand was breaking ranks with its allies and was promoting the PRK's status. Siddhi noted that before Hun Sen's visit, Vietnam had made considerable concessions (e.g. its announcement of total troops withdrawal) in response to ASEAN pressure. Therefore, it was necessary to keep up the pressure. He also felt that Hun Sen's visit to Thailand was the major reason for the PRK's "hardened position", in the subsequent peace talks.

The manner in which Hun Sen's visit was carried out also exacerbated the rift between Chatthai and Siddhi. Siddhi was completely bypassed in the decision-making process. Prior to Hun Sen's visit, Siddhi was obviously in an awkward position in that he had no prior knowledge about the ongoing arrangements, which were making headlines in the national press. According to Siddhi, Chatthai formally informed him about the PRK's leader's visit just the day before Hun Sen's arrival and suggested that the Director

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113 The other three conditions put forth by Sihanouk were: the deployment of an international peacekeeping force (IPKF) through the UN; a general election, under the control of and supervision of the ICC, assisted by the IPKF; and the formation of a neutral and non-aligned Cambodia. See Bartu, "Kampuchea: The Search for a Political Solution Gathers Momentum", p. 178.


of Protocol Department of the MFA be sent to receive him. Not surprisingly, the irritated Siddhi refused.\textsuperscript{119}

In a clear attempt to undermine Chatchai's initiative, the MFA openly distributed information to the press, that all the five ASEAN members had notified the MFA of their disagreement with Hun Sen's visit to Bangkok, while "some other countries" either informed the MFA of their disagreement or declined to comment. Not one of them approved of the invitation.\textsuperscript{120} The Prime Minister's Office, however, furiously denied having received any negative feedback from Thailand's neighbours.\textsuperscript{121} The issue of the Hun Sen visit thus intensified conflict between Chatchai and his personnel advisers, on the one side, and the MFA, on the other.

Like the MFA, the Secretary-General of the NSC, Suwit, was neither consulted about, nor invited to attend the Chatchai-Hun Sen meeting. There was no public reaction, perhaps because Suwit agreed with Chatchai's decision.\textsuperscript{122} According to Chatchai's adviser, the reason that the two foreign policy-making institutions were excluded from the decision-making process, was that Chatchai believed that had he consulted Siddhi and Suwit prior to his decision, it would have been opposed. He also believed that since Thailand did not have diplomatic relations with the PRK, it was appropriate that the MFA was not involved and that his advisers handle the visit.\textsuperscript{123}

While Chatchai could afford to bypass the MFA and NSC, the more intriguing question is whether the decision to invite Hun Sen was made with prior consultation with the military leaders. According to Sukhumbhand, Chatchai made his decision independently, but was certain that he would gain the military's consent because the military leaders had already changed their posture in dealing with Laos and Chavalit had made contact with some leaders of the PRK, including Hun Sen.\textsuperscript{124}

Chavalit's role in arranging and facilitating Hun Sen's visit, suggests he supported Chatchai's initiative. Publicly, Chavalit said that it was good for Hun Sen to come so that Thai officials could understand his policies. He also attempted to placate the critics by arguing that Chatchai was striving for peace—particularly for people along the Thai-

\textsuperscript{119} Interview, Siddhi Sawetsila, Bangkok, 23 July, 1992.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Thai Rat}, 7 February, 1989, p. 16 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{The Bangkok Post}, 9 February, 1989, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{122} Interview, Suwit Suthanukun, Bangkok, 7 May, 1992.

\textsuperscript{123} Interview, Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Bangkok 4 April, 1992.

\textsuperscript{124} Interview, Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Bangkok 4 April, 1992.
Cambodian border. In fact, it is not clear whether Chavalit agreed with a policy of open dialogue with the PRK. He made known publicly, his disagreement to two subsequent visits by Hun Sen, to Bangkok, in 1989. According to one source, Chavalit felt that the PRK capitalised these "highly-publicised visits" for propaganda purposes. In order to bring about peace in Cambodia, Chavalit perceived that "secret contacts" with leaders of the PRK were as crucial as formal relations with the regime. However, there was little evidence to show how Chavalit perceived such "secret contacts" could help bring about a settlement of the conflict.

Chatchai's decision to invite the PRK's leader was made without prior consultation with Thailand's allies on the Cambodian conflict. This was in contrast to the previous Thai policy on Cambodia, which had been based on the assumption that it was beyond Thailand's ability to solve the conflict alone and, therefore, Thailand had accorded great importance to solidarity with ASEAN, China and the U.S. in bringing about a political settlement in Cambodia. Nevertheless, these countries was officially informed about Hun Sen's visit only after the visit had already been announced. Most countries, except China, made no immediate public comment, although the sudden change of Thai policy caused some confusion.

China clearly expressed their displeasure with Chatchai's initiative. Its immediate reaction, as was noted by the Xinhua news agency, was that Chatchai's invitation to Hun Sen to visit Bangkok was aimed at "enhancing the international prestige of the PRK." Given the close Sino-Thai alignment against Vietnam, according to Chatchai's adviser, Chatchai realised that China would be wary of his initiative. Therefore, during his visit to China in March 1989, Chatchai attempted to explain Chinese leaders about his initiative. It was significant that he met with most of China's top leaders during the visit—chairman Deng Xiaoping, Premier Li Peng, Secretary-General of the Communist Party of China Zhao Ziyang, and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen. All these Chinese leaders emphasised the same point to Chatchai: that it was necessary for Thailand, ASEAN and China remain unified in maintaining pressure on Vietnam, until all Vietnamese troops were withdrawn and that the international community must continue to prevent the legalisation of the PRK or the enhancement of its status. Chatchai tried to assure Chinese leaders that his meeting with Hun Sen did not imply a move towards recognising the PRK and that his only desire was to bring peace to the region. However, there was little sign of any change in China's hardline stance towards Vietnam. Deng and Li Peng emphasised that the Soviet Union was an "imperialist


power" and that Vietnam was the Soviet Union's "proxy" state. The two Chinese leaders were even concerned that Thailand might be moving into the Soviet "orbit".128 Facing China's hardline position, Chatchai declared at the end of his visit that "Thailand is too small, we are not a superpower" and that he would have to stop, at least for the time being, all direct approaches to the leadership, in Hanoi and Phnom Penh, and wait for the outcome of the Sino-Soviet summit in mid-May 1989.129

China's hostile reaction did not in fact prevent Chatchai from continuing his policy of direct dialogues with the PRK. In early May and September 1989, Hun Sen was again invited to Bangkok for talks with Chatchai and his advisers on the Cambodian conflict.

Chatchai's direct dialogue with the PRK was much criticised for strengthening the status of the PRK and, thus, complicating the peace talks.130 As a matter of fact, it was unlikely that Chatchai's direct dialogue with the PRK could have strengthened the status of the PRK, even though Chatchai might have wanted it to. Thailand was certainly not a key to the settlement of the Cambodian conflict and its role had been limited to its provision of sanctuaries and arms supply routes to the Khmer resistance forces. This role had been decisive in reviving the Khmer Rouge as an effective fighting force, in the aftermath of the Vietnamese invasion. The importance of this role, during the Chatchai government, however, seemed to have decreased. The Khmer Rouge was reported to have stockpiled a large amount of Chinese arms and food upon which they could survive for years. This meant that although Thailand had cut off supply from China, immediate resupply was not an urgent matter for the Khmer Rouge anyway.131 The survival of the other two resistance factions, under the leadership of Son San and Sihanouk, depended more on international support, than on the military strength of their respective forces.


130 According to one report, for example, Vietnam's "hardened position", in the second Jakarta Informal Meeting in February 1989 was partly due to Chatchai's open contact with the PRK. Together with China's schedule for a summit with the Soviet Union, before a Vietnamese troop withdrawal, Vietnam felt more confident that it could keep a controlling hand on the processes that would shape Cambodia's future. Vietnam stated in the meeting that its troops could be withdrawn, under international supervision, by September 1990, if it's condition on the cessation of military aid to the Khmer resistance movement were met. Otherwise, the troops would be withdrawn, by the end of 1990, not the first quarter of 1990, as Vietnam had announced earlier. Neither Vietnam nor the PRK made any concession on the issues of an interim quadrapartite government and international supervision of the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. Former Indonesian Foreign Minister, Moctar Kusumaatmadja, also asserted that Thailand's opening contact with Hun Sen might have "bolstered" Hun Sen's hope of consolidating his power. See Hamish McDonald and Michael Vatikiotis, "Peace on hold", FEER, 2 March, 1989, p. 10.

131 One source indicated in early 1989 that the Khmer Rouge had enough arms and food supplies for two years and its strength was over 40,000. See Lak thai, 16 March, 1989, pp. 21-22 (in Thai). McGregor suggests that without the Thai route, China could supply the Khmer Rouge with gold. See McGregor, "China, Vietnam and the Cambodian Conflict: Beijing's End Game Strategy", pp. 275-276.
The key to both the external and internal aspects of the Cambodian conflict lay mainly in relations between China and the Soviet Union, and China and Vietnam. As has been noted, it was the Sino-Soviet reconciliation, not pressure from Thailand and its ASEAN allies, that had brought about the change of Vietnam's posture over the conflict. Sino-Soviet pressure again brought about Vietnam's decision in April 1989 to totally withdraw its troops from Cambodia in September that year.\(^{132}\)

**A "step-by-step" solution to the Cambodian conflict**

On 5 April, 1989 Vietnam announced that it would withdraw all its troops from Cambodia, by 30 September that year. Vietnam repeated its previous demands for an end to all "foreign interference" in the internal affairs of Cambodia and a cessation of foreign military aid to all Khmer resistance factions. It also announced that if foreign countries "do not honour their commitments" to put an end to the military aid to the Khmer resistance, it reserved the right to help defend the Phnom Penh regime.\(^{133}\)

Nevertheless, Vietnam's demand was again rejected immediately by all parties involved in assisting the Khmer resistance. China supported Sihanouk's position that the withdrawal must be supervised by the UN and announced that military aid to the Khmer resistance groups would cease, only after Vietnam's total troop withdrawal, was verified by the UN.\(^{134}\) General Chavalit also said that external aid to the Khmer resistance movement would automatically cease when the last Vietnamese troops had pulled out of Cambodia.\(^{135}\)

Thai leaders were sceptical about Vietnam's pledge of a total troop withdrawal by September. Both the MFA and the military did not think that Vietnam would leave

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\(^{132}\) From the end of 1988, China put pressure on Vietnam, to let Vietnam know that it preferred to see Vietnamese troops totally withdraw from Cambodia by June 1989, instead of the end of the year, as Vietnam had announced. At the same time, China argued that Chinese aid to the Khmer Rouge would be ended along with the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops. China also reiterated that it would hold talks with Vietnam, only after Vietnam "unconditionally" withdrew all its troops. Vietnam announced in January 1989 that a total withdrawal would be moved up to the end of September 1989, but this was conditional upon a political settlement in Cambodia. Despite Vietnam's condition, China welcomed its decision. Together with encouragement from the Soviet Union, the first steps toward reconciliation between China and Vietnam took place when vice-foreign ministerial talks, between China and Vietnam, took place—the first such talks in more than a decade—in January 1989. See Ibid., pp. 277-278.

\(^{133}\) In addition, Vietnam called for the reactivation of the International Control and Supervision Commission comprising India, Canada and Poland, under the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Cambodia. The Indonesian Foreign Minister, as chairman of the Jakarta Informal Meeting, and "a personal representative" of the United Nations Secretary-General were also invited to join the Commission. The role of the Commission would be to control and supervise the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops as well as the cessation of foreign interference and foreign military aid to the Cambodian parties. *(The Bangkok Post, 6 April, 1989, p. 1.)* It should be noted that Vietnam had rejected any UN role in the Cambodian conflict on the grounds that the UN had long supported the Khmer resistance of CGDK, so could not assume a neutral role in the conflict.

\(^{134}\) *The Bangkok Post, 6 April, 1989, p. 1, and The Nation Review, 7 May, 1989, pp. 1, 2.*

\(^{135}\) *The Bangkok Post, 25 April, 1989, p. 1.*
Cambodia permanently, but might continue to leave some of its troops under the guise of the Phnom Penh army.\textsuperscript{136} It was thus clear at this stage, that resolutions of both external and internal aspects of the Cambodian conflict, were proving to be equally problematic. In this context, Chatchai in late April 1989 proposed to the four Khmer factions a "step-by-step" solution to the conflict based on the following sequence: a ceasefire by all the warring parties; the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and verification of the troop withdrawal, by an international control commission; the formation of the national reconciliation council comprising all the four Khmer factions; a census to ascertain eligible voters; a general election; a four-faction coalition government, according to the election results; and international recognition of the elected government.\textsuperscript{137}

In an attempt to gain support for his initiative, Chatchai first proposed that the four factions sign a ceasefire pact in Bangkok, before the final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in September.\textsuperscript{138} According to Chatchai, it was necessary that the fighting end as soon as possible, because Thailand was the only country affected by the spill-over of fighting in Cambodia. Moreover, a ceasefire would encourage Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Cambodia by the scheduled time. As noted above, most Thai leaders including Chatchai, had doubted about Vietnam's intention to withdraw its troops according to the timetable, but Chatchai perceived that Thailand could help encourage Vietnam's decision to withdraw all of its troops, while continued fighting could give Vietnam a pretext to halt its troop withdrawal.\textsuperscript{139}

Chatchai also believed that ASEAN's decade-long, comprehensive approach to the Cambodian conflict was too ambitious and had been proved both unrealistic and unworkable. From his viewpoint, it was difficult to achieve both the internal and external aspects of the conflict in one effort.\textsuperscript{140} Chatchai's adviser, Pansak, suggested that Chatchai's "step-by-step" approach was designed to provide a "graceful exit" for

\textsuperscript{136} *The Bangkok Post*, 14 May, 1989, p. 10. According to Suwit, Secretary-General of the NSC, Thai military and security officers doubted that Vietnam would withdraw all the troops by September, and that they would only reduce the number of troops. (*The Nation Review*, 17 September, 1989, p. 1.) A statement issued by the Armed Forces Information Office of the Supreme Command in late April stated that Vietnam would continue to maintain its influence in Indochina and therefore, after September 1989, Vietnamese troops might remain in Cambodia "under the guise of Heng Samrin soldiers." Moreover, the military stated that Vietnam still retained between 90,000 and 110,000 troops in Cambodia, not 50,000 as had been claimed. Therefore, it was necessary that an international control commission be set up, to ensure all troops—not just 50,000—were withdrawn. See *The Bangkok Post*, 28 April, 1989, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{137} *The Bangkok Post*, 30 April, 1989, p. 1. It is unclear how "a four-faction coalition government" could be guaranteed before the election.

\textsuperscript{138} *The Nation Review*, 7 May, 1989, pp. 1, 2.

\textsuperscript{139} *The Nation Review*, 7 May, 1989, pp. 1, 2 and the author's interview with Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Bangkok, 4 April, 1992.

Thailand and the Western community, after the failure of "the comprehensive global approach". He also openly attacked the MFA's persistence in following through this approach, claiming that it had only prolonged the conflict.141

It is important to note that Chatchai's peace proposal on Cambodia was essentially the same as the final peace settlement, signed at the Paris Peace Agreement in October 1991. However, at the time when his proposal was put forward, as will be seen below, it was rejected by the U.S., China, and ASEAN. Intriguingly, both the MFA and the Thai military rejected it. Only Vietnam and the Phnom Penh regime welcomed Chatchai's ceasefire proposal. For Vietnam, an end of fighting in Cambodia would assure its primary concern: the survival of the Phnom Penh regime, or the State of Cambodia (SOC).142 Therefore, Vietnam declared its support for Chatchai's proposal.143 Hun Sen immediately accepted the proposal and even announced that if all other Khmer factions refused, the SOC "might declare a unilateral ceasefire".144 The SOC stood to gain most from a ceasefire because it had gained control of the greater part of Cambodia. The three Khmer resistance factions of the CGDK refused a ceasefire agreement for the same reason—they only controlled parts of remote areas and, thus, the SOC would be the only beneficiary of a ceasefire.145 It is also possible that the resistance forces rejected a ceasefire agreement because they hoped to make further advances in the battlefield, after Vietnam withdrew its troops. This would strengthen their bargaining power in subsequent negotiations.

The breakdown of the Paris Conference on Cambodia in late July 1989 increased the possibility that civil war would be escalated after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in September. Before the withdrawal took place, Chatchai invited leaders of the four Khmer factions to have separate meetings with him in Bangkok. He again proposed that the three factions of the CGDK accept a ceasefire, while leaving the issue of internal government as "an open ended" issue. The proposal was rejected by the three Khmer factions.146 During Chatchai's discussion with Hun Sen, the issue of the UN's role in the international control mechanism was raised for the first time as part of Chatchai's peace proposal. Hun Sen responded positively to the idea that verification of the final

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142 As requested by Sihanouk, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was renamed the State of Cambodia (SOC) in April 1989.


144 The Nation Review, 7 May, 1989, pp. 1, 2.

145 Thai Rat, 23 September, 1989, p. 3 (in Thai).

withdrawal of Vietnamese troops be undertaken by the UN. The role of the UN in verifying troop withdrawal was also accepted by Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, after his talks with Chatthai's advisers. Vietnam's assent was conditional on the UN mission being officially under the auspices of the Paris International Conference. This was the first time that both Vietnam and the PRK accepted the role of the UN in Cambodia. However, it is unclear whether or not this was the fruit of Chatthai's diplomacy. It is likely that Vietnam yielded to increased international pressure at the time when the Soviet Union was less supportive to its role in Cambodia.

Chatthai's attempt to change Thailand's policy towards the Cambodian conflict was further evident from his call to the countries which supplied arms to the Khmer resistance forces to cease their military aid to the forces. This step was considered necessary, according to one of Chatthai's advisers, because it would move Thailand to a "genuine neutral" position. In reality, it would seem that the proposal was made, primarily to reduce the Khmer Rouge's military strength. Without external support, particularly from Thailand and China, the Khmer Rouge's survival in the long term would be in jeopardy. In early 1990, Chatthai stated that he had made requests to the U.S., China, the Soviet Union and France to stop their arms supplies to the Khmer warring factions.

Chatthai's initiative was rejected by most countries concerned. The MFA and the Thai military also rejected it and continued to pursue their own preferred policies independently.

External opposition to Chatthai's policy

As noted in Chapter IV, since the Reagan Administration, the U.S. policy towards the Cambodian conflict had been to support China's policy of containing Vietnam - a country perceived to be a proxy of the Soviet Union. The U.S. did, however, reject a return to power of the Khmer Rouge. When Vietnamese troops were to withdraw, the Bush Administration had been preparing, since early 1989, to provide military aid to the Sihanouk and the Son San factions of the resistance, believing that this was necessary to strengthen the non-communist factions—in case the Khmer Rouge tried to

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147 *The Bangkok Post*, 21 September, 1989, pp. 1, 3. The function of the ICM, as proposed by Chatthai, was as follows: to verify the final Vietnamese troop withdrawal; to supervise the ceasefire; to monitor the cessation of external arms supplies; to conduct a national census for the purpose of determining eligible voters; and to supervise general elections in Cambodia—without the prior exclusion of any Cambodian faction. *The Nation Review*, 30 November, 1989, p. 4.


149 Interview, Kraisak Choonhavan, Bangkok, 16 March, 1992.

seize "unilateral control" of Cambodia. In May 1989, when U.S. Vice-President Dan Quayle visited Thailand, Chatchai made known his "reservations" about Bush's plan, arguing that increasing aid to the Khmer resistance forces would not help improve the situation as Thailand and other countries were concentrating on bringing about a political, not a military solution, to the conflict. Instead, continued military aid to the resistance forces would likely slow the planned withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia. Quayle disagreed, claiming that if the non-communist resistance forces became stronger, this would ultimately lead to "a free and independent Cambodia." He also said that he had found "strong regional consensus for the support of the non-communist resistance and for a comprehensive settlement" of the conflict. The U.S. also argued that Vietnam's final troop withdrawal from Cambodia did not go far enough. Washington would not normalise relations with Vietnam, until a comprehensive settlement of the conflict was reached.

In 1989, the Bush Administration was in fact being pressured by Congress to stop all aid to the non-communist Khmer factions of the CGDK, for fear that the assistance might fall into Khmer Rouge hands. In 1989, according to Chatchai's adviser—who made frequent travels to Washington in seeking support from the U.S. for Chatchai's policy—the U.S. remained its policy because it did not want to upset China and also believed that Chatchai's approach would leave unresolved the question of power sharing among the warring Khmer parties and this could lead to an eventual recognition of the Vietnamese-backed Phnom Penh regime. The adviser believed that U.S. policy also stemmed from its "hang-up" over the "Vietnam syndrome."

A great deal of effort was made by Chatchai to persuade China to agree to his approach to the Cambodian conflict and to halt arms supplies to the Khmer Rouge. He made a number of official visits to China and his advisers had "secret meetings" with Chinese leaders. But China strongly opposed Chatchai's dealing with the conflict, according to one adviser, and its intransigence was the major obstacle to Chatchai's policy. China's policy remained consistent—its assistance to the Khmer resistance would cease

151 The Bangkok Post, 1 June, 1989, p. 4.
only after a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. China even stepped up its arms supply to the Khmer Rouge, following an escalation of civil war in Cambodia in the aftermath of the final Vietnamese troop withdrawal. When Premier Li Peng visited Thailand in August 1990, he rebuffed Chatchai’s request to halt arms supplies to the Khmer Rouge, stating that China would continue to supply weapons, “unless the Cambodian problem is completely resolved.”

The fact that the Thai military supported foreign military aid to the Khmer resistance, as will be discussed below, enabled China, the U.S. and other countries to continue their arms supplies to the three factions of the resistance—via Thailand—despite Chatchai’s opposition. In response to a question in the House of Representatives over the issue of Thailand being used as a route for foreign arms supplies to the Khmer resistance, Chatchai blamed “the superpowers” for the arms flow, saying that he had tried to tell the superpowers “to slow it down but there is little that [he] could do.”

Noteworthy is the lack of evidence of Chatchai’s discussion with military leaders on the issue. Moreover, he may have had little, or no knowledge, of foreign military aid, via Thailand, to the resistance, as the matter was handled exclusively by the military.

*Internal opposition to Chatchai’s policy*

Both the MFA and the Thai military rejected the "step-by-step" approach and an end to arms supplies to the Khmer resistance forces. They believed that a "partial settlement" of the conflict would not guarantee that all the remaining problems, especially the internal aspect of Cambodia, would subsequently be tackled. Following Chatchai’s proposal on a new approach to the conflict, General Chavalit said in 1989 that the Cambodian settlement must begin with internal issue of Cambodia. As was evident from their various official statements, the MFA and the military, did not trust that

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157 In mid-1990, according to *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, China for the first time secretly sent 24 tanks by sea, through Thailand, to the Khmer Rouge. This was the first such shipment. Acquisition of China’s armour marked the Khmer Rouge’s shift to conventional warfare tactics, a move permitted by the final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in September. See Sina Than, "Cambodia 1990: Towards a Peaceful Solution?", *Southeast Asian Affairs 1991*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), p. 95.


160 In late April 1989, after France had sent military aid to Sihanouk’s force, via Thailand, Chatchai said he was “surprised” to learn that such a transfer had taken place. Siddhi and General Sunthorn Kongsompong, Armed Forces Chief-of-Staff, on the other hand, said they were pleased with France’s assistance to the Khmer resistance and that Thailand was pleased to be a route for the weapons to pass through to the resistance. See *Khaopiset*, 26 April-2 May, 1989, p. 32 (in Thai).

Vietnam would genuinely withdraw all its troops and feared that without a verification by the UN Vietnam could still leave its soldiers and weapons with the PRK forces.\textsuperscript{162}

The MFA and the military believed that the Khmer Rouge should be included in a peace settlement. For Siddhi, the Khmer Rouge was the strongest force among the resistance, and its exclusion from a future Cambodian government, would only cause more fighting in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{163} Siddhi and Chavalit also rejected Chatchai's proposal that arms supplies to the resistance be halted. They noted that aid to the resistance should cease only after a withdrawal of Vietnamese troops was verified by the UN.\textsuperscript{164} After the U.S. Congress voted for military aid to the non-communist Khmer factions of the CGDK in late July, Siddhi declared that: "the military aid will have to be sent to Sihanouk via Thailand and we don't have any objection to make to that."\textsuperscript{165}

In 1989, it was clear that Thailand pursued two contradictory policies on the Cambodian conflict, but the MFA gained an upper hand in the policy, largely because its position continued to receive support in international forums. For example, the annual ASEAN foreign ministerial meeting, in Brunei, in early July, repeated its call for a comprehensive settlement to the Cambodian conflict.\textsuperscript{166} Siddhi also pushed hard for the Paris International Conference on Cambodia, in late July 1989, to focus on a comprehensive settlement and was supported by ASEAN, China and the U.S. The Paris peace talks thus put the spotlight again on the different approaches between ASEAN and Indochina, and the unchanged position of the powers involved. ASEAN, supported by China and the U.S., called for a comprehensive solution, whereas Vietnam and the SOC, supported by the Soviet Union, wanted to consider the external and internal aspects of the conflict separately.\textsuperscript{167} Another triumph for Siddhi's Cambodian policy

\textsuperscript{162} See the MFA statement, "Foreign Ministry statement on the withdrawal of Vietnamese soldiers from Cambodia" issued on 20 September, 1989 in FBIS, 21 September, 1989, p. 62; For statements by the military, see The Bangkok Post, 1 September, 1989, p. 9; Sayamrat, 10 September, 1989, pp. 1, 16 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{163} FBIS, 23 August, 1989, p. 51; The Bangkok Post, 19 February, 1990, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{164} The Bangkok Post, 14 May, 1989, p. 10; The Nation Review, 4 July, 1989, p. 1 and 6 July, 1989, p. 3. In late June 1989, a spokesman for the Armed Forces indicated that the military disagreed with the U.S. proposal to provide military aid to the two non-communist factions of the CGDK, while excluding the Khmer Rouge from the aid program and that Thailand supported the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge, in any future government in Cambodia. (The Bangkok Post, 23 June, 1989, p. 5.) The MFA also declared in early July 1989 that Thailand supported in principle the continuation of lethal and non-lethal aid to the resistance factions as a means of bolstering their bargaining power. See The Bangkok Post, 5 July, 1989, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{165} The Bangkok Post, 25 July, 1989, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{167} Michael Field, et al, "No end in sight", FEER, 7 September, 1989, pp. 14-15. After the breakdown of the Conference, Siddhi said that the time was "not ripe" for a settlement to the conflict, but he was still hopeful that a comprehensive solution to the conflict could be achieved. See The Nation Review, 1 September, 1989, p. 2.
was in November 1989, when the ASEAN-sponsored resolution to Cambodia at the U.N. which called for the international community to seek a comprehensive settlement to the conflict, received more support than ever.

In late 1989, Siddhi abruptly declared that the MFA would give the Prime Minister a free hand to deal with the Cambodian issue. Siddhi's decision was made largely because the conflict between him and Chatchai, over the Cambodian issue, had steadily worsened. MFA officials and Chatchai's advisers frequently entered into public quarrels over the Cambodian issue. The issue received considerable publicity, and regularly made headlines in the press. Indeed, the stability of the government was threatened when members of Siddhi's Social Action Party who supported Siddhi and expressed their discontent with Chatchai's advisers, who were seen as architects of his Indochinese policy. Therefore, according to a MFA official, Siddhi's decision was made because he did not want to see "the government crumble" as a result of the dispute.

Another factor which may have also caused Siddhi's low profile over the Cambodian issue, was that over time, Chatchai's policy had gained greater domestic support. In January 1990, for example, 90 government and opposition MPs unprecedentedly

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169 For example, in an article published in late 1989, an anonymous MFA official hit back at Chatchai's ceasefire proposal as wishful thinking and premature because no warring parties would accept a ceasefire, unless their military strength had been tested. The official also wrote that those who claimed a ceasefire would bring peace to Cambodia and the Thai-Cambodian border, should be asked: "what kind of peace they would like to bring to Cambodia: the one in which Cambodians do not have the right of self-determination as has been proposed by Vietnam and [the PRK's] Heng Samrin, or the one within which Cambodians become master of their country, a peace plan which Thailand and the world community have worked for in the last eleven years... It is true that the Khmer Rouge regime was a horror and that continued fighting in Cambodia would inevitably affect Thai people on the border. But one has to ask too if there is any country which takes into consideration only humanitarian and moral factors in its attempt to solve international conflict?" See Nai Buakeo, Khong tae chak wang saranrom, susanraree kaepanha kampuchea, [The Foreign Ministry's genuine solution to the Cambodian conflict], Matichon sudsupda, 24 December, 1989, pp. 20-21 (in Thai).

170 For example, a Thai newspaper, Thai Rat, published an article which reflected confusion, claiming that: "like the other 50 million Thai citizens, I have no idea what the government's policy on Cambodia and Indochina is..." (Thai Rat, 9 October, 1989, p. 3, in Thai.) Another editorial entitled "Two Thai factions and four Cambodian factions" revealed the deep divisions within the government. See Thai Rat, 11 September, 1989, p. 5 (in Thai).

171 A case in point was in late 1989 when Sukhumbhand made a comment that Siddhi should resign so Chatchai could achieve his Indochinese policy. Sukhumbhand had resigned from Chatchai's advisory team, but was still regarded as part of the team. The comment caused strong protest from a Social Action Party member, Prasop Budsraracom, who was chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. (Matichon supsupda, 5 November, 1989, p. 6, in Thai.) Prior to this, members of Social Action had voiced their displeasure with the advisers' conflict with Siddhi. It should also be noted that Deputy Prime Minister Pong Sarasin, a member of Social Action, also voiced his displeasure with the advisers' role in other issues. (Thai Rat, 20 March, 1989, pp. 1, 17, in Thai.) But the Cambodian issue caused the most displeasure among members of Social Action towards Chatchai's advisers.

submitted a letter urging Chatchai to act to stop the flow of military supplies to the Khmer resistance, via Thailand; stop the use of Thai territory as a sanctuary for any Khmer resistance factions; and to repatriate all 300,00 Cambodian refugees from the Thai border camps.173

With the lessening of opposition from the MFA, Chatchai played a more active role in bringing about a settlement to the conflict. This was evident by his facilitation of three rounds of peace talks between the four Khmer factions in 1990. However, the talks did not produce any substantial result to the conflict. In 1990, he made another shift in the Thai policy. In a cabinet meeting in March, he proposed a closure of all border camps—housing some 300,000 Cambodian displaced persons—and the sending of the refugees to UN-run "neutral camps".174 He claimed that the proposal was due to inadequate security within the camps, and that displaced Cambodians were forced to join guerilla forces of the three resistance factions. Neutral camps, set up in Thai territory and administered by the UN, would accommodate those who wished to dissociate themselves politically, from the political factions. The Ministries of Interior and Defence, were then assigned to draw up a plan for relocating the refugees.175

Chatchai’s plan would have had the effect of weakening the Khmer resistance by reducing its manpower base. It was well-known that refugees were reportedly controlled, and used, by the three Khmer resistance factions of the CGDK—for military and political gains.176 Creating "neutral camps" would have had the most impact on the Khmer Rouge—the only militarily active force among the three Khmer factions. Only the Khmer Rouge had been able to mobilise manpower in the camps, on a large scale, to join fighting forces.177

However, Chatchai’s plan was opposed by China, when he outlined his plan to visiting Chinese Defence Minister Qin Jiwei in early March 1990.178 It was also opposed by

173 The Nation Review, 18 January, 1990, p. 1. In response to the call, which was in line with his policy, Chatchai said that he welcomed the move, but wondered "why the MPs have waited so long to make such a call." See The Nation Review, 19 January, 1990, p. 2.

174 Displaced Cambodians had taken refuge in Thailand since the late 1970s. In principle, the refugee camps were under the supervision of the Thai Supreme Command, with aid channelled from various international organisations. In line with the other ASEAN countries, Thailand’s policy was that repatriation to Cambodians should only come as part of a comprehensive settlement of the Cambodian conflict.


176 Vitiit Muntarbhorn, "Refugees sanctuary", FEER, 12 April, 1990, p. 27.

177 In early 1990, the Khmer Rouge had been able to move over 10,000 Cambodians from camps to its area inside Cambodia. See Ibid., p. 27.

178 The Bangkok Post, 7 March, 1990, pp. 1, 3.
Thai Supreme Commander General Sunthon Khongsomphong, who said that neutral camps should not be built inside Thailand, but could be located on the Thai-Cambodian border. A spokesman for the Supreme Command later announced that "neutral camps" for displaced Cambodians were not necessary, and that "authorities" should take measures to clear the existing camps of any influence from the resistance forces. It was not clear who the "authorities" were and there was no evidence of any such measures.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has described Chatchai's remarkable attempt to make a major shift in Thai policy towards Indochina. Within the short life of his government, Thailand's relations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, improved considerably. However, the new policy caused intense conflict among key policy-makers, and its implementation was uneven. The conflict derived both from the conduct of policy, and particularly, from divergence in policy goals. Chatchai introduced an abrupt change in the country's Indochinese policy, with inadequate consultation and communication with other foreign policy-making institutions and the public. Moreover, the reasoning of Chatchai's policy towards Indochina, which gave primary importance to economic considerations, was totally different from the previous decade-long policy. As noted in Chapter III, the military had long dominated the formulation of Thailand's policy towards Indochina. As such, security considerations had long taken precedence over every other issues. The period under the Chatchai government again reflected the dominant role of the military in Thailand's Indochinese policy, especially in Cambodian affairs. The reason that the MFA, under the leadership of Siddhi, could resist changing long-held anti-Vietnam policy, was largely because its policy was in line with that of the military.

External factors were also the major reason for Chatchai's little achievement in his attempt to reformulate Thailand's policy towards the Cambodian conflict. The MFA and the Thai military took a different position from Chatchai, on the Cambodian issue, and they were supported by most countries which opposed Vietnam's occupation. However, Chatchai's peace proposals on Cambodia, which was mostly rejected during his tenure in office, was somewhat similar to the final settlement of the conflict, as will be shown in Chapter VIII. Given the complexity of the Cambodian conflict, it was in fact beyond one country's ability to solve the conflict. This was evident in the Paris Agreement on Cambodia in October 1991, was the result of changes in the international

179 The Nation Review, 4 April, 1990, p. 2.

situation which brought about consent and cooperation, from all major actors concerned, in bringing an end to the conflict.
Chapter VIII

The Thai Military and the Ongoing "Cambodian Problem"

In October 1991, the Cambodian conflict "officially" ended when the Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia was signed. For Thailand, however, the "Cambodian problem" did not end, for there appeared to be an ongoing relationship between sections of the Thai military and the Khmer Rouge. In particular, elements of the Thai military continued to support the Khmer Rouge in its struggle against the new Phnom Penh government. Some discussion of this issue is needed since it illuminates an important aspect of Thai security perceptions towards Vietnam and Cambodia.

First, however, this chapter offers a brief examination of Thailand's policy towards Vietnam in the period just prior to the final settlement of the Cambodian conflict.

Thailand's policy towards Indochina

The interim civilian government of Anand Panyaratun, which was installed by the February 1991 coup leaders, immediately announced that it would follow Chatchai's policy of turning Indochina from a battlefield into a marketplace.\(^1\) It should be noted that the Anand government was given a relatively free hand by the coup group in dealing with the country's economy. The background of Prime Minister Anand and Foreign Minister Arsa Sarasin in business also brought them a vision of the importance of Indochina for the Thai economy.\(^2\) The Thai business community generally believed that Indochina's rich resources would be of benefit to Thailand, which found itself increasingly depleted of the raw materials and natural resources it needed for its fast-growth economy.

Like Chatchai, civilian leaders during the Anand government were confident of the fast growth of the Thai economy. This confidence was reflected in the government's policy towards Thailand's less prosperous neighbouring countries. As Foreign Minister Arsa put it, since Thailand was economically more advanced than its neighbouring countries, it had a moral obligation to provide assistance to its less fortunate neighbours. An unprecedented assistance program was thus set up to offer technical and grant aid to

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2 Anand Panyaratun was a former Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary and Ambassador to the U.S. and the United Nations. He resigned from government service in 1977 after being accused by the Thanin government (October 1976-October 1977) of having communist sympathies. He joined the Saha Union Company, one of Thailand's largest industry firms where he stayed until he was appointed Prime Minister. Foreign Minister Arsa Sarasin was a former Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary and Ambassador to the U.S. He resigned from government service in 1988 and joined a private industry company until he was appointed as Foreign Minister in the Anand government.
"less fortunate countries", including Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. Arsa also declared that the prosperous Indochinese economies would in turn, benefit all of Southeast Asia, and that Thailand would serve as "a vital linkage between ASEAN and Indochina." Increasing Thai business links with Indochina, particularly with Vietnam, were strongly encouraged. The government announced that it gave high priority to economic relations with Vietnam, despite the Cambodian conflict and, as a result, economic relations with Vietnam improved during the Anand government. A joint economic commission between Thailand and Vietnam was set up during Arsa's visit to Hanoi in September 1991 to enhance economic cooperation between the two countries. Thailand also entered into negotiations with Vietnam on a number of large-scale joint venture investment projects, notably the development of petroleum resources and fisheries. In late October 1991, Vo Van Kiet became the first Vietnamese Prime Minister to visit Thailand in 13 years. The central purpose of his visit was the promotion of economic relations between the two countries.

In contrast to that of Chatchai, the Anand government's policy towards the Cambodian conflict generally followed the decade-long policy agreed upon by the Foreign Ministry under the leadership of Siddhi and the military. In mid-1991, Secretary-General of the National Security Council (NSC) Suwit Suthanukun described Thai policy towards Cambodia as follows: first, Thailand believed that there were still large number of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia even after Vietnam's "final" troop withdrawal in September 1989, Thailand therefore required Vietnam to withdraw all of its troops; second, a political solution to the conflict should include all Cambodian factions; and third, Cambodia should not be a threat to Thailand. Thailand also reiterated its expectation that a repatriation of some 386,000 Cambodian refugees would take place after the settlement of the conflict.

Under the Anand government, Thailand adopted a low-profile role in the settlement of the Cambodian conflict as well. Since Thai policy was largely reflected in the peace plan on Cambodia announced by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (Perm Five) in August 1990 (see below), the Anand government announced that it supported the UN plan and would not take separate initiatives to solve the conflict, but would play a supporting role to the UN. Notwithstanding the pledge,

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3 FBIS, 16 April, 1991, p. 49; 23 April, 1991, p. 56. The other country under the assistance program was Nepal.


5 FBIS, 20 June, 1991, p. 32.

the government nonetheless facilitated two meetings between the four Khmer factions in June and August 1991, after a request from Sihanouk.

The Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia

The end of the Cold War contributed greatly to the improvement of Sino-Soviet relations and Sino-Vietnamese relations. This section briefly looks at significant developments leading to the Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia in October 1991.

As Thayer has succinctly pointed out, the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship—which was symbolised by the 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation—"was at heart an anti-China alliance." The alliance delivered large-scale Soviet military and economic assistance to Vietnam. However, as has been noted, relations between Moscow and Hanoi changed following the improvement of Sino-Soviet relations in the late 1980s. During 1990-1991 when the Soviet Union itself was on the verge of collapse, its military and economic support to Vietnam virtually collapsed. Economic aid was greatly reduced in 1990 and from 1991, payment for Soviet goods had to be in hard currency (which the Vietnamese lacked) and Hanoi was asked to repay a large amount of the debt it owed to Moscow. In June 1991, the dissolution of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (Comecon), the Soviet-dominated economic bloc, had an enormous impact on Vietnam, since about 80 per cent of Vietnam's imports came from Comecon countries. It also affected the Phnom Penh regime which had received substantial aid from Comecon countries throughout the 1980s. The Soviet Union also ended its subsidised military assistance program to Vietnam. In 1991, it began a three-year disengagement of all its military forces from Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay. Moscow's policy of improving relations with Beijing, Washington, and ASEAN, also involved an effort to help end the Cambodian conflict. In 1990, Vietnamese sources claimed that the Soviet Union wanted the conflict solved "for good".

The political and military withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Vietnam drove Hanoi to improve its ties with Beijing, as evidenced by its overtures to China for a normalisation of Sino-Vietnamese relations. With the Soviet power in global retreat, China no

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11 In 1990, Vietnamese sources said that there had been higher level contacts between Vietnam and China to improve their relationship. It should also be noted that shortly after the Seventh Congress of the
longer perceived Vietnam and the Phnom Penh regime as elements of a Soviet plan to encircle China. In 1991, the political chaos in the Soviet Union and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe gave new momentum to Sino-Vietnamese relations, as each now found mutual interest in preserving their respective communist regimes. However, China stated that in order for normalisation of relations with Vietnam to occur, the latter would need to help bring about a settlement of the Cambodian conflict that was in line with the August 1990 UN peace plan. (see the UN peace plan below) The improvement of Sino-Vietnamese relations was crucial to the settlement of the Cambodian conflict. Both China and Vietnam played a critical role in urging their respective Khmer 'clients' to comply with the UN peace plan.

U.S. policy towards the Cambodian issue also changed in 1990-1991. In July 1990, then Secretary of State James Baker announced that the U.S. would no longer support the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) seat at the UN if the CGDK included the Khmer Rouge. At the same time, Washington indicated that it would open direct dialogue with Vietnam on the Cambodian issue and provide humanitarian aid to the Phnom Penh regime. The reasons for this major shift in U.S. policy which reversed a decade-long refusal to talk directly with Vietnam on the Cambodian issue, were two-fold. First, the Bush Administration was under pressure from both the American public and Congress to prevent a return to power of the Khmer Rouge. Second, the end of the Cold War and the decline of Soviet military power, including Moscow's military disengagement forces from Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay meant that a major source of U.S. antipathy to Vietnam had disappeared.

Communist Party of Vietnam in June 1991, a number of individual considered to be anti-China, including Foreign Minister Thach were dropped from the politburo. See Michael Vatikiotis, "Grudging unity", FEER, 20 September, 1990, p. 11.

12 In July 1991, Chinese leaders told visiting General Le Duc Anh, who ranked second in the Vietnamese politburo, that China "agrees completely" with the result of Hanoi's seventh congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in June 1991 which reaffirmed that the Party would retain its hold on political power while loosening its control over the economy. According to a Vietnamese official: "The Chinese side expressed deep concern about the loss of power of many communist parties and the weakening position of socialism in the world. On the basis of this, both sides agreed to improve relations." See Murray Hiebert and Tai Cheung, "Comrades again", FEER, 22 August, 1991, p. 8.

13 Yeong, "Cambodia 1991: Lasting Peace or Decent Interval?", p. 115.

14 At the meeting between the four Khmer factions in Thailand in August 1991, for example, the presence of the Chinese and Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Ministers contributed to the success of the meeting. However, it would be too simplistic to assume that Beijing and Hanoi possessed complete influence over their respective Khmer 'clients'. The decade-long armed struggle had bred deep distrust and hatred among the warring Khmer factions, and these sentiments were major obstacle to progress towards a settlement.

15 Some U.S. allies, including Japan and Britain, were also increasingly opposed to the Khmer Rouge and had begun to establish contacts with the Phnom Penh regime. The European Community (EC) stated in early 1990 that central to its policy towards the Cambodian issue was the prevention of a return to power of the Khmer Rouge. The EC also indicated that it wanted to move closer to Vietnam. See Nayan Chanda, "For reasons of state", FEER, 2 August, 1990, pp. 10-11; Sina Than, "Cambodia 1990: Towards
In April 1991, the U.S. took a more active role in the Cambodian issue by presenting
Vietnam with a four-phase proposal—the so-called "road map”. Washington proposed
that every step Hanoi made towards resolving the Cambodian conflict would be
rewarded by removal certain U.S.-imposed restrictions. This process would eventually
lead to the normalisation of relations between the two countries.16

The shift in the positions of the major players on the Cambodian conflict led to an
acceptance of a major UN role in the conflict. In November 1989, Australia proposed a
temporary UN transitional administration in Cambodia to run the country while
elections were being arranged, and an international control mechanism to verify
Vietnamese troops withdrawal and monitor a ceasefire. In January 1990, the Perm Five
unanimously approved the Australian plan and agreed that the UN should assume
responsibility for bringing about a comprehensive political settlement to the Cambodian
conflict.17 On 28 August, 1990, the Perm Five outlined a comprehensive UN peace plan
on Cambodia. The plan spelled out the UN's role in supervising an interim government,
military arrangements for the transitional period, free elections, human rights protection
and guarantees for the neutrality of a future Cambodia. The fact that the plan was
agreed upon by China, the Soviet Union and the U.S., all of which had been major
supporters to the Khmer warring parties, raised real hopes that a settlement of the
Cambodian conflict was at hand.18

The role of the UN during the transitional period was accepted by all the four Khmer
 factions, but they still disagreed among themselves on the degree to which the UN
should exert authority and the power-sharing formula which would operate in the UN-
supervised interim government. The period from 1990 until the official settlement of
the Cambodian conflict in October 1991 thus witnessed attempts by various countries,

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16 The four-phase plan was in phase one, as soon as Hanoi and Phnom Penh signed an international
peace agreement on Cambodia, the U.S. would allow American business and veterans' groups to travel to
Vietnam. The U.S. would also allow Vietnamese diplomats in New York City to travel beyond the 38
kilometres limit then in force. In phase two, once UN officials had arrived in Cambodia and arranged a
ceasefire, the U.S. would end the trade embargo against Cambodia and start to lift the trade embargo
against Vietnam. Phase three would take place six months after the peace accord had been in effect and
after all Vietnamese advisers left Cambodia, the U.S. would end the trade embargo against Vietnam and
would start easing U.S. opposition to loans to Vietnam by international financial institutions. Phase four,
which would begin after free elections in Cambodia and the opening of a new national assembly, would
see the U.S. fully normalising diplomatic and economic relations with Vietnam and Cambodia. The U.S.
would grant Most-Favoured-Nation trading status and its full backing to lending by international
financial institutions to both countries. See Susumu Awanohara and Murray Hiebert, "Open door in

17 The Australian peace plan was formulated by Senator Gareth Evans, Australian Minister of Foreign
Affairs and Trade. It built on a suggestion in October 1989 by Congressman Stephen Solarz, Chairman of
the U.S. House Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs. See Michael

including Thailand, to create a power-sharing formula acceptable to all the Khmer factions.

The final settlement of the conflict began with a ceasefire between the four Khmer warring parties—a step which Chatchai had previously proposed in May 1989. On 22 April, 1991, Indonesia and France, co-chairmen of the Paris International Conference on Cambodia, and the UN Secretary-General issued a joint statement appealing to the four parties to observe a voluntary cease-fire from 1 May. The appeal was accepted and observed, to a large extent, by all the Khmer parties. 19

On 23 October, 1991, the Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia was signed by 19 countries under the auspices of the Paris International Conference on Cambodia. Under the Agreement, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), a peace-keeping organisation, would oversee the one and a half year transitional period of Cambodia. While the twelve-member Supreme National Council (SNC), comprised of six members from the Phnom Penh regime and two each from the three resistance factions of the CGDK, would embody Cambodia's sovereignty, UNTAC would take over the five key ministries—Defence, Foreign Affairs, finance, interior and information until UN-supervised general elections were held. During this period, some 20,000 peacekeeping forces and civilian personnel would be deployed in Cambodia. UNTAC's responsibilities were to enforce a ceasefire, and to verify both the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops and the cessation of all foreign arms supplies. In addition, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees would undertake the repatriation of all Cambodian displaced persons from Thailand. 20

The Paris Agreement was a comprehensive peace accord in line with what Thailand had long worked for. Moreover, given the realities of the Cambodian situation, the Agreement was the best result that Thailand could hope for. Until the Paris Agreement, the Phnom Penh regime controlled most of Cambodian territory and population and possessed a far greater number of troops compared with those of the Khmer resistance forces. 21 It was thus a political triumph for Thailand and other countries which opposed Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia.

19 Although violations of the ceasefire agreement took place, it was generally agreed that the fighting in Cambodia dropped considerably in the period after the ceasefire came into effect. See Murray Heibert, "Pessimism for peace", FEER, 30 May, 1991, p. 15.


21 According to Kiernan, over two years after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in late 1989, the Phnom Penh regime still had control of all 20 provincial capitals, and all but 2 of 172 district towns. This amounted to more than 90 per cent of Cambodian territory and population. In 1991, the Phnom Penh regime informed the UN that its full-time troops numbered 140,000 (Ben Kiernan, "The Cambodian Crisis, 1990-1992: The UN Plan, the Khmer Rouge, and the State of Cambodia", Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1992, pp. 3, 16.) In mid-1991, it was estimated that the Khmer Rouge had about 30-40,000 forces. See The Nation Review, 28 June, 1991, p. A18.
The Thai military and the Khmer Rouge

In late 1992, Cambodia was again plunged into political chaos when the Khmer Rouge rejected the disarmament and cantonment stage of the UN peace plan mainly on the grounds that there had been no verification of the final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in September 1989.22 This rejection resulted in economic sanctions against the Khmer Rouge-controlled area by the Supreme National Council of Cambodia in September 1992, and subsequently by the United Nations Security Council in late November. Consequently, the Khmer Rouge withdrew from the UN-organised national election in May 1993 and returned to a strategy of armed struggle against the government in Phnom Penh. Throughout this period, Thai leaders held a number of meetings with leaders of the Khmer Rouge to seek a means by which the group could rejoin the UN peace plan.

After the Khmer Rouge's intransigence, Thailand was accused by the Cambodian government and UNTAC of providing support to the Khmer Rouge—with particular reference being made to the direct support provided by Thai military in the forms of sanctuary and weapons. These accusations have been repeated as recently as May 1994.23

It is unclear whether Thai support to the Khmer Rouge has been halted at the time of writing.24 In March 1994, a senior official of the MFA said that Thai support to the

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22 FBIS, 29 December, 1992, pp. 59-60. The Khmer Rouge also demanded that: "hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese 'settlers' in Cambodia be expelled." Concerning this issue, the UN stated that: "the issue of foreign residents and immigrants is a matter which deeply concerns many Cambodians... [therefore, this was] a matter for discussion between the future government of Cambodia and the Governments of neighbouring countries." See Frederick Z. Brown, "Cambodia in 1992: Peace at Peril", Asian Survey, January, 1993, p. 86.

23 A report in the FEER claimed that according to a confidential UNTAC document, "Thai army units move freely in the DKZ [Democratic Kampuchea Zone, or the Khmer Rouge-controlled area] and have been accused of aiding the Khmer Rouge militarily." (Nayan Chanda, "Strained ties", FEER, 17 December, 1992, p. 26.) During the last half of 1993, a number of complaints were made by Norodom Rannariddh, Prime Minister of the new Cambodian government, to the Thai government, claiming that Khmer Rouge forces took sanctuary in Thailand after clashes with government troops and that weapons were sent to the Khmer Rouge from Thailand. (Arthit, 17-23 December, 1993, p. 16, in Thai.) In his interview in May 1994, King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia claimed that the Khmer Rouge's advantage in its struggle against the Phnom Penh government was because "they are very friendly with the Thais, especially the military." (Nayan Chanda, "The centre cannot hold", FEER, 19 May, 1994, p. 19.) An article by William Shawcross in late May 1994, claimed that the Thai army "still gives logistical support to the Khmer Rouge and, according to Phnom Penh, weapons also." See William Shawcross, "Cambodia at the crossroad", The Australian, 30 May, 1994, p. 9.

24 A case which seemed to suggest the on-going support from the Thai military to the Khmer Rouge was an incident in early December 1993. A truck carrying some five tonnes of weapons was stopped by Thai police on a road close to the Thai-Cambodian border. The arrest of the truck led to the discovery of a 1,500-tonne cache of Chinese-made weapons located in the Thai province of Chantaburi which is opposite Cambodia's town of Pailin - the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge. The cache had been in Thailand since the early 1980s when weapons from various countries were channelled through Thailand to the Khmer resistance of the CGDK. After the Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia in October 1991,
Khmer Rouge had ended following the Paris Peace Agreement, and that after the Khmer Rouge boycott of the UN-organised May 1993 election, Thailand considered the guerillas as an "outlaw group". He said that he did not believe that it was the policy of the current military leadership who had never had connections with the Khmer Rouge, to provide support to the group. However, he felt that "small-scale support" to the group could be possible, as the group had resided on the Thai-Cambodian border for more than a decade and thus had been familiar with local officials who might continue to provide support. In other words the problem, insofar as it existed, was a result of an uncontrollable border situation.

It is difficult to gauge Thai policy towards the Khmer Rouge since there appeared to be different views within the Thai security establishment. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest reasons why sections of the Thai military might have wished to support the Khmer Rouge.

First, support for the Khmer Rouge may have been determined by the military's continuing concern of the "Vietnamese threat". Some military leaders warned about Vietnam's long-term intention of dominating Cambodia and Laos and/or of establishing an "Indochinese Federation" which would include Cambodia, Laos and part of Thailand's northeast region.

the Thai military refused to return the weapons to the other two factions of the resistance government of the CGDK, the Sihanoukists and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front.

There seems to be little doubt that the truck was destined for the Khmer Rouge. (The investigation was not finalised at the time of writing.) In any case, the police discovery of the cache revealed a lack of coordination on the issue on the part of Thailand. It was unclear why the police took the action without the military's knowledge. According to a senior Thai diplomat, the arrest of the truck took place "accidentally" and the Director of the Police Department did not have any knowledge of the history of the cache. (Personal communication with a senior Thai diplomat, Canberra, 29 March, 1994). Following the incident, the government and the military took up conflicting positions on the issue. Thai Foreign Minister Prasong Soonsiri announced that the cache, sent by "friendly countries" and destined for Khmer factions, would eventually be returned to its original owners. However, Army Commander-in-Chief General Wimon Wongwanich stated that the weapons belong to the Thai army and that Prasong "may not understand." Wimon nonetheless denied any support from the military to the Khmer Rouge. See The Bangkok Post, 12 December, 1993, p. 1; 15 December, 1993, p. 1; and Rodney Tasker, "Caught in the Act", FEER, 23 December, 1993, p. 13.

Another source claimed in late March 1994, that "Unit 838" - a special Thai army unit set up to work with the Khmer resistance groups during the 1980s - was still operating. The source quoted "several Thai military rangers deployed in eastern Chantaburi province" as saying that the Unit's main purpose now was to coordinate with the Khmer Rouge. See Sutin Wannabavorn, "Thai unit with guerrilla links said to still exist", Reuter, Bangkok, 30 March, 1994.

25 As noted in Chapter IV, the covert Sino-Thai cooperation on support to the Khmer resistance groups, including the Khmer Rouge, was handled by a few number of officers in the Thai security establishment. General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, probably the most important person on this issue, retired from military service in April 1990. General Suchinda Kraprayoon, Chavalit's successor, and his faction in the Army was said to have close connection with the Khmer Rouge as well. Suchinda became Prime Minister in April 1992 and was overthrown in the "May 1992 massacre". General Wimon Wongwanich became Army Commander-in-Chief since 1992. He is believed to have played no part in the Thai support to the Khmer resistance during the 1980s.

26 Personal communication with a senior Thai diplomat, Canberra, 29 March, 1994.
As discussed in Chapter V, Laos and Cambodia have been the Thais' traditional "buffer zones" vis-a-vis the Vietnamese, forming a crucial part of Thai defence planning. Thus, the period from the late 1970s to the end of the 1980s, when Vietnam dominated both Laos and Cambodia, was a major setback for the Thai military. In the case of Laos, where Vietnam stationed thousands of troops since the late 1970s, Thailand evidently allowed Laotian rightist rebels to operate from Thai territory. Moreover, although the Laotian government announced in early 1989 that all Vietnamese troops had been withdrawn from Laos by late 1988, Thai support to Laotian rebels may have remained at least until mid-1993 or beyond. For the Thai security establishment, it was in the interests of Thailand not only to prevent Laos and Cambodia from succumbing to Vietnamese power, but also to have some sort of Thai influence over the two countries.

Despite Vietnam's economic difficulties and a lack of Soviet support, perception of the "Vietnamese threat" in sections of the Thai military remained. It should also be noted that Vietnam has been the only country regularly referred to by military leaders as a threat to Thailand's security. In late 1991, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, then Army Commander-in-Chief and one of the most powerful military leaders at that time, was asked which country he considered major threats to Thailand. He responded that:

> Vietnam remains a threat to [Thailand] because, of all our close neighbouring countries, Vietnam is the only country that is more powerful than [Thailand] in terms of military power. Vietnam has thousands of tanks and millions of troops - and the numbers have not been reduced.

In other words, the Vietnamese threat was not being gauged by the policies of the current government, which could quickly change, but by its military capabilities. In another interview in early 1992, General Suchinda suggested that the "Vietnamese threat" stemmed from the fact that Vietnam was a communist country. He also argued that a realignment of the two communist countries—China and Vietnam—posed a potential threat to the region:

> The collapse of communism in Europe, especially... in the Soviet Union, tends to make people think that there is no more communism. But in this region, we still cannot figure out what directions will be taken by China, Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia.... China will try its best in order to prop up communism. Vietnam will turn toward China since it can no longer depend on the Soviet Union. This will have an impact on Thailand... We have already seen an improvement in relations between Vietnam and China.

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28 See the BBC's interview with General Suchinda in London on 18 September, 1991 in FBIS, 10 October, 1991, p. 43.

29 Thai Rat, 2 January, 1992, p. 3 (in Thai).
In another interview, Suchinda stated that there was no change in Thailand's belief that Vietnam was its foremost enemy:

Militarily, Thailand will not change its attitude towards Vietnam. Soldiers must always be ready for defence responsibility. Although [Thailand and Vietnam] are friends today, we may fight each other tomorrow when there are conflicts of interest.\textsuperscript{30}

The military's belief that Vietnam had designs on Thailand's northeast region had been an important determinant of Thailand's all-out opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia in the early 1980s. In early 1993, General Chetta Tanajaro, Commander of the First Army Region, said that the military still believed that Vietnam desired to occupy Thailand's northeast region. But he argued that Vietnam's ailing economy meant that the Vietnamese were unable to carry out their aggressive designs at the present time. Nevertheless, he said that:

Vietnam's national objective is to expand to Thailand's northeast region. Vietnam is vulnerable to external threat because of its geography which is long and narrow. Therefore, it would be more secure if it could include the area [in Cambodia and Laos] up to Thailand's northeast region. Because of this geo-strategic reason, this objective has never been changed. The reason that Vietnam has not yet fulfilled this objective is only because of its ailing economy.\textsuperscript{31}

Given these military beliefs, the Khmer Rouge presumably was still seen by some Thai military leaders as a strategic asset - a "buffer force"—for Thailand. Following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, Thailand allowed the Khmer Rouge to build military bases on the Thai-Cambodian border and inside Thai territory. The armed Khmer Rouge presence functioned as Thailand's buffer force vis-a-vis Vietnamese troops in Cambodia. The Thai military and the Khmer Rouge cooperated closely against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. Khmer Rouge forces received military training from the Thai military, and joint military operations were held between Khmer Rouge

\textsuperscript{30} The Bangkok Post, 9 January, 1992, pp. 1, 3.

\textsuperscript{31} Khaorphiset, 15-21 January, 1993, p. 17 (in Thai). The military's suspicion of the "Vietnamese threat" to the northeast can be seen from its highly sensitive reaction to any Vietnamese activity in the region, where a sizeable population of overseas Vietnamese resided. In 1991, the Army opposed Vietnam's proposal that Thailand's northeast province of Udon Thani be a location for its consulate in return for a Thai consulate in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City. It was argued that a Vietnamese consulate in the region could revive the patriotic movement and facilitate "subversive activities" that could undermine Thai security. Vietnam finally agreed to drop Udon Thani as a site for its consulate in favour of the northern province of Chiang Mai. In late 1991, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, then Army Commander-in-Chief, openly accused that Vietnamese Embassy in Thailand had interfered too much with, and had exerted too much influence on, Vietnamese refugees who came to Thailand in the early 1990s. See The Bangkok Post, 20 May, 1991, p. 4; 19 September, 1991, p. 1; and 27 October, 1991, p. 5. See also the issue of overseas Vietnamese in Thailand in Chapter III.

It should be noted that Commander of the First Army Region is one of the most powerful and crucial positions within the military because it controls Bangkok and the metropolitan areas, including some border provinces. Therefore, Commanders of the First Army Region have played a decisive role in most of the military coups in Thailand.
and Thai forces against Vietnamese and the Phnom Penh regime's troops. Thai soldiers reportedly fought "side-by-side" with Khmer Rouge guerillas. For example, the guerillas joined in the Thai army's major operation against Vietnam at Chong Bok in 1987.\textsuperscript{32} Thai military leaders and Khmer Rouge leaders also developed personal ties.\textsuperscript{33} The Thai security establishment believed that it was the Khmer Rouge who had prevented Vietnam's complete control of Cambodia and weakened the pro-Vietnamese Phnom Penh regime. The other two factions of the resistance government under the leadership of Sihanouk and Son Sann were both weak. Sihanouk had never had a friendly relationship with Thailand and Son Sann played no important role in the Cambodian conflict and was not poised to become an important figure in post-war Cambodian politics. Therefore, it would seem that Thailand could not hope for a good relationship with Sihanouk and Son Sann in a post-war Cambodia.

The final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in September 1989 took place without the verification of the UN as Thailand had long demanded. The Thai military claimed that Vietnam had retained some of its troops in Cambodia and redeployed them in the Phnom Penh regime's forces. This Vietnamese presence gave Hanoi continued influence over the Phnom Penh regime. In their interviews in 1993, Generals Chetta Tanajaro and Charan Kullavanit implied that they agreed with the Khmer Rouge's claim in 1992 that UNTAC did not take any action in verifying the final withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in September 1989 and that therefore some troops might still be left in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{34}

Whether Vietnam in fact left some troops in Cambodia is unclear and probably impossible to determine. There were reports that Vietnam redeployed its troops from Vietnam to help the Phnom Penh force after the Khmer Rouge captured the gem-rich town of Pailin in October 1989. According to U.S. intelligence, some 10,000

\textsuperscript{32} It was reported that the "joint operation" between Khmer Rouge forces and Thai troops was a result of the close relationship between General Issaraphong Numpakdi, Commander of the Second Army Region (October 1986-October 1989), and Ta Mok, a high-ranking Khmer Rouge leader. See Khaophiset, 28 May-2 June, 1993, p. 14 (in Thai).

\textsuperscript{33} It was reported that Thai army officers who were in charge of the Thai-Cambodian border during the 1980s had close ties with leaders of the Khmer resistance forces. Two army leaders who reportedly had close ties with the Khmer Rouge were Generals Chavalit Yongchaiyudh and Issaraphong Numpakdi, Commander of the Second Army Region. (Khaophiset, 28 May - 2 June 1993, p. 36; Arthit, 17-25 December, 1993, p. 16 and Lak that, 6-12 February, 1993, p. 4, in Thai.) It was well-known that Pol Pot, the paramount leader of the Khmer Rouge, travelled from Khmer Rouge-controlled areas in Cambodia to nearby areas in Thailand where he stayed in a "safe-house" under the protection of special Thai army units. (AFP report in FBIS, 27 July, 1992, p. 48.) In April 1991, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, then Army-Commander-in-Chief, told a visiting U.S. senator that he considered Pol Pot a "nice guy". Quoted in Kieman, "The Cambodian Crisis, 1990-1992: The UN Plan, the Khmer Rouge, and the State of Cambodia", p. 10.

\textsuperscript{34} See interviews with Commander of the First Army Region General Chetta Tanajaro and Secretary-General of the NSC General Charan Kullavanit in Khaophiset, 15-21 January, 1993, p. 15; 7-13 May, 1993, p. 14 respectively (in Thai).
Vietnamese troops were stationed in the western part of Cambodia during October 1989 to March 1990. Other sources suggested the number of Vietnamese troops left in Cambodia after September 1989 to be anywhere from 3,000 to 7,000. In a testimony in April 1991 to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Solomon, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, stated that since 1989, Vietnam had sent several thousand military advisers and some civilian advisers back to Cambodia. However, following the completion of the first phase of the peace plan, which included a verification of Vietnamese troop withdrawal, the UN issued a statement in November 1992 that it had found no evidence of foreign forces remaining in Cambodia, at least in the areas to which it had access.

At any rate, the close relationship between the Thai military and the Khmer Rouge, and the belief that the Hun Sen faction of the coalition government, which was formed after the May 1993 election and was the second largest political party in the coalition, was under Vietnamese influence, gave rise to the conviction within the Thai military that Thailand's security interest would be best served if the Khmer Rouge were returned to power in Phnom Penh. This was certainly the view of General Sanan Kachornklam who perceived that the Khmer Rouge was the most disciplined force among the Khmer resistance groups and believed that the Hun Sen faction would always be close to Vietnam. The Thai military reportedly believed that the Hun Sen faction would be dominant because of its control over the Phnom Penh Armed Forces. In this respect, the existence of the Khmer Rouge force was deemed essential, presumably in the sense that it could check power of the Cambodian government.

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36 According to Solomon: "More recently we've had evidence that small combat teams have gone in and out of Cambodia. So I think - our evidence isn't all that strong or reliable - that the Phnom Penh regime has not done very well militarily... and Vietnam is doing its best to buck it up to shore up its performance." Sydney Morning Herald, 27 April, 1991, cited in Frank Frost, "The Cambodia Conflict: The Path towards Peace", Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol. 13, No. 2, September, 1991, p. 132.


38 Personal communication, General Sanan Kachornklam, Head of the Cambodian refugees repatriation program, Bangkok, 8 July, 1992. The perception that the Khmer Rouge was the most disciplined force among the Khmer resistance groups was also shared by General Prasert Pakchareon, Director of the Suranaree Task Force, who was in charge of the Thai-Cambodian border in the early 1990s. See Lak thai, 5-11 May, 1992, p. 10 (in Thai).

39 The case which indicated the Thai military's suspicion of the Hun Sen faction was the military's rejection of Prime Minister Norodom Rannaridh's request in late 1993 for a return of weapons belonging to the former Sihanoukist army. The weapons had been channelled from various countries through Thailand to the Khmer resistance government of CGDK during the 1980s and had been kept in Thailand. One of the reasons for Rannaridh's request was that the weapons would be necessary for the Phnom Penh government to cope with the Khmer Rouge "rebellion". The request was turned down in November 1993 on the grounds that the Khmer Rouge at the time could not be considered a "rebellion" because it still had its official office in Phnom Penh and had expressed its keen interest to join the Phnom Penh...
Another reason for Thai military's support for the Khmer Rouge may have been the perception that political disorder in neighbouring countries could serve Thai security interests. This was pointed out in early 1993 by General Chetta Tanajaro, Commander of the First Army Region:

Frankly speaking, if [Thailand's] neighbouring countries were not at peace, it would be good for us. Naturally we would suffer from fighting spill-overs. But overall, that situation would be better than if they were at peace because the prospect that they could launch a large-scale aggression against us would be virtually impossible. Take the example of the Khmer Rouge when it was in power during 1975-1978, they came to kill Thai people and burn Thai villages. But these things did not happen any more when its country was at war [during the 1980s].

This line of reasoning was not new in the contemporary history of Thai relations with its neighbouring countries. A case in point was, as noted in Chapter V, the Thai strategy on the Thai-Burmese border. From the 1950s, Thai support for various ethnic minority groups in Burma in their armed struggle against the Rangoon regime was justified on the grounds that so long as Rangoon was preoccupied with the pacification of its minorities, the prospect of Burma becoming a direct and major threat to Thailand was virtually impossible.

Nevertheless, there was also a contrasting view. In mid-1993, General Charan Kullavanit, Secretary-General of the National Security Council, argued that a peaceful Cambodia and a strong Cambodian government would enhance stability on the Thai-Cambodian border. From his viewpoint, if a Cambodian government was strong and was able to provide welfare to its people, it would lessen the chance that Cambodians would become bandits along the Thai-Cambodian border—a problem which had long existed. He also asserted that since the Khmer Rouge's strongholds were in the area flanking the Thai-Cambodian border, the group's activities could become a liability for Thailand if it became isolated. In this respect, he said that the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in a post-war Cambodian government was imperative for Thailand, otherwise its forces would have no choice but to become armed bandits along the Thai-Cambodian border.

The belief that a strong Cambodian government would best serve Thai interests was also asserted by former Secretary-General of the NSC Suwit Suthanukun in his government. It was reported that in the eyes of the Thai security establishment, the Hun Sen faction controlled the armed forces of the Phnom Penh government and thus was the most powerful faction in the government. It was believed that a return of weapons to the Phnom Penh government would only help eliminate the Khmer Rouge forces and in turn strengthen the Hun Sen faction. See Arthit, 17-23 December, 1993, pp. 15-18 (in Thai).


41 Khaophiset, 7-13 May, 1993, p. 14; and 28 May-2 June, 1993, p. 15 (in Thai). General Charan was involved in the Thai policy towards the Cambodian conflict since 1980 when he served as a coordinator between the military and the Foreign Ministry. He became Secretary-General of the NSC from 1991.
interview with the author in 1992. According to Suwit, there were two lines of thinking within the Thai security establishment. One view was that Thailand should exert its influence over Cambodia in order to prevent Vietnamese influence. The other view was that it was inconceivable that Thailand could impose its influence over Cambodia and in fact, an independent and strong Cambodia would be able to resist Vietnamese influence. Therefore, Thailand should help establish a strong Cambodia.\footnote{Interview, Suwit Suthanukun, Bangkok, 7 May, 1992.}

In early 1993, there was a debate within the Thai security establishment over whether or not the military's "buffer zone" strategy was still appropriate. The policy was re-examined in a series of meetings between the NSC, and the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs. It was decided that it could damage the country's foreign policy and should be abandoned.\footnote{Khaophiset, 28 May-2 June, 1993, p. 36 (in Thai).}

Finally, the issue of the Thai military's shadowy involvement in business deals with the Khmer Rouge needs to be taken into consideration. This has been one of the most controversial aspects of the military's relationship with the Khmer Rouge, particularly in the period after the peace settlement in Cambodia.

Since the military was in charge of the border areas, its involvement in border trade had not been uncommon. Military personal were involved in the black markets which flourished on the Thai-Cambodian border during the Prem Administration.\footnote{Black markets along the Thai-Cambodian border had been present for a long time, but the most flourishing period was after Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in late 1978 when a large number of Cambodian refugees flooded into Thailand and resided in camps along the border, and the Thai government imposed trade restrictions on border trade. Thai consumer goods from black markets on the border were reportedly sold mostly to the Khmer Secp (some factions of the Khmer Secp were under the Khmer People's National Liberation Front, a faction of the Cambodian resistance government of the CGDK). Thai goods were also sold to Vietnam via Cambodia.} In 1980, Colonial Prajak Sawangjiti, Commander of the Second Infantry Regiment based in Prachinburi, a province on the Thai-Cambodian border, admitted that "all government officials, including army and police officers, have benefited from black markets."\footnote{Patinya, 31 October, 1980, pp. 23-28 (in Thai). See also a report on the military's involvement in black market trade in Sayamrat supdawichan, 4-10 August, 1991, pp. 12-13 (in Thai).}

After the Chatchai government encouraged trade relations with Indochina, Thai business with both the Phnom Penh regime and the Khmer Rouge expanded rapidly especially in logging and gemstone mining. These activities apparently continued even after the Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC) imposed economic sanctions on the Khmer Rouge-controlled area in late 1992.\footnote{The SNC sanction on the Khmer Rouge included the ban on exports of logs and gems out of Cambodia. According to one source, it was Hun Sen who helped a number of Thai companies to bring logs out of Cambodia after the sanctions were imposed. Hun Sen's "assistance" to Thai companies was} Various reports suggested that Thai
military officials took part directly or indirectly in this lucrative business. For example, a Thai weekly magazine, *Lak thai*, pointed out that trading along the Thai-Cambodian border was estimated at "some billions of baht per month", and that:

connections with [Thai] military officials are essential in doing businesses with the Khmer Rouge. Large-scale business need to have a connection with high-ranking officials whereas small-scale businesses can be protected by lower-ranking officials...\(^{47}\)

In trying to understand the behaviour of the Thai military, one has to realise that it has not been unusual for the military's security interests to be mixed with personal or corporate interests.\(^{48}\) It is impossible to gauge whether, and to what extent, the military's involvement in business deals with the Khmer Rouge was a factor in its support to the group. However, it is reasonable to conclude that business links with the Thais considerably assisted the Khmer Rouge and consequently contributed to, one way or the other, the ongoing disorder in Cambodia.\(^{49}\)

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\(^{47}\) *Lak thai*, 14-20 November, 1992, pp. 17-18 (in Thai). [SUS1 is about 25 baht] The other business in which military officials were said to be involved directly was the purchase of weapons from the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Serie. Most of these weapons were reportedly sold to Burmese minorities on the Thai-Burmese border. This issue was confirmed to the author in her interview with Saiyud Kerdphol, (Bangkok, 11 May, 1992). See also *Sayanrat supdwachan*, 4-10 August, 1991, pp. 12-13; 16-22 May, 1993, pp. 19-20, and *Khaopiset*, 5-11 March, 1990, pp. 35-37 (in Thai).

\(^{48}\) Various examples can be cited here. One concerns former Supreme Commander General Chavalit Yongchaichaiyudh's initiatives of good relations with neighbouring countries during his tenure in office as noted in Chapter VII. It is widely well-known that Chavalit also involved extensively in logging business with the Phnom Penh regime and Burma. (Arthit, 24-30 December, 1993, p. 5, in Thai.) It is noteworthy that after his resignation from military service in 1990, Chavalit subsequently set up a political party with part of the funds was said to have come from various cross-border businesses. Another example is the Thai support to Burmese minorities in their struggle against the Rangoon regime in order that the minorities served as "buffer forces" on the Thai-Burmese border. At the same time, it has been well-known that officials in charge of the Thai-Burmese border were involved in various legal and illegal businesses with the minorities. (Khaopiset, 23-29 October, 1992, pp. 22-23, in Thai.) The Thai military's policy of collaboration with the U.S. in the Vietnam war during the 1960s to early 1970s was another example that high-ranking military officers also benefited personally from the American presence in Thailand. See Chapter II.

\(^{49}\) To be sure, no one can overlook the Khmer Rouge's determination to continue its fighting against, as it has claimed, "foreign domination of Cambodia" and severe factionalism among Cambodian leaders. However, business with Thais has been the major source of income for the group after the Paris Peace Agreement on Cambodia, when China virtually ended all of its support to the group.
Conclusion

The current civilian government of Chuan Leekpai and the leadership of the military have reiterated its policy of non-interference in Cambodia's internal affairs, but accusations of Thai military support to the Khmer Rouge continues on.\textsuperscript{50} For the government, this suggests that it lacks either power or will to stop such activities. For the military leadership, it is unlikely that it lacks power to stop the activities within its organisation. It would seem that this issue of on-going relationship between sections of the Thai military and the Khmer Rouge is a reflection of the military's continuing independent role in Thai politics. It also indicates its military-oriented attitudes and its corporate and personal interest in the country's relations toward neighbouring countries.

\textsuperscript{50} It was also reported that on 2 June, 1994, the Clinton administration "is questioning Thailand about reports it is assisting Khmer Rouge forces in Cambodia." \textit{(The Australian}, 3 June, 1994, p. 9.) An article by William Shawcross in late May 1994 claimed that: "Thai conduct is one of the most serious foreign policy problems for Cambodia - and the international community needs to determine what sanctions it can apply to Thailand." See William Shawcross, "Cambodia at the crossroad", \textit{The Australian}, 30 May, 1994, p. 9.
Chapter VIII

Conclusion

Explaining why nations behave as they do is one of the central tasks of the study of international relations, for it involves analysing both human goals and the means that are used to attain them. Both goals and means may be influenced by various factors, internal and external to the nations concerned. Finally, while it is often argued that states pursue the 'national interests', the concept of national interest is nebulous, often ambiguous and defies precise definition.

This study has examined a number of factors influencing Thailand's policy towards Vietnam in the context of the Cambodian conflict between 1978 and 1991. It has analysed two quite different Thai policies towards Vietnam during the period in question. First, that of security cooperation with China which was directed against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia during the Kriangsak and Prem periods. Second, support for the transformation of Indochina from "a battlefield into a marketplace" during the Chatthai period.

I have argued that there were two main factors which brought about Sino-Thai cooperation against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia during the Kriangsak period. One was the "worst-case" planning approach of Thai military leaders in response to Vietnam's military capability. The invasion had eliminated Thailand's traditional "buffer zone" and, since this "buffer zone" formed a crucial part of Thai defence planning, the loss of this area was perceived as threatening Thai national security. The invasion was also seen as evidence of Vietnam's intention to create an Indochinese Federation which would include Cambodia, Laos and Thailand's northeast region. The perceived threat to the northeast region explained the deep concern with which the Thai military regarded Vietnamese support for Thai communist insurgents seeking to 'liberate' the northeast region. In the eyes of Thai leaders, the threat of Vietnamese aggression towards Thailand was plausible, not only because Vietnam possessed powerful military capabilities but also because Vietnam received substantial military and economic aid from the Soviet Union.

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia took place at the height of Sino-Soviet rivalry in the region and Chinese leaders perceived it as an act of Soviet-sponsored aggression and expansionism in Southeast Asia. Hence China supported the anti-Vietnamese Khmer Rouge on the grounds that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. In this context, Thailand and China found a common cause in assisting the deposed Khmer Rouge forces.
Cooperation between Beijing and Bangkok was furthered by the covert Sino-Thai agreement: that Thailand would facilitate the resupply of the deposed Khmer Rouge forces in return for a reduction of Chinese aid to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). This covert agreement was remarkable in view of the fact that the CPT-led insurgent movement underwent considerable growth in the period prior to the invasion, despite efforts by the Thai military to suppress it. The subsequent collapse of the CPT, caused in part by the change of Chinese policy, generated a great deal of trust and a positive attitude towards China among Thai leaders.

While Thailand was pursuing a covert alliance with China, it also cooperated with ASEAN in mobilising international opposition to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia. In addition, the Kriangsak government avoided direct confrontation with Vietnam and, most of the time, was able to keep Thai-Vietnamese relations from being openly hostile.

Vietnam's incursion into Thailand in June 1980 changed Thai policy, however. It created the perception among Thai leaders that Vietnamese troops in Cambodia posed a real threat to the territorial integrity of Thailand and that Vietnam had ruled out any possibility of negotiations on the Cambodian issue with Thailand. It thus created the atmosphere of confrontation between Thailand and Vietnam which continued throughout the Prem period. It also brought about closer Sino-Thai cooperation in two major areas. One was Chinese military pressure against northern Vietnam which prevented the Vietnamese from concentrating all of its forces in the south. The other was direct Chinese military assistance to the Thai military. A number of Thai operations against Vietnamese forces in Cambodia especially in the period after 1984 underscored the necessity for beefing up Thai defence capacity and provided the incentive for cooperation between Thailand and China on border security. China provided military assistance, including Chinese "friendship price" and free arms supplies to the Thai military in order to strengthen the Thai defence capacity.

Other factors help to explain the growing Sino-Thai cooperation during the Prem period. China could do little to shift the military balance in favour of its allies in Cambodia during the period, but Thai leaders believed that China's involvement created a deterrent against Vietnamese aggression. The fact that China continued to support the Khmer resistance forces also supported the belief that Beijing was determined to drive Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia. The latter was crucial if Thailand was to realise its ultimate aim of a Cambodia free from Vietnamese influence.

Diplomatically, Thailand used ASEAN and the United Nations as forums to push for a comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia—a settlement which included a total withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia and the establishment of an independent Cambodia through free elections under United Nations supervision. Thailand was also at the forefront of the policy of isolating Vietnam and its client
regime in Phnom Penh, politically and economically, and it was the "China factor" which enabled Thailand to maintain its "uncompromising position" vis-a-vis Vietnam throughout the eight years and five months of the Prem period.

In August 1988, when Prime Minister Chatchai Choonhavan assumed office, he announced his policy of turning Indochina from "a battlefield into a marketplace." The Chatchai policy was a result of external and internal changes during the 1980s. The last half of the 1980s had witnessed a decline of Sino-Soviet hostility. In particular, the normalisation of relations between the two countries brought about changes in their policies toward the region, including the Cambodian issue. Under pressure from the Soviet Union and confronting declining Soviet support, Vietnam gradually sought to reach an accord with Thailand and countries concerned on the issue of Cambodia. It was not until September 1989, however, that the 'final' Vietnamese troop withdrawal from Cambodia took place.

During the Prem period, Thailand underwent considerably socio-economic change. Rapid economic growth and the relative stability of the parliamentary system brought about a greater direct participation of business persons in politics. The impact was most pronounced in the area of economic policies. Prime Minister Chatchai's business background predisposed him to see that the economy, and not security, should be a major consideration in relations with Indochinese countries. A reestablishment of commercial ties with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia was thus the main thrust of Chatchai's Indochinese policy.

Recognising the change in the policies of the superpowers and of Vietnam towards the Cambodian issue, Chatchai also attempted to bring an end to the conflict. His approach, however, was totally different from that of the Prem period. Chatchai departed from the policy of cooperating with China against Vietnam, and moved to pursue a reconciliatory policy towards Vietnam, notably by seeking to establish direct contact with the Vietnamese-backed Phnom Penh regime. Essentially, Chatchai's various initiatives sought to accommodate Vietnam's security interests in Cambodia by accepting both the Phnom Penh regime and that there should be a reduction of the Khmer Rouge's role in a post-war Cambodian government.

Chatchai's approach caused a major rift within the Thai leadership. Implementation of the policy was fraught with difficulty. The new policy was immediately rejected by the Foreign Ministry and the military which reiterated their long held view that Vietnam posed a security threat to Thailand, and rejected any change in the policy. Formulation of Thailand's Indochina policy had long been left in the hands of the military and the Foreign Ministry, whose policy was in line with the military. Chatchai's effort to launch a new Indochinese policy was consequently seen as an encroachment on an area of policy which was traditionally the domain of the military. The military was still a strong
force in politics and, together with the Foreign Ministry, continued to pursue in anti-
Vietnam policy independently. The net result was a Thai policy towards Cambodia
marked by conflict and lacking coherence.

What conclusions can be drawn from this study? First, that the Thai military played a
dominant role in shaping Vietnam policy during the period under study. This is not
surprising given the dominant role of the military in Thailand's foreign policy during
most of the post-war period. Conflicts between civilian governments and the military
over the country's policy towards Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos had occurred in the
past. During 1975-1976, the policy of normalisation of relations with the three countries
initiated by civilian leaders was frequently blocked by military leaders. While this was
partly because of the nature of the fragile civilian governments of the period, the main
reason was that the overthrow of the military regime in October 1973 did not affect the
armed forces' physical capacity or its political will. The military could therefore
continue as the most influential institution in Thailand. In particular, security-related
policies had long been controlled by the military and there had been no tradition of
parliamentary control over these issues. This situation largely remained unchanged
during the period under study.

Nevertheless, the rapid socio-economic changes of the 1980s did have consequences for
Thai foreign policy. During Chatchai's period in office the increasing importance of
economic factors became evident and efforts by politicians to control Indochinese
policy increased. Unlike their prominent role in economic policies, the politicians' role
in the security area remained considerably limited, however.

Unless there is a dramatic change in Thai politics, it is inconceivable that the military
will allow other political actors to play a major role in decision-making process in
security affairs. So doing could have far-reaching implications for the military's role in
the country. In the first place, the Thai military had justified its dominant role in politics
by claiming that it was the only force responsible for protecting national security from
external and internal threat.1 Allowing other political actors to participate in national
security decision making would undermine the military's power. Any diminution of the
military's power in security decision-making could affect its power and influence in
other areas—notably annual defence expenditure, which the military considers to be its
exclusive domain. Control over foreign policy is thus part of a domestic struggle for
political power.

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1 This can be seen from the fact that all military coups after the 1932 overthrow of absolute monarchy
were justified somewhat similarly, namely that the coups were carried out in order to save the nation
from communist threat, corrupt politicians, incompetent civilian governments, and to save the people
from hardship. See Chai-anan Samudavanija, Panha kanphathana kannuangthai, [Problems in Thai
political development], (Bangkok: Samnakphim chulalongkorn mahawithayalai, 1987), pp. 190-192 (in
Thai).
This study also demonstrates that 'national interest' may be defined differently by different domestic actors. Throughout the period under study, security—defined in traditional military terms—was perceived by the military as Thailand's most vital interest with respect to Vietnam. In other words, 'national interest' was interpreted mainly in terms of security. Attempts by Prime Minister Chatthai to replace security considerations with economic ones in relation to the three Indochinese countries were strongly resisted by the military and Chatthai's period in office was marked by a somewhat incoherent Indochinese policy in which the military ultimately prevailed.

Given the changes in both the external and internal environment which took place during the 1980s, one may legitimately ask to what extent could the military's approach to Vietnam be understood as expressing a 'national interest'. There is little doubt that Thailand has come a long way since the early 1980s. When the Vietnamese invasion took place, Thailand was a country with little confidence in its military capability while it faced severe internal insurgency and mounting economic problems. Policy towards Vietnam was thus formulated from the standpoint of weakness. By the late 1980s, however, Thailand had experienced relatively rapid economic growth and was free from internal insurgency. The end of the cold war also brought about a more peaceful external environment. In this latter period there was therefore no real need for Thai foreign policy towards its Indochinese neighbours to be based so firmly on military considerations.

If Thailand is destined for economic prosperity, a military-oriented foreign policy will no longer adequately serve the country's interest. Thailand's interests require a peaceful regional environment. Given its relatively high economic development compared with most of its neighbours, Thailand's long-term security interests suggest that it should help its small neighbours, including Cambodia, to become more stable, politically and economically. However, as the military remains the dominant force in Thai politics, realisation of such a policy of peaceful co-existence has a long way to go.
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