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THAI FOREIGN POLICY FROM SARIT TO SENI:
ADAPTATION DURING THE SECOND INDOCHINA WAR

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in the Australian National University

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Except where otherwise acknowledged in the text this thesis represents my own original research.

N. J. Funston

Neil John Funston
ABSTRACT

Shortly after General Sarit's coup in November 1957 Thailand was confronted by successive crises in Indochina: a rapid expansion of communist insurgency in Laos and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), together with bilateral conflicts with Cambodia, particularly over the border temple of Phra Viharn. Problems in Indochina continued to grow over subsequent years, and together with the issue of great power involvement - particularly that of the U.S. - became the main focus of Thai foreign policy concerns.

Policy towards Indochina was directed at supporting anti-communist governments through encouraging U.S. intervention, providing a base for U.S. activities in the region, extending its own military aid, and mounting a major diplomatic effort on behalf of the RVN. When the U.S. began a slow withdrawal from the region in the late 1960s Thailand sought to strengthen the U.S. will to persist, but also moved cautiously towards rapprochement with China, and sought to strengthen regionalism through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. This process was extended in the 1970s with moves to distance Thailand from the U.S. and establish the basis for future relations with neighbouring communist movements. After communist victories throughout Indochina in 1975 lingering
Indochinese suspicions and domestic opposition made a modus vivendi difficult to establish, but slow progress in this direction was made until interrupted by the coup of October 1976.

Events in Indochina were a major determinant of Thai foreign policy, however such systemic influences were not the only factor. "National" influences, including Thailand's geopolitical location in relation to the Indochina countries, and historical links with the region, were also important. So too were decision-making factors. For most of the period foreign policy was closely held by a strongly anti-communist military, assisted by a conservative foreign ministry. In the 1970s the foreign ministry became less anti-communist, and more committed to charting an independent foreign policy for Thailand. After the overthrow of the Thamom government in October 1973 it largely supplanted the foreign policy role of the military. Elements in the military were strongly opposed to the new policy, but the ministry were able to push ahead with the assistance of an increasingly anti-U.S. public opinion. The coincidence of an expanding communist threat and U.S. intervention in the 1960s with control of foreign policy by a small military-led elite, and the decline of U.S. influence in the 1970s with an increasing foreign policy role for the foreign ministry and public opinion, meant that systemic and decision making influences were difficult to separate, and reinforced one another.
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PREFACE

From the late 1950s Thailand's neighbouring Indochinese states became a major focus of international attention as the second Indochina war began. The expansion of communist influence in the RVN and Laos, and a decade later in Cambodia, led to massive U.S. intervention, which was countered by Soviet and Chinese support to the communist side. By the late 1960s the conflict began to move against the U.S., which commenced a slow though at times interrupted withdrawal from the region. It nonetheless continued to deploy massive air power, and in 1971 shifted diplomatic course dramatically when it began the process of normalising relations with China. Such changes failed to stem communist growth in the Indochina countries. By April 1975 victorious communist armies had seized power in Saigon and Phnom Penh, and the Pathet Lao had secured a dominant position in the Vientiane government.

By contrast, to Thailand's south, maritime Southeast Asia remained divided, but developments there were far less disruptive. Indonesia in the late 1950s and early 1960s pursued an aggressive and apparently pro-communist foreign policy that caused considerable alarm in Thailand, but the abortive October 1965 coup in Indonesia led to the ouster of Sukarno and the emergence of an anti-communist leadership anxious to cooperate with regional countries.
Burma, to the west, had many difficulties with Thailand, particularly with regard to minority groups along the border, but an uneasy modus vivendi between the two countries was maintained.

Indochina, and the related issue of great power intervention there, was the main preoccupation of those concerned with Thai foreign policy, and is thus the focus of primary attention in this thesis. The two primary aims are to explain what Thai policy was - based on a detailed look at Thai relations with each of the Indochina countries and the U.S. - and how this was affected by national, decision-making and systemic influences.

The beginning of the second Indochina war also coincided with an intense bilateral dispute between Thailand and Cambodia, and the beginning of the Sarit regime in Thailand, thus marking a convenient starting point for this study. It concludes in October 1976 when democratic government was abruptly brought to a close, thus covering a period that enables comparisons of foreign policy under military and democratic rule, and observation of the initial Thai response to the 1975 communist victories in Indochina. However rigid adherence to the time frame is not a feature of this thesis: when considered relevant the historical background to these events is considered in detail, and a brief postscript takes events up to early 1989.

The first Chapter looks at relevant theoretical literature. Several different approaches are seen to have
usefulness in approaching Thai foreign policy, but none offers a readily amenable comprehensive guide to analysis. It is suggested, therefore, that as a starting point attention be given to examining Thai foreign policy with reference to the influence of different "levels of analysis": the national level, focusing on more or less enduring state interests shaped by historical interaction, together with geographic, economic and demographic characteristics; the decision making level, meaning an examination of different groups involved in the formation and implementation of Thai foreign policy; and the systemic level, meaning the influence of other states and the regional/international strategic balance.

Chapter two provides background for understanding the national and decision making levels of analysis by discussing Thai domestic politics. The first section examines different theoretical approaches to this topic, focusing on political culture, the bureaucratic polity and neo-Marxism. It suggests a synthesis of the three approaches that takes into accounts the importance of the military and the hierarchical and elitist nature of the Thai political system, while at the same time acknowledging the emergence of a new middle class that gradually broadened participation in political decision making from the late 1960s. The second section of the chapter details the major shifts in Thai politics, particularly for the period from Sarit through to Seni.
The national and decision making context of foreign policy formulation is examined in chapter three. The first section identifies five permanent national influences on Thai foreign policy - a consciousness of Thailand’s status as a significant regional power, the importance of diplomacy (particularly through alignment with large powers), perceptions of Vietnam and Burma influenced by historical rivalry and Cambodia and Laos by their former vassal status, a perception of the trans-Mekong region as the greatest security threat to the country, and economic interests tying it to the West and Japan. Discussion of decision making looks at the respective roles of the Office of the Prime Minister, the military, foreign ministry, monarchy, foreign policy advisers, interior ministry, cabinet, parliament and public opinion. The military, aided particularly by its control of the prime ministership, is seen as dominant in the period up to overthrow of military rule in October 1973, and the foreign ministry, with a strong public opinion input, until October 1976. The approach of the foreign ministry also began to change from the early 1970s, to an institution that sought a more independent foreign policy for Thailand and a greater policy role for itself. These aspirations were opposed by the military and led to intense conflict between the two particularly after October 1973.

Chapter four examines systemic influences on Thai foreign policy. The regional strategic balance is
discussed first, with the main focus on the cold war and increasing U.S. involvement in the 1950s through to the late 1960s, gradual U.S. withdrawal from this time through to communist victories in 1975, the slow development of regionalism after the formation of ASEAN in 1967, and Chinese moves towards rapprochement with the U.S. and non-communist Southeast Asia from the early 1970s. This is followed by an examination of Thailand's bilateral relations with the great powers and regional neighbours outside Indochina. The main attention is focused on the U.S., particularly on identifying the various Thai-U.S. agreements for prosecuting the war against communist movements in Indochina, which locked the two countries into a firm alliance. In addition to identifying systemic influences on Thailand the chapter serves a secondary purpose of outlining the main features of Thai bilateral relations with states outside Indochina.

Chapters five to seven provide a detailed examination of Thai bilateral relations with Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. A similar format is used in each case. The "setting" is discussed first, briefly summarising the history of diplomatic relations, comparing national power, and noting geographic or social factors providing links or causing antagonism between the two countries. This is followed by a section on historical background, tracing ties from the earliest contacts to the late 1950s. Bilateral relations are then examined chronologically through to October 1976, followed by a conclusion which
includes an analysis of the relative importance of national, decision making and systemic influences on Thai policy.

Chapter eight provides a brief survey of Thai policy towards Indochina as a whole, together with conclusions on the interrelationship between national, decision making and systemic influences on foreign policy, and a more detailed look at the changing nature of the decision making context. The postscript comments briefly on Thai policy towards Indochina after 1976, then discusses further changes that took place in foreign policy decision making up to early 1989.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACM</td>
<td>Air Chief Marshal</td>
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<td>ASA</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asia</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>ASPAC</td>
<td>Asian and Pacific Council</td>
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<td>BCP</td>
<td>Burmese Communist Party</td>
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<td>CACE</td>
<td>Committee Against the Coup d’Etat</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINCPAC</td>
<td>Commander-in-Chief Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPT</td>
<td>Communist Party of Thailand</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCI</td>
<td>Department of Central Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>Democratic Kampuchea</td>
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<td>DRV</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESCAFE</td>
<td>Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Far East</td>
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<td>ETO</td>
<td>Express Transport Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Control Commission</td>
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<td>ICJ</td>
<td>International Court of Justice</td>
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<td>ICRC</td>
<td>International Committee for the Red Cross</td>
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<td>JUSMAG</td>
<td>Joint United States Military Assistance Group</td>
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<td>KI</td>
<td>Khmer Issara</td>
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<td>KMT</td>
<td>Kuomintang</td>
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<td>KR</td>
<td>Khmer Rouge</td>
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<td>KS</td>
<td>Khmer Serei</td>
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<td>LPDR</td>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>MAA</td>
<td>Military Assistance Agreement</td>
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<td>MACTHAI</td>
<td>Military Assistance Command Thailand</td>
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<td>MCP</td>
<td>Malayan Communist Party</td>
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<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>MOI</td>
<td>Ministry of Interior</td>
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<td>NDC</td>
<td>National Defence College</td>
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<td>NLF</td>
<td>National Liberation Front</td>
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<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
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<td>NSCT</td>
<td>National Student Centre of Thailand</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPM</td>
<td>Office of the Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARU</td>
<td>Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<td>PRD</td>
<td>Public Relations Department</td>
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<td>PRG</td>
<td>Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTAF</td>
<td>Royal Thai Air Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>RVN</td>
<td>Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEATO</td>
<td>Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation</td>
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<td>SLAT</td>
<td>Special Logistics Agreement Thailand</td>
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<td>SOFA</td>
<td>Status of Forces Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRV</td>
<td>Socialist Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSG</td>
<td>United Nations Secretary-General</td>
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<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>United States Air Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOPT</td>
<td>Voice of the People of Thailand</td>
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CHAPTER 1
A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The accumulated literature on the foreign policy of Thailand, and Southeast Asia states generally, lacks theoretical introspection. With only two important exceptions, which will be discussed shortly, it belongs to a category of international relations that is non-systematic, basically historical in approach. Special stress is given to either one or a combination of the following: idiosyncratic factors, historical and geopolitical factors, ideology, or domestic politics. Several of these studies are illuminating within their terms of reference, but they contain little explicit guidance on how an enquiry into Thai foreign policy might proceed. To evaluate the various possibilities, the problem must be considered within the framework of the international relations discipline as a whole.

Attempts to construct a general framework for the analysis of international relations have, since World War II, centred around three competing paradigms. Initially, the realist school represented the prevailing orthodoxy, with its principle analytical tool "national interest" defined in terms of power. By the 1960s the realists retained some adherents, but had lost ground to those
proposing a more "scientific" differentiated state model. Outside the discipline's mainstream there was yet a third alternative, that offered by Marxism. After looking at each of these approaches I will also consider some examples of middle range theory, including that concerned specifically with the problems of small or underdeveloped states, and conclude by discussing the importance of the level of analysis chosen to study foreign policy.

Realism

The realist school was founded by writers whose main concern was to uncover how foreign policies had contributed to the outbreak of World War II. The principle exponent of this approach, Hans Morgenthau, for years the unchallenged doyen of international relations theorists, argued that the power at a nation's command, relative to that of other nations, is an objective reality for that nation, and serves to determine what its true interest is and should be. A state's national interest was served by a foreign policy directed at enhancing power, so as to ensure the international power balance did not move against it.

Critics of the realist approach have claimed that it wrongly identifies the maximisation of military power as the constant aim of foreign policy, and that it ignores domestic political factors and individual behaviour - states might have different capacities, but in other respects they are "undifferentiated". This in some respects misrepresents the realist understanding of power, which also includes emphasis on non-military aspects of
power, including diplomacy, national character and government.⁴ There is no doubt that power, so defined, remains at the heart of contemporary international relations, and is so perceived by those directly involved in the practice of international diplomacy. The shortcomings of this approach, however, are twofold: a general tendency to ignore domestic influences on foreign policy; and the lack of a framework for determining what a nation’s power (and hence national interest) actually is, given that power is in a constant state of flux, and critically dependent on a large number of variables including such intangible ones as national character and national will. Thus, as Rosenau observes, "To explain that a certain policy is in the national interest, or to criticise it for being contrary to the national interest, is to give an imposing label to one’s own conception of what is a desirable or undesirable course of action".⁵

Power, is often the essence of international relations. In reminding us of this the realist school makes an important contribution. But exactly how this affects the policy-maker, and why other influences are sometimes more important, are issues which the realists have not successfully resolved. Clearly, then, this approach cannot stand on its own.

**Post-realists**

The first major attack on the realists came with the publication of a monograph on decision making by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin in 1954.⁶ Its main innovation was to argue that "foreign policy making is most fruitfully
analysed as decision making in an organisational context". The starting point is an elucidation of internal and external factors which bear on the decision making process. Internal includes the "non-human environment" and several categories dealing with a country's social and political structure; external the non-human environment, together with other cultures, societies and states. However, "decision-makers operate in a highly particular and specific context". Issues are mediated through "decisional units", the group of decision-makers which participate in deciding a particular issue. Members of these units are influenced by spheres of competence, communications and information, and motivation. To take all these variables into account a sophisticated methodology, drawn largely from the sociology and psychology of decision-making in complex organisations, is proposed. Extensive data is required about the personalities involved, and all stages of the decision making process.

Snyder's model was an important breakthrough. It introduced precision into the identification of international actors, and the sources of their behaviour, where this had previously not existed. It highlighted the vast complexity of international relations. It drew attention to the effect which the decision making process itself could have on the formulation of policy. And it provided at least an embryonic framework against which all attempts to identify the sources of foreign policy could be measured. Other works focusing on decisional
phenomena, or in other ways indicating their indebtedness to this approach, quickly followed. One important sub-field, focusing on bureaucratic sources of foreign policy,\textsuperscript{7} bore a particularly direct relationship to its parent.

In spite of these advances the approach did not lead to a coherent body of literature. In the publications following there was no common premise that might have provided the basis for an incremental growth in knowledge. Few attempts have been made to systematically apply the model, the most notable being a study of the American decision to intervene in Korea in 1950, "and even this failed to yield amplification or clarification of the foreign policy decision-making process in other than the single situation to which it was applied".\textsuperscript{8}

Why, if the approach was a breakthrough, did this occur? The explanation, simply, is its lack of theory. A framework, and a vast array of categories were put forward, but there were no significant attempts to suggest relationships between the categories. Indeed the lengthy focus on decision making detracted from adequate consideration of external and other internal factors.

Further limitations of particular relevance to underdeveloped countries, have been noted by Weinstein.\textsuperscript{9} He observes that in contrast to the complex bureaucratic organisations for which the model is designed, the foreign-policy machinery in underdeveloped countries lacks structure. Communication networks are often obscure, and in some cases policies cannot be traced to one particular decision. Where policies can be traced there remain...
formidable obstacles to acquiring the detailed data necessary, due to factors such as closed political systems and underdeveloped mass media.

In an attempt to overcome some of the shortcomings in Snyder's work Rosenau, perhaps the most important theorist in the post-realist school, introduced what he described as "pre-theory". Rosenau attempted to systematically identify both internal and external sources of foreign policy, and to advance international relations towards general hypotheses of an "if-then" character. His article begins by positing five variables, said to encompass all factors that need to be considered in analysing foreign policy: idiosyncratic - "all those aspects of a decision-maker that distinguish his foreign policy choices or behaviour from those of every other decision-maker"; role - "the external behaviour of officials...generated by the roles they occupy and likely to occur irrespective of...the role occupant"; governmental - "aspects of a government's structure that limit or enhance...foreign policy choices"; societal - aspects such as "major value orientations..degree of national unity and the extent of...industrialisation"; systemic - "any non-human aspects of a society's external environment or any actions occurring abroad".

By a series of "mental manipulations", Rosenau arrived at "a crude pre-theory of foreign policy in which the relative potencies of the five sets of variables are assessed in terms of distinctions between large and small countries, between developed and underdeveloped economies"
and between open and closed political systems". The basic assumptions behind the mental manipulations, appended in a footnote, were that:¹¹

the potency of a systematic variable is considered to vary inversely with the size of a country (there being greater resources available to larger countries and thus lesser dependence on the international system than is the case with smaller countries), that the potency of an idiosyncratic factor is assumed to be greater in less developed economies (there being fewer of the restraints which bureaucracy and large-scale organisation impose in more developed economies), that for the same reason a role variable is accorded greater potency in more developed economies, that a societal variable is considered to be more potent in open polities than in closed ones (there being lesser need for officials in the latter to heed non-governmental demands than in the former), and that for the same reason governmental variables are more potent than societal variables in closed polities than in open ones.

Rosenau concludes that in the case of small, underdeveloped countries with an open political system idiosyncratic variables are likely to be the most important, followed by systemic, role, societal and governmental; in the same circumstances, but with a closed political system, the only change is a reversal of societal and governmental positions. He then, however, argues for further distinctions in terms of whether a system is penetrated or not, and the type of issue (status, physical resources, or general) at stake. This produces no major changes, except that the systemic variable not unexpectedly replaces idiosyncratic at the top in penetrated states. The pre-theory approach does have certain advantages. Since the unit of analysis is international events rather than decision making it encompasses a much broader range of international phenomena. It does make an attempt to move towards
theory. And distinctions introduced regarding the type of state and the type of issue introduce a new set of variables that conceivably are important in determining foreign policy and foreign relations generally.

But such incremental gains fall well short of a major breakthrough. The pre-theories, or hypotheses, remain at a very low level of sophistication. "To be theoretical in nature", Rosenau observes, "the ranking would have to specify how much more potent each set of variables is than those below it on each scale, and the variables themselves would have to be causally linked to specific forms of external behaviour". To make a substantive theoretical contribution, one might add, it should also clarify the inter-relationships between the variables rather than focus only on rankings. Rosenau does not explain how one takes the next step towards theory - how, in other words, to operationalise his model - apart from the unlikely suggestion that if researchers arranged empirical findings in terms of "the extent to which individuals, roles, governments, societies and international systems serve as causal agents in foreign affairs...it should be possible to discern patterns and draw contrasts among diverse types of policies and situations". Since the five variables are merely a way of viewing all possible influences on international phenomena, implicit in all writings, it is impossible to conceive how such a development might take place.

The various categories Rosenau employs need to be considered separately, since they offer both advantages
and disadvantages. Of the five major explanatory variables, it is striking that four relate to internal influences on foreign policy. Telescoping them into four categories does impose some coherence on the multitude of possible influences, though there is a degree of overlap between each, and in subsequent formulations "role" has been merged with "government". Nonetheless it remains a useful checklist against which the comprehensiveness of writings on domestic sources of foreign policy may be measured. The same cannot be said of the "systemic" variable. This is simply a catch-all term that makes no contribution towards understanding the various types of external variables that might shape international relations. The remaining four state type variables and the issue variable appear to be an important refinement, though few of the implications are spelt out.

After it had become apparent to Rosenau and colleagues that the pre-theory framework "remained in a very preliminary state of formulation",¹² this was revised and elaborated as a theory of "adaptation".¹³ The main concern evident in this work is to relate the five basic variables to foreign policy behaviour patterns. The route travelled towards this goal is circuitous, and the links between the two approaches tenuous. Drawing on a biological analogy, the starting point is that:¹⁴

Like any other human entity, the national polity can be conceived as pursuing one of four basic and mutually exclusive adaptive orientations if it is to maintain its essential structures and survive. It can seek to adjust its present self to its present environment; it can try to shape its present environment to its present self; it can attempt to create a new equilibrium between its present self and its present environment; or it can
accept the existing equilibrium between its present self and its present environment...these four alternative sets of orientations have been designated as giving rise to, respectively, the politics of acquiescent adaptation, the politics of intransigent adaptation, the politics of promotive adaptation, and the politics of preservative adaptation. (My emphasis)

The form of adaptation chosen depends on the relative extent to which internal or external demands come to bear on foreign-policy decision-makers. Acquiescent adaptation is caused by high external and low internal demands; intrasingent adaptation by low external and high internal demands; promotive adaptation by low external and low internal demands; and preservative adaptation by high external and high internal demands. Illustrative examples of each are, respectively, Czechoslovakia, South Africa, China and Great Britain. At this point the analysis can, in a limited way, also incorporate "pre-theory". Acquiescent politics are systemic-dominated; intrasingent politics are society-dominated (though in this context society includes the role and government variables); promotive politics are dominated by idiosyncratic variables; and preservative politics are equally influenced by all the variables. As long as there are no changes in the relative balance between external and internal demands the basic orientation of foreign policy will remain constant. If this balance is upset the state either makes a creative adaptation or fails to survive. Two important hypotheses regarding the process of change are posited, namely: 15
an electoral or violent ouster of political leaderships as normally necessary to the occurrence of any of the twelve possible transformations, and for some of them (especially the transformation from either intransigent or acquiescent to preservative adaptation), a major societal upheaval would appear to be a requisite.

a long term trend in which all national polities undergo transformations in the direction of preservative adaptation. In an era of more coherent, sizeable, and demanding attentive publics at home and dependence on resources and support from abroad, none of the other types of adaptation seems viable.

The adaptation approach has not gained wide acceptance. Shortly after it was conceived Rosenau presented his views to several colleagues, but after discussion the framework "no longer seemed so readily amenable to empirical research". It was then discarded, and members of the group turned instead to examination of a "four data-based research foci" which, in effect, was an attempt to operationalise pre-theory. Rosenau did return to adaptation in a few instances, but neither he nor any other writer has made a sustained case for its utility. One of the few attempts to apply it empirically has Thailand as a major focus, but the author simply discards, without explanation, consideration of the first two forms of adaptation (acquiescent and intransigent).

Perhaps the main objection to adaptation theory as it stands, is that nearly all states in the world fall into the preservative category. Aside from the examples mentioned, Finland is another state that falls into the category of acquiescent, Israel is intransigent, America before Vietnam, and presumably Russia, are promotive.
Examples such as these leave little room for others to join. But if nearly all states in the world are preservative, then the theory has obviously explained very little.

Rosenau's next major foray was to create a new framework based on "linkage". Unlike his earlier works this did not attempt to move the study of international relations further in the direction of theory. Its purpose was merely to indicate in a more systematic manner the possible areas of interaction between national and international forces. Towards this end 24 components of the polity are listed, and correlated with six components of the environment (contiguous, regional, cold war, racial, resource and organizational). This accounts for a basic 144-cell matrix. Each of the cells must then be assessed in terms of the direction of the interaction (Does it originate in the polity or environment? Or is it a case of "fused" reciprocal influences?), whether it was direct or indirect, and whether it was penetrative, reactive or emulative (a special case of reactive).

The framework has been strongly criticized for being atheoretical, and for the vast number as well as the vague and sometimes overlapping categories. Rosenau has been one of his own severest critics. In a volume containing the empirical results of nine scholars who had agreed to use his framework, he found their efforts "marked by variability". The problem, he concluded, lay in the matrix: "If some predictions about the phenomenon embraced by each of the matrix had been hazarded, those
using it would have at least had some guidance of the kinds of questions to explore and the kinds of data to gather".21

One of the chapters, by O'Leary, merits particular attention since it is addressed to the relevance of the linkage concept in the context of developing countries. It makes two main points: that writers of international relations theory have been preoccupied with the international system and hence "seemingly underplayed the critical role which domestic politics of the member states may play in determining the rules and operations of the system"; and that developing countries, for reasons such as domestic instability and dependence on outside support for development, seek to "replace the formal and informal rules of the prevailing unintegrated international system with a stable and tolerable integrated system which eliminates the pre-eminence of the territorial state."22 The first proposition, if correct, merely identifies a problem (which, as observed, has been noted by others) without explaining how to deal with it. The second proposition is even more tenuous, but if true is posited only as a long term general trend, subject to numerous exceptions, and hence also of little operational value.

Generally, the framework does serve to underline the interaction between national and international events, and the complexity of world politics, though the proliferation of categories makes the task a daunting one. Beyond this the framework has not been productive, and Rosenau himself has expressed a desire to bury it.23
Within the post-realist tradition there are several other frameworks that might be considered, but generally these re-tread familiar ground and offer little more than a different terminology. Special consideration must, however, be given to the work of Pettman. His theoretical model, inspired by what he considered to be the failure of theorists to establish a satisfactory comprehensive theory of international relations, or even a broad understanding of the international behaviour of small states, was designed specifically for the analysis of international relations in Southeast Asia. The theory rests on two basic premises: that the foreign policy of small states can be seen as either acquiescent or repudiative towards great powers; and that foreign policy was generally determined by introspection or external events, and was seldom a case of drift.

In his empirical analysis Pettman focuses particularly on the distinction between foreign policies that are either acquiescent or repudiative. However, no convincing case is made for this "either-or" distinction. The categories do of course closely parallel those labelled acquiescent and intransigent in Rosenau’s adaptation theory. Rosenau, however, suggests two further possible orientations, and while small states might not be expected to exercise promotive policies vis-a-vis great powers, it is quite conceivable that they might practice preservative policies, a category that fits somewhere between acquiescent and repudiative. Viewed from this perspective acquiescent and repudiative policies are merely extremes of a continuum, and are hence of little
explanatory value since further distinctions would be necessary to take account of all possible intermediary stages. The case for a distinction between introspection (internal) and external events has, of course, already been accepted; what Pettman’s account offers is a lesson in the difficulty of putting this into practice. In the chapter on Thailand, for instance, there is much emphasis on external factors impinging on foreign policy but only hints about domestic sources. Finally, the framework is oriented to a study of relations between Southeast Asian countries and great powers, and it is not apparent how it might be modified to a study focusing mainly on the relationships between countries in the region.

How, then, is one to summarise the significance of the post-realist school? Little progress has been made towards the main objective of developing a comprehensive theory of international relations. But their efforts should not be simply dismissed on this ground. Perhaps their main contribution has been to emphasize the importance of domestic influences on the formulation of foreign policy, and the interaction between domestic and systemic factors. In some instances the authors have helped clarify the complexity of international relations, often providing exhaustive check lists of the different influences involved. Much of the terminology they have used has also become the standard language for discussion of the discipline.
Marxist/Dependencia School

A fundamentally different approach to international relations has long been pursued by scholars working within the Marxist tradition. Their writings have been virtually ignored by those working within the mainstream of international relations theory, to the detriment of the discipline as a whole. Such concepts as "penetration" and "linkages" for example, were only discovered during the 1960s, though they had long been central to Marxist analyses. Moreover for conventional theorists they remain little more than categories, lacking the analytical potential which Marxist analysis imbues them with.

Marx did not develop a comprehensive theory of international relations, but the basic determinants of this were inherent in his views on the nature of the capitalist system. Capitalism is founded on competition for capital accumulation; this, in turn, is reflected in the expansionary drive of capitalist nations. Marx, Lenin and others differed on details, but all stressed the crucial, dynamic role of capital, and saw international relations as determined essentially by an economically-motivated imperialism. However, while Marx and Lenin had expected the export of capital to promote economic growth in underdeveloped areas, in 1928 the 6th Congress of the Communist International adopted the view that it would positively "underdevelop" them.²⁶

Both themes, the inherently expansionary nature of capital and its tendency to underdevelop countries (or at best permit dependent development), have been taken up by present day Marxists. The first major work was Paul
Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth* (New York, 1957), and subsequent development owes a great deal to the "dependencia" school of Latin American scholars. "Imperialism" is still a term used by many writers to define international relations, but in the wake of formal decolonisation it has lost ground to terms such as dependence and neocolonialism.

Marxists see the world as sharply divided between a few developed countries and the great majority of "underdeveloped" countries which are dependent on them. An impressive body of literature has been generated on the foreign policy of developed countries (particularly the United States), and socio-economic-political change in underdeveloped countries. Within developed countries attention has been focused on the key political role of multinational companies, dependence on crucial raw materials outside the country, and dependence on other countries as markets (both for exports and for goods produced there by the multinationals). Thus United States foreign policy has been described as based on "a conception of national interest as inherently involved in the strengthening of international capitalism against the threats of socialism and nationalism". Such an analysis was the basis for the emergence of an influential new revisionist school of American foreign policy during the 1960s.

The dependence of underdeveloped countries is explained by both "pure" economic factors, and by the interaction of political and economic factors. Economic
factors stem basically from the global division of labour whereby underdeveloped countries supply primary products which are then processed by developed countries. The act of processing is inherently dynamic, leading, through technological advances to further development, and assuring much greater returns on the world market. If this in itself does not completely preclude economic growth in underdeveloped countries, further obstacles are posed by an economically determined political dependence, generated by factors such as:

a) the close correspondence between the interests of national oligarchies and national bourgeoisie and the structure of the international system
b) dependence of the national oligarchies on international support for survival
c) specific alliances of national businessmen as an independent loci of power
d) development of foreign businessmen as an independent loci of power
e) coercive power in the hands of agents and agencies of imperial power; multinationals, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and United States agencies and military power
f) power of the military, strengthened by United States assistance

In short, Marxists see a symbiotic relationship between leaders of underdeveloped countries and elites in the imperial power, pursued at the expense of the underdeveloped "have nots".

There can be no doubt that such a framework is a most valuable tool of analysis for the study of underdeveloped countries, one that often approximates reality more closely than rival "pluralist" or "patron-client" models. The approach broadens the field of international relations to encompass the division of the world between the "haves" and the "have nots", is useful for examining domestic developments in underdeveloped
countries, and has rightly drawn attention to the economic motivation that often lies behind the foreign policy of developed countries.

It is not, however, an adequate theory of international relations in general. In the case of developed countries it offers no explanations about the role of the communist world, and does not adequately confront the diverse non-economic factors that may influence the foreign policies of these countries.

The shortcomings are even more pronounced in the case of underdeveloped countries where, aside from describing the relationship between the metropole and its "satellite", it is simply assumed that the satellite's dependence on the metropole will also be reflected in the field of foreign policy. While it is perhaps understandable that writers have focused on the domestic implications of dependence, it is nonetheless surprising that a systematic study of an underdeveloped country's foreign policy from a neo-Marxist viewpoint has yet to appear. There has thus been no attempt to formulate possible consequences where, for instance, a country is economically tied to two or more developed countries with significantly different foreign policies, where the metropole is racked by divisions over its foreign policy, or where an underdeveloped country is of vital strategic significance due either to its resources or geopolitical factors. Clearly, there is a need to supplement the Marxist approach by consideration of factors generally included in more conventional accounts.
Are, however, such general criticisms of the Marxist case relevant in the case of Thailand? Several works on Thai domestic politics view it from a Marxist perspective, and one writer ranks it (along with only five other countries) as a "fully-fledged economic colony and political protectorate" of the United States. Even outside Marxist circles the appellation "client state" has become widely used. The theoretical limitations of the Marxist approach cannot, therefore, be an adequate justification for ignoring it. In the study that follows close attention will be paid to examining the nature of Thai dependence on America, and the consequences this has had in the field of foreign policy.

**Small/Underdeveloped States**

There is now a considerable body of writing dealing with the problems of small states within the international system. Since most small states are also underdeveloped the two traits are generally assumed to be interrelated. (In many cases a further distinguishing feature of the genre is that they are newly independent, though this of course does not apply to Thailand.) Little attention has been given to differentiating small states in terms of development, though all writers indicate the problems of such states are found in a particularly acute form when a small state is also underdeveloped. Most accounts start from the premise that small states lack the influence, manoeuvrability and independence of large states; the real issue turns on the question of degree. Galtung takes the most extreme view, arguing that "international
politics... is big power politics" because "if you think it over, its only the U.S.A and the U.S.S.R that really count, the other countries are of no importance".\textsuperscript{36} Keohane proposes a more complex hierarchy of international power, but nonetheless lists small countries as those for whom foreign policy is "adjustment to reality, not rearrangement of it". He also adds a psychological dimension, arguing that the leaders of a small state "consider that it can never, acting alone or in a small group, make a significant impact on the system".\textsuperscript{37} Three further writers, Vital, Rothstein and Singer,\textsuperscript{38} have made more substantial contributions to the topic, and need to be considered in greater detail.

Vital also sees overwhelming obstacles to small states conducting an independent foreign policy. Independence, in this context, is defined as "the capacity to withstand the pressure of other states - or governments - which are intent on deflecting it from a course which the national interest - or the interest of its leaders - would appear to require". The most decisive factor is the huge military superiority of the great powers, destined to further increase because of factors such as the high cost and advanced technology involved in the research, development and production of modern armaments, the reluctance of great powers to part with the most technologically advanced armaments, and the nuclear monopoly of great powers.

Economic problems also lie at the heart of small power impotence. Limited funds for foreign policy purposes result in a "vast disparity in the information
available and in the quality and size of the machinery designed to deal with it at a specialist level". The lack of an adequately equipped foreign policy-making bureaucracy ensures that idiosyncratic factors have a major bearing on policy formation.

Smallness also makes countries particularly vulnerable to economic pressures, even though these are seldom invoked: "It is as a permanent possibility that ...(this)... matters most, always inhibiting the small power in its external relations". Psychologically, the realisation of weakness "is the dominant fact of the state's international existence". This can give rise to such divergent responses as pathetic moral surrender or strident assertion of moral superiority, but the underlying consistency is in the realisation that the small power "has only mental values and capabilities to draw on: determination, canniiness, unity and patience". Only in its immediate geographic surroundings do small powers sometimes have "rough equality of diplomatic and intelligence apparatus", and some capacity to provoke subversion in neighbouring countries. However, Vital quickly adds that "very few of the new states possess the necessary combination of material and human capabilities on the one hand and ruthlessness of policy and ambition on the other".

Rothstein does not share Vital's belief in the dominance of military factors in the international arena. He argues, for example, that by 1919, and increasingly since, the Small Powers' military strength relative to the
Great Powers was declining sharply. Nevertheless, Small Powers were in a better security position than ever before because other factors outweighed their military weakness. But Rothstein does not develop this line of thought. Instead, he goes on to stress that "the solution to any 'security dilemma' must come from an outside source..If...(Small Powers)..have learnt anything from history, it is that external support usually arrives late, and that it is given only in expectation of future benefits". Small states possess a "narrow margin of safety"; any mistake could prove fatal.

Consequently, the Small Power is forced into an intensive concentration on short-run and local matters to the exclusion of, or at least to the detriment of, any concern for long-run stability....In some cases, foreign policy not only concentrates exclusively on short run factors but also tends to consume the entire political process of a Small Power. The threat confronting it may seem so total and so imminent that discussion of anything else appears irrelevant.

Finally, the psychology of fear "leads states to rely on the hope that they can be protected by their own insignificance" and, contrarily, "to place exaggerated reliance on demands for formal recognition of ...status" - a paradox similar to that which Vital referred to as the psychology of weakness.

Singer, by contrast, views power in the international system from the perspective of a committed pluralist. It is both relative and contextual. Nonetheless, he sees the order of magnitude as sufficiently great to permit broad generalisations about Powers and Weak States. Power begets power, and weakness begets weakness. There is, however, a way out, since if any of the components of
power - wealth, organisation and status - can be improved, this will lead to improvement all-round.

Singer is not, however, primarily concerned with power differences, but with the interaction between Powers and Weak States. His main theme is the dependence of the weaker states, whatever the form of interaction. Perceptually, elites in weak states are linked to "mentor" states by ties such as language, education, religion, class and ideology. In terms of communications, weak states rely on the international news media, and the diplomatic and intelligence networks of mentor powers. Economically, a crucial role is played by comprador elites, and there is heavy dependence on powerful countries for trade, aid, investment and currency support. Militarily, Powers preside over innumerable multi-lateral and bilateral security agreements and sometimes unilaterally extend a protective umbrella over other areas. In addition they also supply the military hardware required, and play an important part in training. Politically, there are various devises by which Powers assert their dominance, ranging from direct diplomatic pressures, "advisers" appointed to the weak states, indigenous political compradors, and international organisations such as the British Commonwealth or Organisation of American States. While Singer is concerned to argue that the interests of all would be better served by an interdependent rather than a dependent relationship, there is little to indicate how, given the enormous power imbalance, this transformation could take place.
In short, Galtung and Keohane consider small states have no role to play except as objects, while the others see their role as at best peripheral. In the wake of the U.S. defeat in Indochina few would advance such views today; indeed Keohane is now included amongst those who recognise that small states are often able to manipulate assets (strategic, economic etc.) they have as an ally with a great power to exert influence out of proportion to their size. \(^ {39} \) There are also a number of case studies focusing on bilateral relations that contradict this view: small states have either been seen as possessing considerable room for manoeuvre, or having the capacity to influence powerful allies on a wide range of issues. \(^ {40} \)

The works considered all tend to view the situation from the perspective of a hypothetical worst possible case, i.e. a small, isolated country standing against a hostile and determined great power. Morrison and Suhrke acknowledge that under such circumstances "the smaller party has limited choice: accommodation, resistance alone, or search for external countervailing assistance". However if the large power is actually or potentially a supporter, a different situation exists. A small state may manipulate assets desired by the large power, such as "real estate" for bases, economic concessions or diplomatic support. It can even manipulate its weakness, by claiming that it lacks the capacity to do something desired by the large party. A number of specific bargaining tactics can also be used including procrastination, manipulation of information, staging of
surprise performances, and "triggering" tactics (e.g. Hanoi's 1972 military offensive was designed in part as a trigger to lock China and the USSR into supporting it, and thus reduce the possibility that great power negotiations then taking place might result in reduced assistance).\textsuperscript{41}

There is thus a sharp division amongst scholars focusing on small states. On one side are those whose position is similar to that of neo-Marxists, stressing the political, military and economic dependence of small powers; on the other side are those arguing that small powers have considerable room to manoeuvre. In the absence of an agreed framework it would seem necessary to approach the question empirically. For Thailand, the significance of its status as a small state focuses particularly on its relationship with the U.S., a topic that is examined in detail in subsequent chapters. However as states that are small by international standards may also be large in regional terms, attention will also be given to Thailand's influence in the regional context.

Sharing a similar concern to theorists dealing with small countries, Weinstein has sought to develop a new approach to the analysis of foreign policy in developing countries. His study of Indonesian foreign policy led him to discard existing theories of international relations and to the conclusion that there is a critical interaction between elite attitudes and the internal political structure:\textsuperscript{42}

given the prevailing perception of a hostile world, a competitive situation creates strong incentives
for carrying out a foreign policy emphasizing defense of the nation’s independence, while the liabilities accompanying a policy designed to serve the needs of economic development are formidable; in a noncompetitive political situation, however, the liabilities of a development-oriented foreign policy can be easily overcome, while the political incentives to carry out an independent policy are reduced...

The general proposition...may be stated as follows: given a predominant perception of the outside world as a hostile place, a competitive system is more likely, though not certain, to lead to a foreign policy of development.

Weinstein’s work is suggestive, but it would be more appropriate to regard it as an hypothesis, directed essentially at predicting the predominant orientation of foreign policy in underdeveloped countries, rather than a new "approach". The two categories used to identify policy orientation - independence and development - reflect some of the major strengths and weaknesses of the analysis. Unlike the categories used by Rosenau in his adaptation framework, it is recognised that policy orientation can be distinguished in terms of political and socio-economic objectives. However in other respects the categories are of limited utility. Independence is a catch-all term meaning political and economic independence, national security, and even regional paramountcy. While these may perfectly interlock in the Indonesian context there is no reason to suppose they would for other countries. Development is defined in conventional terms, though Marxists would reject the assumption that this necessarily implies considerable reliance on foreign assistance.

Conceding, however, a possible broad distinction between the categories of independence and development,
what explanatory power does the hypothesis hold? A predominant perception of the outside world as a hostile place is common in all developing countries, hence the critical variable is the presence or absence of political competition. The apparent plausibility of Weinstein's argument is belied by the ease with which one can think of cases where the relationship between political competition and foreign policy is not as projected. China and other communist countries have not allowed political competition, but it can hardly be said that they have given greater prominence to development (particularly as defined) than independence. Malaysia, in the somewhat competitive political environment after independence in 1957, placed much more emphasis on development than independence; however during nearly two years of emergency rule commencing May 1969, when political competition was severely curtailed, independence was suddenly given great emphasis. Such examples suffice to illustrate that political competition per se is too abstract a concept to be identified as a major determinant of foreign policy. Hypotheses regarding the orientation of foreign policy must identify more specifically the alignment of political forces likely to support the designated alternatives.

The Regional Subsystem Approach

The main part of this study looks at Thailand's bilateral relations with the countries of Indochina, a focus that arguably locates it within the field of regional subsystem analysis. In an illuminating survey of
this field, Thompson, after citing all the attributes that writers have endowed regional subsystems with, argues convincingly for four necessary and sufficient conditions:

. The actor's pattern of relations or interactions exhibit a particular degree of regularity and intensity to the extent that a change at one point in the system affects other points.

. The actors are generally proximate.

. Internal and external observers and actors recognise the subsystem as a distinctive area or "theatre of operation".

. The subsystem logically consists of at least two and quite probably more actors.

If it is accepted that Thailand and the Indochinese countries qualify as a regional subsystem by these criteria, what relevance is this to a study of Thai foreign policy? Although such analysis began in the late 1950s a coherent body of theory, or indeed even a commonly agreed frame of reference, has yet to emerge. Notwithstanding this, the regional approach does have two advantages, both of which Thompson has noted. First, it permits some reduction in the complexity of world politics. By limiting the focus a more comprehensive analysis is possible, one in which the work of international relationists is enriched by contributions from area specialists. Secondly, "If regional subsystems exist in world politics as distinct 'theatres of operation', they deserve a share of analysts attention. This is especially the case when national elites consider their regional environments to be of primary concern. Such an approach compensates for past and present biases in favour of superpower omnipotence".

29
Level of Analysis

The theories discussed so far give some guidance as to how a study of Thai foreign policy might proceed, but fall well short of a clear organising framework. If elaborate attempts to develop theory seem unsatisfactory, where should one start? In the view of this writer, the answer lies in recognising that the analysis of foreign policy can be conducted at three different levels: the international, the national, and the decision making. All three are of course interconnected, but unless the distinctions are recognised scholars are likely to pursue one line of analysis without giving due recognition to the others. Indeed many of the theories discussed can be criticised on this ground. The realists, Marxists and many of the "small state" theorists focus heavily on the international influences on foreign policy and give little attention to the national level. The post-realists, look at both national and international influences, but have arguably not distinguished clearly between the national and decision making levels.

The approach adopted here follows that outlined by writers such as Holsti and Spanier. The international - or systemic - level is perhaps the most common focus for foreign policy analysis. This looks at the ways in which the international balance of power, or relations between states, determines foreign policy. As already noted, many writers see smaller states as constrained by an international power structure over which they have very little control. Most writings on Thai foreign policy
belong to this category.

The national level, by contrast, focuses on the influence of enduring aspects of the state - including its geographic, demographic and economic characteristics, along with historical experiences. Based on such factors states can be expected to have particular needs and policies, regardless of the type of government actually in power. Many analyses of the Soviet Union, for example, have explained its foreign policy largely in terms of traditional concerns about protecting its enormous land mass, traditional attitudes to other races, or its status as a great power.

The decision making level focuses ultimately on the key individuals and groups involved in formulating foreign policy. Holsti and Spanier confine this to a few individuals (such as prime ministers or foreign ministers), whose values, attitudes etc. must be analysed so we can understand how these influence their perceptions of international relations. But the approach adopted here is a wider one. The focus includes analysis of the overall foreign policy making structure of the state, since it is felt that few individuals who make decisions in this area are uninfluenced by the bureaucracy set up to manage foreign relations, and the broader political framework. A secondary advantage of this approach is that it takes the bureaucratic and political process out of the national level analysis, where it is usually located, and places it in an area where it more properly belongs by virtue of its sometimes transient nature.
International relations theorists have debated the relative importance of the three levels just described. No clear consensus has emerged from this, but there is general agreement that all are important.45

The following analysis, then, is largely an empirically oriented study of Thailand's relations with regional neighbours in Indochina, and the U.S. in the context of the second Indochina war, together with a modest attempt to outline the importance and changing nature of the three different levels of analysis. Special attention is focused on the national and decision making levels of analysis, particularly the latter, as these have so far received relatively less attention in writings on Thai foreign policy.
FOOTNOTES


2. For a summary of the perspectives adopted in some of the major works on Southeast Asian international relations see Weinstein, F.B., op. cit., p.356, footnote 1.


11. Ibid., p.47, fn.45.


15. Ibid., pp.164-165.


17. The impact of adaptation theory has been summarized in Petersen, N., "Adaptation as a Framework for the Analysis of Foreign Policy Behaviour", *Cooperation and Conflict*, No.4, 1977, p.222.


19. These examples, apart from the USSR, were mentioned in conversation with Professor Rosenau, Australian National University, July 1978.


21. Ibid., p.16.


23. Referred to in Rosenau, J.N., "Theorizing Across Systems: Linkage Politics Revisited", in Wilkenfeld, J., *Conflict Behaviour and Linkage Politics*, David McKay Co., Inc., New York, 1973, p.46. In this article Rosenau did make a limited attempt to revive the framework, but he has not subsequently sought to pursue this.


32. For a preliminary overview of such a study see Bell, P.F., "The Political Economy of Foreign Policy in Thailand", paper for a conference on "Political Economy of Foreign Policy in Southeast Asia", University of Windsor, May 3-June 3, 1987.

33. Writings on domestic politics from a Marxist perspective are discussed in the following chapter, pp. 45-53.


35. There has also been substantial debate over what constitutes a "small state", and how to rank size, but since Thailand's status as a small state is non-controversial I propose to ignore this. The debate is summarized in Pettman, R., op.cit., pp. 9-12 and 156-159.


40. See, for instance, Weinstein, F.B., *op. cit.*, who notes that both North and South Vietnam were to some extent able to impose their will on America, as did Indonesia with Holland.


45. See for instance Waltz, K.N., *Theory of International Relations*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, 1979, which argues the general superiority of the systemic over the national levels of analysis.
CHAPTER 2
THE DOMESTIC BACKGROUND

Before examining foreign policy directly it is necessary to understand the setting wherein policy was conceived and implemented. The following chapter seeks to explain this by discussing the nature of the Thai political system, then the main political developments that occurred in the period under discussion.

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Until recently, virtually all attempts to identify the basic determinants of Thai politics proceeded from a political culture or bureaucratic polity perspective.¹ For adherents of the former, respect for hierarchy and leadership on the one hand, and a "loose social structure" on the other, were the main focus. Those using the bureaucratic polity approach acknowledged the importance of such factors, but placed greater stress on the structure of bureaucratic dominance. Since the 1970s these approaches have been challenged by a third, based on neo-Marxism.
Political Culture/Bureaucratic Polity

The political culture approach traces respect for hierarchy and leadership to the traditional organisation of Thai society, particularly from the time of Ayuthia (1350-1767), and the influence of Buddhism. The early Thai political system was based on Indian concepts of a devaraja (god-king), which in theory (though not in practice) placed absolute power in the hands of an hereditary monarch, assisted by princes and a small official class (sakdina). Among officials, those in charge of military affairs were particularly important, as the kingdom was almost constantly in a state of war; indeed several military leaders used their position to seize the monarchy, and kings often led armies into battle.

Those outside the ruling class were tied into the system by mandatory alliance to an individual official. They enjoyed virtually no individual rights, and their fortunes were almost entirely dependent on their patron. The one meliorating factor was that a favourable land to population ratio made it possible to flee from one official to another, as a last resort. This perhaps helped sustain the idea that officials should behave benevolently towards the general public.

Thai Buddhism also played a part in assuring respect of hierarchy and leadership, by identifying itself with the political leadership, and teaching that those who held power did so because they had acquired merit.

These characteristics were continued during the
Bangkok period (beginning 1782), though less emphasis was placed on Hindu doctrines associated with divinity, and the monarchy strengthened its position as a protector of Buddhism. From the mid nineteenth century, facing threats from Western imperial countries, moves were also made to reform the bureaucracy along more efficient and functional lines - a development seen by some as critical in laying the groundwork for a bureaucratic polity. Both these developments strengthened the position of the monarchy in the short run, but also helped create an opposition that in 1932 brought absolute monarchy to an end.

The overall effect of these developments was to ensure that attitudes of respect for hierarchy and leadership became deeply ingrained in Thai society. As Mulder notes, "...the concept of social equality is unknown in Thai cultural tradition; ..all social relations are characterized by a superior-inferior aspect; (and) ..it is impossible to speak Thai without reference to relative status".³ Political scientists have concluded that this historical tradition has resulted in a system where:

- Rule is by a very small elite.
- Most of the population accept this as legitimate, have little interest in politics, are highly deferential to political authority, and believe change is only possible if it is directed from above.
- Cooperative endeavour amongst the politically conscious takes the form of superordinate-subordinate or patron-client relations. This
inhibits the emergence of pressure groups, political parties etc., since an element of genuine co-operation among equals cannot exist. It also prevents alignments based on class.

. The military/civilian bureaucracy is the dominant political force due to the consonance between its structure and existing social values.

. Coups are accepted as legitimate, being an act of will by a person with merit.

. The king has high social and political status, and is the focus for strong popular feelings of identification with the "nation".

. Rulers are expected to be benevolent.

Thailand was first described as "loosely structured" by Embree, by which he meant a society in which "considerable variation of individual behaviour is sanctioned". The apparent paradox between this and respect for hierarchy is explained in terms of "social cosmetic" - the elaborate ritual and politeness of face-to-face relations - and a real ambivalence in resolving the conflicting influences. Subsequent sociological and anthropological studies have generally supported Embree's view, and added a more structural component by noting the absence of a multitude of organisations that characteristically bind peasant society together. It has also been argued that the concept implies a high degree of role interchangeability, and, more controversially, social mobility. The individualistic nature of Thai Buddhism, in which each individual is seen as having considerable power
to determine his own fate, is usually seen as the basic determinant of this phenomenon. Politically, the implications are said to be as follows:

1. It has encouraged a narcissistic form of individualism that prevents cooperative endeavour in interest groups, political parties etc., and causes chronic instability in patron-client relationships. The political irresponsibility of the press, and "loud-mouth politicians" have also been attributed to this: social conventions prevent Thais openly criticising the government, but being individualistic they like to hear others doing so.6 At the same time it has led Thais to eschew ideology and abstract thought.

2. The government’s capacity to impose its will on the people is limited. Only changes which are clearly beneficial will be accepted. In many respects it is a "non-participatory democracy".7

3. Buddhism, to the extent that this is a component of loose structure, has encouraged compromise and mitigated violence. Thus coups have been relatively bloodless, and losers have rarely been harshly treated. Even the military seem to hold such values: one account particularly notes that "Thai commanders frequently voice their hesitancy to kill Thais".8

4. Acceptance of the military playing a political role, and its own proclivity to do so, can also be seen as reflecting the lack of role specificity characteristic of loosely structured societies.
. Considerable attention is given to ceremony, e.g. symbolic stress on the importance of the constitution, democracy etc., without any conviction that they really can work.

The bureaucratic polity approach reaches similar conclusions, and also acknowledges the supportive role of social structure and attitudes, but gives greater attention to the importance of bureaucracy arising out of reforms in the late nineteenth century. The Thai monarchy, playing the role that colonial powers did elsewhere, paid considerable attention to modernising the bureaucracy, not least its military component. This strengthened the position of the bureaucracy vis-à-vis other groups in society, to the extent that it was able to overthrow the monarchy in 1932.

The implications of a bureaucratic polity have been examined, both theoretically and empirically with reference to Thailand, in several works by Riggs. To summarise briefly, where the bureaucracy is the dominant political group, administration, the economy, and political development will all suffer: administration because the logic of the system means that bureaucrats will ignore difficult administrative tasks and seek to enhance status by bureaucratic politicking; the economy because bureaucrats will be preoccupied with their own enrichment, and seek this through economically inefficient means such as establishing government enterprises or squeezing "pariah" economic elites (however to minimise resentment and opposition to their own privileged position
the bureaucracy has an interest in not allowing the emmiserisation of the public to go too far, and thus extends to the public a wide range of bureaucratic services); political development, because the bureaucracy will seek to protect its position against any potential opposition, including interest groups, political parties and the legislature. Politics is confined to conflict between rival cliques among a small bureaucratic elite.

Looking specifically at Thailand, Riggs finds much evidence to support his theory. He notes that of 237 men who served in Thai cabinets between 1932 and 1958, 184 were officials compared with 38 non-officials (and 15 uncertain). Of the officials 100 were civilians and 84 military. Riggs documents how these officials sustained their political positions by strategic alliances with the pariah Sino-Thai business class, extending protection in return for financial support. Military leaders further entrenched their position by harsh repressive measures. The powers of parliament were strictly curtailed, and in some instances abolished altogether. Political parties and interest groups fared even worse. They were frequently banned, or if not, faced severe restrictions on political activities. Political parties remained small cliques or loose government (military) sponsored blocs.10

Based on the numbers involved, and greater frequency with which civil servants repeatedly held office in cabinets, Riggs implies that the relative power of the military and the civilians was comparable. Using such criteria this analysis could be extended to the 1959-1974
period, when 141 bureaucrats, including only 38 from the military, along with four non-bureaucrats, were included in cabinet.\textsuperscript{11} Clearly, however, the military access to coercive force puts it in a different position to the civilian bureaucracy. No civilian has ever led a successful coup, or even attempted a coup without expecting substantial military support. As Girling notes, Riggs overlooks the "virtual monopolization of key posts – prime minister, minister of defence, and minister of the interior – by army leaders. Such men have held the position of prime minister for some thirty-nine out of forty-eight years; civilians for under nine years".\textsuperscript{12} Thus, while Girling, and others such as Neher,\textsuperscript{13} have continued to use the term "bureaucratic polity", they do so in a different sense to Riggs, to mean a political system in which the military bureaucracy is dominant. It is used with this meaning in the following pages.

Indeed whether the civilian bureaucracy even ranks as the second most important political force is debatable. The monarchy, in spite of the "revolution" of 1932, has reemerged as a major political actor since Sarit took power in 1958. Sarit reintroduced the monarchy to the public to reinforce his own legitimacy, and in the process established a symbiotic relationship between military and monarchy which, though it faltered in the early 1970s, still remains.
Neo-Marxist

The neo-Marxist approach to Thai studies is of recent origin. Within the mainstream of academic research articles adopting this perspective began to appear only in the 1970s. They were, to a large extent, a by-product of opposition to the American role in Vietnam, and appeared particularly in the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* and *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. The analysis overlaps with the more conventional approaches at a number of points - including emphasis on the concentration of political power in the hands of a few, and the pervasiveness of patrimonial norms - but it differs in three crucial emphases: the importance of imperialism since the nineteenth century, and the centrality of class and ideological conflict.

Imperialism

The role of imperialism in nineteenth century Thailand has been incisively examined in a paper by Anderson. This questions the fundamental orientation of conventional accounts, which see political initiative at this time resting decisively in the hands of the Thai monarchy, and the role of the monarchy as progressive and modernizing. Thailand may have retained nominal independence, but in reality after the 1855 Bowring Treaty it was an indirectly ruled colonial (British) appendage. Politically, successive Thai rulers were dependent on foreign advisers to oversee virtually every facet of administration. Economically it also came under foreign domination, illustrated by the fact that 95% of
the export economy was in the hands of foreigners and Chinese on the eve of the 1932 coup against the monarchy. Thus "modernization" under the Chakri dynasty was the same as that to be found throughout the region: the reach of the central government was extended to outlying regions where its influence had previously been indecisive - a development made possible by the foreign-imposed end of regional warfare - and the shaping of an economic order oriented particularly to European (and to a lesser extent Chinese) interests.

An essential continuity is seen in the twentieth century through the decline of British influence from the 1930s, the Japanese coup de main during World War II, and the emergence of America as the predominant power from the late 1940s. The main analytical focus has of course been on American influence. Some writers have seen this as a conscious act of imperial manipulation. Banning Garrett, for instance, implies that U.S. economic control was achieved in part by artificially forcing down the price of two of Thailand's major exports - tin, through dumping on the world market, rubber, through the creation of a synthetic alternative - and then cynically offering assistance in return for the development of the economy along U.S.-prescribed lines. Some of the specific indications of U.S. economic control cited are:

- World Bank activities, including loans of over $350 million since 1950, and a survey in 1959 which
became the basis of the first five year plan in 1960.

Prime minister Sarit's fortune (approximately $158 million), obtained mainly from foreign companies.

Growth in U.S. private investment from $25 million in 1960 to over $200 million, passing Japan as the largest foreign investor in 1968.

Various economic incentives offered to foreign investors, including the 1967 "most favoured nation" agreement extended to the U.S.

Economic boom conditions in the late 1960s, when perhaps 50 percent of the growth was associated with U.S. activities in Vietnam.

A series of debts owed to international financial institutions controlled primarily by the U.S. and Japan, which had by the late 1950s "lowered the capacity of the Thai government to resist foreign economic penetration into previously closed or protected sectors of the Thai economy".

It is not, of course, argued that U.S. control was confined to the economic sphere. Acting through military advisers, the United States Operations Mission (USOM) and private foundations (particularly Fulbright and Asia), the U.S. "planned and aided the reordering of Thai society, from the military and administration to rice cultivation and education".17 To aid this program American scholars spearheaded an attempt to investigate virtually every aspect of Thai life. Bell notes that in 1959 USOM (in other countries known as the Agency for International

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Development) had nine basic divisions, 21 major contributors (including 9 major universities) 139 U.S. and 262 Thai permanent staff members and another 268 American and 2157 Thais on contract.\(^\text{18}\) (These numbers increased in the following decade). The major thrust of American policy was in the area of counterinsurgency. This included some attempts to improve social conditions for Thai peasants and thus detract from the appeal of communism - through such programs as Community Development, Accelerated Rural Development, Mobile Development Units, and mobilisation of the Sangha - but much greater stress on more narrowly defined security issues. Towards these ends the military was given extensive training in counter-insurgency warfare, the number of police increased and police equipment updated. At the same time social scientists and military specialists, numbering some 150 during the 1960s, prodded and probed governmental leaders into taking the insurgent threat seriously. By the early 1960s the modicum of political authority formerly allowed Thai rulers was all but lost, with the imposition of "American military power and giant corporate capitalism".\(^\text{19}\)

Class Conflict

Class conflict is generally linked with imperialism, though according to some accounts pre-dates it. Explicitly or implicitly most accounts take note of Marx's distinction between "a class of itself" and a "class for itself". The fundamental contradiction is perceived to be between the ruling elite, viewed as a self-conscious
class, and the peasant mass which, since the advent of imperialism, has been in the process of change from "a class of itself" to a "class for itself".

Flood considers that after the imperial intrusion in the 1850s, political power rested with royalty in alliance with imperialism. In 1932 royalty was forced to widen its support base and take in the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie. Today, though Chinese proletarians and Thai peasantry make up the mass of the population, they continue to be victimized by Bangkok-based aristocrats, civil-military functionaries and, the weakest party in the coalition, Chinese comprador entrepreneurs. The present differs from the past only in that "this oppressive coalition has been greatly strengthened by its alliance with, and complete subservience to, imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries". 20 When U.S. penetration grew in the late 1950s the hitherto relatively peaceful nature of class conflict changed as the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was forced to oppose the state and its imperial ally in self-defence.

Several accounts place emphasis on the commercialisation of Thai agriculture, a development which is seen as breaking down the traditional practice of self-sufficiency, making peasants vulnerable to the fluctuating fortunes of cash crops, and benefiting only larger landowners and middlemen. Some trace this from the 1930s, but most focus on the 1960s. Anderson, for instance, argues that as late as the 1950s there was no actual tenancy problem in areas such as central Thailand, but that by the late 1960s, according to U.S. Agency for

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International Developments reports, less than 30% of the farms were owner-operated.21 This, together with other by-products of the U.S. presence in the region, led to the creation or expansion of four social classes: in extensively commercialized rural areas a small, generally landed elite made up of strategically placed notables, rice mill owners, traders, headmen, etc., that acquired sudden new wealth; a mass of unemployed and unemployable drifters attracted to booming urban centres either by the hopefulness of youth or because they were dispossessed; a new petty bourgeoisie (approximately 7.5% of the urban working population) who were able to better themselves in service-type occupations; and a new middle bourgeoisie, also largely in the service sector, and closely tied to foreign capital.22 When economic downturn followed the American withdrawal in the 1970s, the three components of an embryonic middle class initially focused opposition on what they perceived as the corruption and incompetence of the ruling trio (prime minister Thanom Kittikachorn, Deputy prime minister Praphat Charusathien and Thanom's son - also son-in-law of Praphat - Colonel Narong). When their exit failed to solve economic problems, and students from rapidly expanding institutions of tertiary education led a threatening left-wing anti-government movement, the new middle class supported an intense right wing campaign that eventually led to the military coup in October 1976.

Apart from some comments by Anderson (noted above) there is surprisingly little discussion of class
conflict in the urban context. Even Flood's seminal work, which is concerned above all else to demonstrate "the reality of the urban leftwing", fails to locate the leadership of this movement within any specific social class. The radicals, it appears, were distinguished only by the fact that they identified with the mass against the bureaucratic state, though there are also references to the importance of "regional intellectuals" from the northeast. Although there is much discussion of the leftist urban movement in the 1950s and again in the 1970s there are no further hints about its class basis, apart from the alleged participation of students, en masse, from the late 1960s. Anderson mentions the existence of an unemployed urban mass, but does not specifically relate this to political developments. Much of his analysis is, however, concerned with the role played by a new type of university student and lecturer that emerged in the late 1960s, to a large extent as a result of U.S. educational assistance. This group (class?) challenged the ideological basis of the state, and provoked the rightist backlash already referred to.

**Ideology**

Ideological conflict, according to Flood, began in the early 1930s when a section of the intelligensia began to identify with the oppressed mass against the bureaucratic state. From 1945-1958 (until government suppression following Sarit's second coup prevented the open publication of views) members of the radical intelligensia, profoundly influenced by the Chinese
revolution, published numerous works advocating a socialist society. Such writings were resumed when a liberalisation of government policies permitted in the late 1960s. By this time the works included a strong rejection of American imperialism and Western-style liberal solutions to the economic problems of the mass. This ideology specifically conflicted with the "glorification of sakdina culture", which was fostered by the educational system, and remained the dominant intellectual trend in the late fifties and sixties.  

Anderson is struck by the self-confident, conservative ideology that prevailed in Thailand up to the 1970s. Unlike any other Southeast Asian country nationalist heroes were the "great kings", though in a limited way the monarch's centrality was reduced during Phibun Songkram's rule. "Much more clearly than hitherto, nation and monarchy became intellectually separable ideas, with the state (essentially the armed forces) as representative of the one and guardian of the other". However under Sarit Thanarat the prestige of the monarch was again strengthened, along with Buddhism. This led to revival of the slogan Nation-Religion-King, "ideological tools self-consciously forged to buttress Sarit's autocracy". But by the 1970s events were weakening the hold of such an ideology. The Vietnam war was important in radicalizing Thai intellectuals, particularly in the case of students abroad who were influenced by and participated in the anti-war movement. Growing anti-U.S. and anti-Japanese feeling was concealed by censorship until October 14, 1973. Then the concept of "nation" was
challenged by those who felt that national sovereignty had been betrayed by the presence of some 50,000 U.S. troops, and the overwhelming foreign domination of the economy. The role of the monarch also came to be questioned, evidenced most dramatically by the popularity of writings by the Thai Marxist scholar Jit Phoumisak. Religion was not directly called into question, though radical groups within the Sangha did criticize the way it had come to legitimize uncritically the existing government. The right wing (particularly the new urban and middle class previously referred to) perceived the threatening implications of these new ideas, and responded by vigorously proclaiming adherence to Nation-Religion-King. The fall of Indochina in 1975, and subsequent abdication of the Laotian monarchy, prompted the king to endorse this campaign. Beginning late 1975 the right-wing controlled mass media began a coordinated offensive, thus playing a decisive role in preparing the groundwork for the coup of October 1976.

Which Approach?

Which of these two approaches best defines the Thai political system in the period between Sarit and the 1976 Seni government? In some respects the events leading up to and during the years 1973-1976 call into question the political culture/bureaucratic polity approach. Contrary to the view that Thais were politically quiescent and unable to establish mass organisations for political purposes this period witnessed an outpouring of intense political activity, and the formation of important
pressure groups among students, farmers, labourers and others. Political parties began to establish national organisations, and played a major role in parliament and government. In many cases these were led by members of the Sino-Thai business community, who by virtue of assimilation to Thai society and economic success were no longer "pariahs", and felt strong enough to seek a direct role in government rather than simply relying on military leaders for protection. The military, meanwhile, was for a time excluded from open participation in government.

However, a closer look at events over this period reveals that elements of the bureaucratic polity remained a force to be reckoned with. The military, though weakened, was not excluded from the political arena, being represented by retired officers in the cabinet, directly controlling many of the right wing organisations that flourished at this time, and even having influence over several political parties. Other organisations, including political parties, remained factionalised and weak. Ultimately the military reasserted its power with the October 1976 coup.

But this does not mean that events from 1973-1976 were merely a temporary aberration, which the coup brought to a close. The process of economic and social change through the 1960s led to a widening of politicisation, and the strengthening of non-military groups that had to be allowed some role in the governing process. The military remained the dominant force, but they were no longer in a position to rule alone. In so far as the political
culture/bureaucratic polity approach depicts a static model of Thai society it has proved inadequate.

The neo-Marxist approach, by contrast, while also having a number of shortcomings, has a more dynamic explanation of Thai politics. Anderson's account in particular, by emphasising the emergence of a new middle class, identified a key element of change in the Thai political system. This approach is also correct in emphasising the importance of the U.S. influence on Thai politics, though the extent of actual U.S. control has been exaggerated. As Girling notes the U.S. role was not one of domination but stabilisation, "bolstering and maintaining the power, wealth and influence of elite leaders in the midst of domestic upheavals and external threats". 26 It was nonetheless unable to prevent the overthrow of its main collaborators, Thanom and Praphat, in 1973, and had no part in other important events such as the 1976 coup. Similarly the U.S. was not economically dominant, illustrated by the fact that "indigenous investment is far greater than all foreign investment combined. In officially promoted investment alone, Thai capital amounted to more than 70 percent of the total up to September 1976: Japan's, 11 percent; and the United States', 4.5 percent". 27

To conclude, the Thai political system at the time Sarit seized power accorded closely with the political culture/bureaucratic polity model. This continued to remain relevant throughout the period of study, though modified by the socio-economic change of the 1960s and early 1970s. The neo-Marxist alternative
correctly notes U.S. influence over the Thai economy and politics (though it exaggerates the extent of its control), and focuses attention in the direction of socio-economic change.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932 was not the revolution its promoters claimed, but nonetheless represents an important starting point to an understanding of modern Thai politics. In one sense it could be regarded essentially as an adjustment of relations between the monarchy and officials (particularly the military). The military became the dominant political group, though the monarchy and members of the aristocracy fought a powerful rearguard action which prevented them from being totally pushed aside. Coup leaders proclaimed their commitment to democracy, with sovereignty lying in the hands of the people rather than monarchy, but then adopted a constitution that gave wide discretionary powers to the executive, stipulated that half the members of parliament be appointed for a period of twenty years, banned political parties, and imposed harsh restrictions on the press. Nonetheless, the coup legitimised the idea of popular sovereignty, and subsequent political developments often reflected tensions between this ideal and the failure to achieve it in practice.

The initial years after the coup were marked by intense political conflict. The coup group itself was divided between older and younger members of the military, and between the military and civilians, and all faced
opposition from members of the aristocracy. This was largely resolved by 1938 when Phibun Songkram, leader of the younger military group, became prime minister. The first period of his rule, which lasted until 1944, is noted for its harsh repression of opponents (eighteen were executed, and many others imprisoned or deported), nationalistic indoctrination, efforts to curb the influence of economic interest groups by nationalising such major industries as rice milling and cigarette production, and concentration of power in Phibun’s own hands by taking over the important ministries of defence, interior, and (some of the time) foreign affairs.29

Phibun allied himself with Japan during World War II, and their fortunes declined together. When legislation sent to parliament in July 1944 was rejected Phibun resigned, and a three year period of democracy was ushered in. The main beneficiary was Pridi Phanomyong, the leading civilian member of the 1932 coup group, author of an economic plan that was rejected in 1933 as communist, and leader of the "Free Thai" anti-Japanese movement. Embryonic political parties were established, and a new constitution adopted which abolished the tutelage principle, placed effective power in the hands of a triennally elected lower house, and prohibited civil servants (including the military) holding public office. However in the three year period no less than ten governments were formed, headed by five different prime ministers. Governments faced numerous problems caused by international pressures (particularly British demands that
Thailand provide some form of compensation for its alliance with Japan), the economy (food and goods shortages, and rampant inflation) corruption among government members, the mysterious death of the young King Ananda in May 1947, and a split in civilian ranks between the followers of Pridi and a more conservative group led by M.R. Kukrit Pramot and brother M.R. Seni, which later established the Democrat Party. Eventually, political turmoil under civilian rule created conditions that could be used to justify military intervention, and this duly took place in November 1947. Phibun was the nominal leader, but actual implementation was in the hands of commander of the 1st Regiment of the powerful First Division (the "coup army"), Colonel Sarit Thanarat. A respected civilian, Khuang Aphaiwong, was initially appointed prime minister, but the following April he was forced to stand aside for Phibun.

The second Phibun period, which proved no less eventful than the first, can be divided into three distinct phases. From November 1947 to November 1951 military rule could not be firmly entrenched due to opposition from within government ranks and from the parliament; from November 1951 to mid-1955 all parliamentary opposition was quashed, autocratic military rule was enforced, and politicking was confined to manoeuvring between three principle actors, Phibun, the Chief of Police General Phao Sriyanon, and head of the army General Sarit; finally, between mid 1955 and Sarit's coup of September 1957 jockeying for power between members of this triumvirate continued, but under circumstances
which saw a significant re-introduction of democratic rights.

In the immediate period after the 1947 coup parliament and political parties remained of importance. The Democrats initially were the strongest party, but internal factionalism, caused largely by government bribery, led to its disintegration. Phibun was eventually able to control around 75 of 121 in the lower house, brought together in the first "government" party, known as the United Parties. It was nonetheless a difficult time for Phibun, who apart from parliamentary opposition faced five coup attempts, including one led by Pridi and supported by the navy in 1949, and another launched by the navy in 1951. Phibun retained control by holding the strategic ministries of defence and interior, and in addition established a close alliance with the U.S. In spite of his war record, Phibun gained U.S. support partly because of circumstances relating generally to the beginning of the Cold War, and more specifically because of his decision to recognise the American-supported Bao Dai government in South Vietnam, and provide military and other assistance to American efforts during the Korean War. The U.S. alliance increased the international stature of Phibun, and quickly led to considerable U.S. economic and military aid.

The final coup attempt in this period, a successful one, occurred on 29 November 1951. The Silent or Radio Coup, took place simply by an announcement over the radio that parliament had been dissolved, the 1932 constitution
(with four minor amendments) was to be reintroduced, and newly appointed National Assembly members would perform the necessary legislative functions until elections were held for the remaining half of the Assembly. The action was justified by reference to domestic unrest, the difficult international situation, and above all the alleged communist threat. It was, in fact, carried out by Generals Sarit and Phao without the knowledge of Phibun, and was clearly intended to both end the troublesome political opposition of parliament and enhance the position of the younger military elite who were prevented from actively participating in politics by the 1949 constitution.

After the 1951 coup political parties were banned and open political activities virtually came to a close. It was replaced by intense manoeuvring between Phibun, Sarit and Phao. Phibun’s influence continued to rest on his control of strategic ministries, and alliance with the U.S. In addition he attempted to further enhance his legitimacy by projecting an ideology emphasising his qualities of leadership, patronage of Buddhism, and anti-communism. Sarit and Phao sought to build up the army and police respectively. For financial assistance they relied mainly on U.S. aid, but also on links established with important Sino-Thai business leaders.

Government policies underwent a remarkable change in mid June 1955, after Phibun returned from a two month world tour. Reforms were introduced enabling the establishment of political parties, freedom of the press, a liberal policy toward the ethnic Chinese, and a wide
range of other democratic freedoms. The reasons for these reforms were never precisely spelt out, but the major factor was probably that Phibun had been impressed by the political strength of democratically elected governments, and hoped to enhance his own position vis-a-vis Generals Phao and Sarit by gaining a popular mandate.

The new government policy gave rise to intense political activity. When political parties were legalised in September some twenty six parties registered. In February 1956 the government, panicked by the criticism it came in for, suddenly imposed a number of political restrictions. Parliament again became an important avenue of competition as each member of the triumvirate sought to increase his influence. The February 1957 election saw a 57.5% voter turnout, the highest ever recorded. Phao, the dominant figure in the government’s Seri Manangkhasila Party, had a large stake in the election, while Phibun and Sarit both distanced themselves from electoral politicking. The government party won a narrow victory - taking 86 of 160 seats - but in view of its extensive use of government funds, and ballot rigging by Phao, it was widely considered a moral defeat. Popular disquiet over the conduct of the election led to a declaration of national emergency on 3 March, with responsibility for maintaining law and order placed in the hands of Sarit.

Phibun attempted to balance the Sarit and Phao groups in the cabinet, but this proved of no avail in the face of several political crises. Ultimately, Sarit and several others resigned from cabinet, and 46 appointed
parliamentarians, led by Sarit, resigned from the Seri Manangkhasila Party. Expressing his opposition to Phao and government corruption generally (but not to Phibun), Sarit sought popular backing on these issues, from the press, university students, and labour.

On 13 September Sarit submitted an ultimatum, signed by 58 officers, calling for the government's resignation and the dismissal of Phao. On 15 September mass demonstrations by labour organisations and university students supported these demands. The following morning there was a coup. Phibun fled the country, while Phao surrendered and was allowed to leave. Both spent the rest of their lives in exile.

**The Sarit-Thanom Governments, 1957-1973**

As in the case of military coups in 1932 and 1947 the coup leaders initially appointed an outside civilian as prime minister. In an obvious move to gain U.S. approval Pote Sarasin was recalled from his position as ambassador to the U.S. to take over this post. However Sarit personally selected all members of the cabinet, half of whom were from the military. He also suspended the constitution then immediately reinstated it, enabling him to appoint his own nominees to the National Assembly. Elections for the remaining Assembly positions were promised within ninety days. An extensive military re-shuffle also took place, including replacements for the top positions in the airforce and navy.

Voting for the December 1957 elections resulted in the Sarit-supported Unionists (formed immediately after
the February election) emerging as the largest party, though with only a little over a quarter of the seats their success was less than decisive. Sarit, however, was not personally involved in campaigning and emerged without loss of prestige. He was quickly able to arrange a majority among elected parliamentarians by merging the Unionists with a large body of Independents (most former members of Seri Manangkhasila Party), in a new National Socialist Party (Chart Sangkhom), Sarit then handed the prime ministership to his trusted deputy, General Thanom, and left for an extended period of medical treatment in the United States.

The Thanom government was not, however, able to resolve the prevailing political turmoil. Several Unionists objected to cooperating with former members of the Seri Manangkhasila in the new party. Opposition members and the press were highly vocal in their criticisms of the government. By-elections for 26 seats in March 1958 resulted in the Democrats winning 13 and the government only 9. A major crisis broke out with Cambodia over competing claims to the border temple, Phra Viharn, six ministers resigned from the cabinet, and several Unionists threatened to leave the party because of alleged "favouritism". In response to these events Sarit returned on 19 October 1958 and the following day carried out a coup against the parliament.

Sarit announced that this time the coup was in fact a "revolution". In some respects it was. Sarit began by dismissing parliament, arresting a large number of political opponents, and banning all types of political

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activities. A provisional constitution was proclaimed the following January. Its most important provision was Article 17 which virtually gave the prime minister absolute power to act as he wished. For the first time since 1932 no provision was made for elected members of parliament, and the constitution also made it clear that parliament's primary purpose was not legislating but drawing up a new permanent constitution. In practice Sarit did exercise absolute power on a number of occasions, and the prohibition on political activity continued throughout his term in office. His absolutism was moderated only by a preparedness to grant cabinet ministers - in most cases selected on the basis of proven expertise - autonomy in running their own departments.

Sarit sought to entrench his regime by a number of additional steps. He retained a tight control over the military from his position of Supreme Commander. The Office of the prime minister was greatly expanded so that it gained a major say in policy areas such as economic planning (through the National Economic Development Board, and the Bureau of the Budget) and internal and external security (the National Security Council), and acquired powers to regulate the affairs of the bureaucracy (Public Service Board). The National Defence College, an institution for elite members of the civil and military bureaucracies, was established to bring senior civilian bureaucrats and their military counterparts together, and help both accept the idea of working in partnership. The importance of the king was also elevated both domestically
and internationally, and his popularity and stature enhanced Sarit’s own legitimacy. Immediate economic benefits for the people were dispensed (such as lower electricity prices and bus fares), and attention was given to providing the necessary infrastructure for long-term growth led by free enterprise, particularly in the impoverished northeast. Sarit also projected his own charisma: he was, on the one hand, a forceful public speaker, an intuitive problem solver and an indefatigable tourer of the countryside (even its most remote corners); on the other hand his well known amorous liaisons gave him a reputation as a gentleman crook (nakleng), similar to many heroes in popular Thai literature.

Sarit rejected the Western concept of democracy, arguing that in Thailand it led to a government of individuals seeking only individual interests. Thak has identified three components in the alternative suggested by Sarit. Firstly, politics must be based on indigenous principles of state — "truly Thai political principles were political stability, proper social behaviour..., and strong executive leadership which would ‘represent’ the popular will and national development". Secondly, a nation should not be vertically divided by political parties, but horizontally by distinctions between the rulers (the government and bureaucracy) and the ruled. Thirdly, the need for paternalism — Sarit often employed imagery associated with the Sukhothai government, referring to the country as a large family and himself as father. In spite of this traditional political philosophy Sarit was also in favour of development, though this was
defined largely in terms of infrastructure, environmental cleanliness, orderliness, the spread of education, and providing the basic material requirements for a diligent land-owning peasantry. A fourth component in Sarit’s ideology was a strong anti-communism, a sentiment fuelled by periodic arrests of communists, the alleged discovery of a significant communist movement in the northeast in 1961, and communist gains in neighbouring Laos. He personally tried and ordered the execution of four communists. There is no doubt that after years of political conflict in which Western democratic ideas were considered the norm, this espousal of a more traditional view of politics gained wide public acceptance.

No government before or after Sarit has matched his regime’s unchallenged authority, achieved by a combination of institutional changes, repression, and public support. After his death in December 1963, this heritage kept his politically less adept successors in office for a further decade.

Sarit was replaced by a duo of General Thanom as prime minister and General Praphat as his deputy. It has sometimes been observed that Thanom inspired the respect but not the fear of Sarit; Praphat inspired a similar fear but not the respect. The new government soon ran into a number of problems. Between March and May 1964 several financial scandals shook the government, the biggest involving illegal assets of around U.S.$158 million acquired by Sarit. At about the same time there were widespread rumours that Phibun was about to return, and
that a number of cabinet ministers were going to resign. In July a military alert was declared, lasting for three months, ostensibly against an unidentified would be coup group. At the beginning of 1965 several junior military were in fact arrested and charged with participation in an anti-government conspiracy; three were subsequently sentenced to two years jail. In September 1964 the Minister of Agriculture resigned to begin a legal battle (ultimately unsuccessful) against charges of corruption. The government was shaken by these developments, but it was never really threatened as the top political leadership held firmly together.

Early in 1965 controversy over these issues subsided as the strengthening communist position in Indochina, China's reported announcement of its intention to sponsor a communist war in Thailand, and the CPT's declaration of armed revolt, pushed other considerations aside. In November a five-day military alert was called after the government claimed to have discovered a communist plot to capture all senior military officers. At the same time widespread concern was voiced over defence arrangements against a possible communist air raid on Bangkok. Armed insurgency did gain some momentum in the northeast from 1965, and early in 1967 a tribal revolt occurred in the north in which communists - though not the cause - were involved. In the latter case the government issued several warnings of supportive Chinese invasions either across the Laotian or Burmese borders. Such incidents were frequently cited by government leaders as justification for postponing a new constitution - an
argument upheld not only by military leaders but also by respected civilian figures such as Pote Sarasin.  

Nonetheless by June 1968 a combination of domestic pressures, led by the media, and a desire to improve Thailand's external image, had led to the promulgation of a new permanent constitution. This was very similar to those of 1932 and 1952, though it did provide for a fully elected legislature. The executive had extensive powers to act independently, and powers of the government-appointed Senate were almost equal to those of the elected lower house. There was no prohibition on public servants holding political office, and the main cabinet posts later remained in the hands of the military. On the positive side, Article 17 was abolished, and the chance of expressing political dissent very much broadened. In early November political freedom was further expanded when an act permitting the formation of political parties came into force.

Elections in February 1969 saw a 49% voter turnout. The newly formed government party, the United Thai People's Party (UTPP) won 75 seats, the Democrats 57, Independents 72 and other minor parties 14. Many of the "Independents" were in fact close supporters of General Praphat who had failed to gain endorsement by the UTPP. Following the usual pattern, by September 35 Independents had agreed to join the UTPP, and 18 others had formed a party which supported the government.

The new parliamentarians performed a number of important functions. Morell's detailed study of this
topic notes particularly four areas. First, they acted as tribunes or brokers for their constituents. Because traditional channels of interest articulation - most notably through the bureaucracy - were weak or inoperative, elected representatives played a crucial role. Secondly, they were able to act as a limited check on bureaucratic corruption and abuses of power. Thirdly, many provided political education and helped to politicize the rural population. Fourthly, simply because they were elected by popular vote, their presence increased the legitimacy of the Thai political system.

Such virtues did not, however, always recommend themselves to the ruling elite. Indeed they were frequently perceived as directly threatening. Moreover, parliamentarians were often self-seeking, manipulative and irresponsible. Morell has estimated that around 75% were corrupt, though the sums involved were not as large as those obtained by bureaucrats.37

Difficulties placed in the government's path were cited as the main reason for yet another coup against parliament on 17 November 1971. A number of specific issues were in conflict. Several critical items of legislation - dealing for instance, with regulation of the press, tax reform and land reform - had been delayed since the opening of parliament, but required hard decisions in the near future. Parliamentarians were about to raise specific cases of executive corruption which would have been highly damaging to the government. Finally some 28 UTPP members were threatening to vote against, and hence defeat the budget bill if the government did not double
provincial development funds - made available only to government party members, to use as they wished - to two million baht (approximately U.S.$100,000) per annum. The government, however, wanted to spend more of its limited resources on increasing the defence allocation. Foreign policy was also an area of conflict between the two sides, with several parliamentarians advocating a substantial loosening of ties with America, a modus vivendi with China, and a more independent policy generally. From the perspective of the government's military leaders the deterioration of the non-communist position in Indochina, and the increasing importance of China in regional affairs following Kissinger's visit to Beijing and the PRC's admission to the UN, created a difficult situation which they preferred to handle without the added complication of public scrutiny.

While all of these factors were important, the internal dynamics of clique politics in Thailand was even more significant. While there were a number of common interests holding the Thanom-Praphat alliance together, including the marriage of Thanom's son Narong with Praphat's daughter, there were also underlying conflicts between them and their respective circle of political supporters. These conflicts were carried over into the politics of the UTPP. In 1971 the sudden surge to prominence of Thanom's brother, Police Major General Sanga Kittikachorn, as Secretary to the Cabinet, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a leader of the UTPP, caused alarm in the ranks of Praphat supporters. When
there were rumours, at the same time, of a reorganisation of the army that would have strengthened some of Thanom's supporters, the pressures on Praphat to act became irresistible. Praphat was able to convince Thanom that parliamentarians had gone too far, and the coup was ostensibly launched in Thanom's name.

After the coup the business of government was carried out by a five-man National Executive Council, in conjunction with Under-Secretaries of State who were elevated to ministerial rank. The constitution was abolished, and the country went without one for an unprecedented thirteen months. Most political rights were also abolished, though the press continued to enjoy considerable freedom and in May 1972 labour unions were allowed to organize. A notable feature of this period was the sudden rise to prominence of Colonel Narong Kittikachorn, appointed head of a powerful new trouble-shooting organisation known as the Bureau for the Investigation and Follow-up of Government Operations.

In December 1972 a restrictive provisional constitution was promulgated, similar in many respects to Sarit's 1959 provisional constitution. The legislature was fully appointed, and Article 17 was resurrected. In February 1973 a 23-member committee to draft a permanent constitution, chaired by Praphat, was announced. Praphat indicated that it might take three years for the committee to complete its work.

While the coup and subsequent events gained wide public acceptance - partly because the prestige of parliamentarians was extremely low, and partly because the
coup was followed by an initially successful crackdown on a disturbing outbreak of urban crime - they did not go completely unchallenged. Small scale protests by university students followed the coup. More significantly, a highly respected ex-Governor of the Bank of Thailand, Dr. Puey Ungpakorn, penned a compelling cri de coeur for more democracy then left to exile in England. Gradually, these events, plus the cumulative effect of socio-economic change associated with U.S. penetration during the 1960s, the rapid expansion of education, the return of an increasing number of foreign-educated students, a severe economic downturn - manifested in a shortage of jobs for graduates, inflation, and even a shortage of the basic food staple, rice - and a long heritage of student activism extending back to the early 1950s but greatly stimulated during 1968-1971, led to the emergence of an important student opposition movement.39

A National Students Council of Thailand (NSCT) was formed in 1969, and achieved a more directly political focus after Thirayuth Boonmee became Secretary-General in August 1972. In November 1972, probably with some government encouragement, the NSCT launched a mass protest against Japanese economic influence, and organised a limited boycott on buying Japanese goods. The following month they organised protests against a decree which effectively ended the independence of the judiciary, and forced the government to withdraw it. In May 1973 students, together with the press, highlighted a minor scandal in which senior military officers were discovered
hunting animals from a government helicopter in the Thong Yai game reserve. In June conflict flared over the expulsion of nine students from Ramkhamhaeng University for publishing articles critical of the government in the university student magazine. Some 30,000 students came into the streets to protest, and linked this issue with others, including the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Thailand and promulgation of a new constitution within six months. In July students themselves began drafting a new constitution, and some 100 prominent people from various backgrounds, loosely linked in an organisation known as People for Democracy, signed a petition urging the immediate promulgation of a constitution. The importance of these developments was enhanced by the king's close and sympathetic interest.

On 6 October eleven of the main activists were arrested, followed by two colleagues shortly thereafter. This immediately provoked a large demonstration in which an estimated 200,000-500,000 students took part. Popular support for the students was also apparent, due principally to the lack of confidence in the "trio" (Thanom, Praphat, Narong) and the economic downturn, in particular the rice shortage. The military was mobilised against students, but before long military ranks divided and the new Army head, General Kris Sivara, withheld troops under his control. At this stage the king intervened and persuaded the trio to leave the country for an indefinite period.
The Democratic Interlude

After the exit of the trio, the king appointed Sanya Thammasak, a member of the privy council, rector of Thammasat University, and a former chief justice, to head a new government. Sanya initially moved cautiously, appointing virtually all his cabinet from members of the old guard. However, he did promise a new constitution within six months, and appointed a committee to draft the new constitution composed of distinctly liberal personalities. At the same time a unique means was devised for selecting a new parliament: the king nominated 2,270 Thais from all walks of life, who in turn met and elected a 299 member Assembly. This did include some farmers and local leaders, but overall there was a striking similarity between the backgrounds of members of this Assembly and those appointed in 1971. This was the first step in a process whereby former members of the political elite gradually won back powers they had lost on 14 October 1973. In the interim, moreover, the old constitution remained in force.

The new government was soon shaken by severe labour unrest, student-led demonstrations against the U.S. (fuelled particularly by a blatant case of intervention in Thai affairs in the form of a letter from a CIA operative to the prime minister), demonstrations by farmer organisations, allegations of military atrocities in the small northeastern town of Ban Na Sai, conflict over the draft constitution presented to the Assembly in March, and a soaring crime rate. In April 1974 Sanya appointed a number of liberal "advisers", most notably Dr. Puey, to
advise the government on areas such as economic policy. The following month a further shift towards liberal elements occurred. After initially resigning in response to public criticisms of educational affairs, Sanya accepted a request to form a new government and took the opportunity to make substantial cabinet changes.

Sanya's second cabinet had only 11 of 29 members from its predecessor, included no military on active service, and comprised largely younger, well qualified technocrats without any political record. However, there was no respite from political turmoil. In July 1974 communal tensions flared unexpectedly when riots broke out in Bangkok's Chinatown. In August Sanya clashed with the Assembly over the use of Article 17 of the constitution to confiscate remaining assets of the trio, ultimately yielding to pressures and invoking the article. The following month there were widespread mass protests over the constitution being debated in the Assembly. In October a new constitution was finally passed and political parties were legalised. This led to an intensification of politicking, and the formation of some 42 parties by the time of elections in January 1975. At the same time dozens of left, liberal and right wing pressure groups were being formed, and clamoured to make their views known. 1974 ended with dramatic mass demonstrations over two issues. In November a seventeen day protest by farmers in Bangkok, assisted also by some one hundred Buddhist monks, led to government promises of land reform and assistance to help redeem mortgaged land.
In December former prime minister Thanom returned to Bangkok, but left again quickly when this provoked an upsurge of student-led protest.

While political events during the Sanya period often appeared quite out of control, this was to some extent a measure of the seriousness with which the government viewed its caretaker role. The government did take some important initiatives on the economic front - such as introduction of a minimum wage - but it believed that most important decisions could only be taken by a government legitimized by popular election.

The new constitution, when belatedly passed, did show a strong commitment to the objective of popular sovereignty. It provided for a bicameral National Assembly, a 100 member Senate appointed by the king and an elected House of Representatives of 240-300 members, with most important powers resting firmly in the hands of the House. The prime minister and at least half the cabinet had to be drawn from the House, and the House alone was vested with the power to overthrow the government by a vote of no-confidence. In other areas, government officials were not permitted to hold political office, and all parliamentarians and ministers were required to declare their assets and liabilities to the chairman of the National Assembly. Some of the less democratic provisions were the requirement that the king appoint the Senate (even the king expressed opposition to this, arguing that it would lead to an excessive involvement of the monarchy in politics), considerable residual powers for the king to delay legislation, and a requirement that
all electoral candidates join parties. The latter provision was aimed at overcoming problems associated with the large number of independents usually elected, but instead merely added another problem by encouraging the formation of innumerable minor parties.

Only a disappointing 48% of voters took part in the January 1975 election (35% in Bangkok). There were a number of reasons for the low turnout, including a cynicism engendered by the feeling that in spite of October 14 things were not getting better, intimidation by right wing pressure groups, and poor electoral preparations by the Ministry of the Interior. No less that twenty two parties won seats in the 269 member lower house. The Democrats again did well, winning 72 seats, with its nearest rival, the right wing Social Justice winning only 45.

The results confirmed the generally conservative nature of the Thai electorate. The Democrat Party, though it had by this time an important left wing component, was still led by one of its founding members from the 1940s, and campaigned on a promise of responsible change. Three parties with 37 seats supported left wing causes, while most of the rest were right wing parties dominated by different factions among retired army generals. The Social Action Party, though headed by a veteran politician, M.R. Kukrit, was a new entrant on the political scene. Led by a successful, younger generation of bankers and commercial leaders, it nonetheless perceived that social improvement for the mass of
underprivileged was in the self-interest of the well-to-do.\(^{40}\)

A coalition government headed by the Democrat Party was initially established, but some three weeks later, on 6 March, it failed to gain a vote of confidence in the House. On 13 March the Assembly nominated the leader of the Social Action Party, M.R. Kukrit Pramo, as prime minister, and six days later approved his seven party coalition.\(^{41}\)

The new government announced surprisingly radical domestic and foreign policies. The first bill passed allocated U.S.$125 million to 5,000 sub-district councils, largely for the purpose of providing work for farmers on small development projects during periods of the year when few agricultural pursuits were possible. Later initiatives sought to improve rice prices, rural credit, and undertake land reform. While many of these proved impossible to implement during the government’s short term in office, they were steps in the right direction. A new emphasis was placed on the rural areas, but the government was also sympathetic to labour unions and the urban poor.

It was not, however, always possible to reconcile these policies. Attempts to raise rice prices provoked major demonstrations by labour unions. To some Kukrit’s policies even appeared dangerously inclined towards socialism. The atmosphere, at this time, was charged by the dramatic series of events that led to communist victories in Indochina. Kukrit’s policy of detente and reducing U.S. links helped Thailand’s international image, but had mixed consequences domestically. Though anti-U.S.
public feeling was strong, caution in relations with communist neighbours could easily be represented as weakness, and the belief that Thailand was in danger of an imminent communist invasion gained widespread credibility.

Political violence became a way of life. Right wing extremist groups such as Nawaporn, the Red Gaur and Village Scouts channelled easily aroused Thai patriotism into an orgy of killing and violence against any individuals or organisations believed to be in some form left wing. By the middle of 1975 no less than 20 leaders of farmers organisations in the north had been assassinated. On 19 August 1975 some 1,000 rampaging policemen plundered the private home of the prime minister, causing extensive damage, because of actions which they felt had slighted them. A day later technical students, and members of the Red Gaur, stormed Thammasat University and caused U.S.$500,000 worth of damage. The government was powerless to stop this violence, which often had the backing of influential figures in the right wing political parties, or active members of the military, particularly the organisation in charge of anti-communist insurgency, the Internal Security Operations Command.

Predictably, the government soon faced grave problems of internal discipline. The only means by which Kukrit maintained some control was "by keeping some cabinet seats unfilled - as bait for the more ambitious - and by continually promising that he would carry out a reshuffle, but not yet". When finally forced to produce a cabinet change opposition from those missing out quickly congealed
and placed a Democrat-led coalition in a position to defeat the government in the National Assembly. To prevent this Kukrit called new elections.

The 1976 election campaign was the most violent ever, dozens of people being killed or injured. The lack of progress made towards a stable party structure was emphasised in the lead up to nominations when no less that 64 parliamentarians changed party allegiance. Another notable feature was scarcely veiled threats of military intervention should civilians fail to maintain order and ensure the country's security. Voter turnout was again low, reaching 46% nationally and only 29% in Bangkok. The results were a resounding success for the Democrats, which obtained 114 seats. Right wing parties again polled strongly, with Thai Nation receiving 56 and Social Justice 28. The Social Action improved to 45 seats, though M.R. Kukrit was defeated by a right wing ideologue in an Army-dominated Bangkok constituency. Left wing parties suffered a stunning setback, securing a combined total of only six seats. The Democrats then formed a new government in coalition with the Thai Nation, Social Justice and the Social Nationalist parties.

Electoral success did not, however, make it any easier for the Democrats to govern. The Seni government began inauspiciously with the death, two days after his appointment as Minister of Defence, of General Kris Sivara. General Kris had acted as a restraining influence on military officers wishing to play a political role prior to this, and although just retired retained unrivalled links with both military and business elites.
His death removed a major stabilizing factor. From the outset also inter-party politicking was intense, along with intra-party conflict between the left and right wing of the Democrats. Seni did not deal with these divisions as skilfully as Kukrit had, though it is doubtful that even the most adroit prime minister could have retained the initiative for long.

The Seni government adopted similar domestic and foreign policies to its predecessor, but as the escalation of politics into the the streets continued it had little opportunity to implement these. In an orchestrated attempt by military leaders to further de-stabilize the country, former leaders Praphat and Thanom returned to Thailand in August and September 1976, bringing large scale protests by students and an uncertain response from the government. Praphat eventually left the country but Thanom, who on arrival immediately became a monk, stayed on. In an important gesture of support for the military the king, who had become increasingly concerned by events in Indochina (particularly the abolition of the Lao monarchy) and the growth of left wing influence in Thailand, personally called on Thanom at his monastery.

Elements in the military were by now merely looking for a pretext. This came on 5 October when, under circumstances that remain obscure, students at Thammasat staged a mock hanging in protest at earlier police garrotting of two students. A press photograph showed that one in the mock hanging bore a close resemblance to the Thai crown prince, and this was exploited by the right
wing media to whip up royalist sentiment against the students. The following morning police, with assistance from Red Gours and other right wing extremist groups, launched an armed attack on Thammasat, killed scores of students, and helped create an atmosphere in which a military coup would be welcomed by a significant proportion of the population. This duly took place a few hours later.
FOOTNOTES


7. The term is that used by Piker S., in "Loose Structure and the Analysis of Thai Social Organisation", Evers, H-D., op.cit., in reference to local politics. However the same point has been made at a more general level by Adul Wichiencharoen, op.cit., pp. 130-131 and Thinapan Nakata, The Problem of Democracy in Thailand, Pracpittaya Ltd., Bangkok, 1975, pp. 70-71.

9. See particularly Riggs, F.W., *op.cit.*, and an earlier theoretical work *Administration in Developing Countries*, Boston, 1964.

10. Riggs, F.W., *Thailand*, especially chapters IX and X.


23. Flood, T., *op.cit.*, p.60


30. Discussion of the 1944-1947 democratic interlude, and the following second Phibun administration, is based largely on Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, Social Science Association of Thailand, Bangkok, 1979, chapters I and II.

31. The Unionists gained 45 seats, Democrats 39, Socialist Front 12, Independents 58 and minor parties 6. Kajatphai Burutphat, *Karnmuang Loe Phukarnmuang Kong Thai Nap Tae Yoot Raak Teung Fadjuban* (Thai Politics and Political Parties From the Beginning to the Present), Bangkok, 1968, p.296. It should be noted that figures given for this election differ slightly in several sources. The figures given by Kajatphai are from an official report by the Ministry of Interior.

32. The following details are based largely on Thak Chaloemtiarana, *op.cit.*, the definitive study of the Sarit regime.

33. The actual wording was as follows: "During the time of the present constitution whenever the Prime Minister deems it appropriate for the purpose of repressing or suppressing actions which jeopardize the security of the nation or the throne, or any subversive action which threatens or disrupts order, whether originating internally or externally, the Prime Minister, by resolution of the Cabinet, is empowered to issue any orders or take any action. Such order or actions are considered legal". Sumnukgarn Lekathigarn Rathasapha, *Ruam Khotmai Ratatatamanoon* (Collection of Constitutions), Bangkok, 1976, pp.264-265.


37. Ibid., pp. 633 - 634.

38. Ibid., chapter XIII.


40. For detailed election results see Morell, D. and Chai-anan Samudavanija, op.cit., p.113.

41. Kukrit’s Social Action Party combined with Social Justice, Thai Nation, and four small right wing parties.


CHAPTER 3
NATIONAL AND DECISION MAKING INFLUENCES ON FOREIGN POLICY

As earlier suggested, domestic influences on foreign policy can be divided into enduring features which would apply irrespective of the government in power - factors such as geography, demography, economy and historical experiences - and the nature of the decision making process. The two approaches are complementary. The former sets broad constraints on foreign policy, but will not always provide clear guidelines on how a particular government will respond to these considerations. If, for instance, geographical and historical circumstances have decreed that a neighbouring country represents a major security threat, national influences may not by themselves determine whether the appropriate response is resistance or accommodation. A study of decision making influences should provide more specific guidance on such issues.

NATIONAL INFLUENCES

Thailand’s foreign policy environment in the middle of the twentieth century was in many respects shaped by history, geography, and the attributes of national power. Governments in this period saw themselves as the inheritors of a long historical tradition, stretching back
to Sukhothai in the thirteenth century. From this time successive dynasties played a major role in the shifting alignment of forces on mainland Southeast Asia. Indeed the persistence with which Thailand played such a role contrasts with the rise and fall of Burmese, Cambodian and Lao dynasties, and the emergence of a united Vietnamese dynasty only in the nineteenth century. Though not a nation state in the Western sense before colonial intervention, governments at Ayuthia-Bangkok, based on the fertile central plains of the Chao Phraya valley, established loose control over tributary states (often facilitated by ethnic, cultural and linguistic ties), thus extending their influence beyond the boundaries of present day Thailand. This long history, unbroken by colonial intervention, has given contemporary Thai governments a consciousness of their importance as a regional power on the Southeast Asian mainland. In the present century this has been reinforced by consolidation of control over a country 514,000 square kilometres in area (slightly smaller than France), strategically located in the Southeast Asian region in close proximity to China, with a relatively homogeneous population that increased from about 25 million in 1960 to 43 million in 1976, and an economy and military forces that were significant in regional terms.

History has bequeathed several additional lessons to contemporary Thai leaders, including the importance of diplomacy, and alliances with both weaker and stronger powers. Prior to European intervention, international relations in Southeast Asia was based on a tributary
system. Prevailing Hindu religio-political doctrines asserted that the ruler was the centre of the universe, and implied the need to bring as wide an area as possible under control in order to align theory with reality. In practice this generally meant direct control over a small ethnically and culturally homogeneous "core" group, and a much looser control, decreasing with distance and other factors such as ethnic difference, over tributary states. As long as these sent regular "tribute" to the central group, sometimes in as essentially symbolic form such as the tree of gold (bunga emas) sent by several Malay states to Bangkok, supported the centre in time of war, and kept their own affairs in order, they were generally given a high degree of autonomy. Thailand was also part of a similar tribute system that existed between Southeast Asian states and China.

The tributary system placed a premium not only on military strength, but also on diplomatic ability. Opponents could be frustrated by strategic alliances with smaller states, or strengthening ties with China, the one powerful state proximate to the region. China could also be appeased by skilful diplomacy. Hall notes that in the fourteenth century the rise of Ayuthia was facilitated by the weakness of Mongol power in China, but the situation quickly changed as the Ming dynasty consolidated. "The Siamese kings seem to have been aware of this", Hall continues, "for they sent frequent embassies to Nanking, the Ming capital, and sedulously cultivated friendly relations. As diplomats the T'ais have never been sur-
Diplomacy, although not the only factor, also played a major role in enabling Thailand to maintain its independence during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in saving the country from occupation by Japan during World War II, and in avoiding harsh reparations meted out to those who sided with Japan after the war.

Thailand's "bamboo diplomacy," so called because it bends with the prevailing wind, is not simply one of capitulating to a stronger power. The lesson drawn from the involvement of large powers in the region, particularly European powers in the nineteenth century when Thailand was forced to surrender suzerainty over territory in Cambodia, Laos, Burma and peninsular Malaysia, is that large powers pose a major threat to Thailand. China, as the only large power proximate to the region, has also had a special place in Thai concerns. Thai leaders have traditionally accepted the need to accommodate a superior power, but at the same time see the necessity of building up countervailing forces. As Thak notes, the Thai phrase for this is "yiep rua song khaem" (placing a foot on either side of the boat to avoid capsizing). Wilson describes it as an "insurance" approach.

It is an approach long honored in Southeast Asia, if not the whole world. It is based on the twin assumptions that neighbors are ambitious and allies are unreliable. The approach dictates that, if caught between two large powers in conflict, one must join and rely on the stronger. But, because situations change and because judgements can be faulty and friends fickle, the best way to insure safety is by keeping open, as far as possible, lines of retreat to the other camp.

Foreign Minister Thanat expressed much the same view in
mid 1969 when he observed that "in a world of changing alliance, enemies became the best of friends, and allies the worst of enemies".  

Wars, suzerain-vassal relationships, and a whole range of political intrigue remain firmly engraved in the historical consciousness of contemporary Thai leaders. Pre-colonial international relations in Southeast Asia, fashioned by an inbuilt imperative to expand and chronic political instability in most states, were characterised by constant war and intervention in the affairs of others. Efforts to extend control at the periphery of a state frequently led to conflict not only with the area directly concerned, but also with another expanding state. Conflict between states often took the form of competition to establish suzerainty over territories on the periphery, though direct confrontation did also occur. It would be impossible to consider contemporary Thai relations with Burma and Vietnam without reference to historical conflicts in the course of attempting to establish hegemony over the Southeast Asian mainland. Similarly, relations with Malaysia, Cambodia, and Laos have been greatly influenced by the suzerainty which Thailand exercised over most of these areas in the past. Thai leaders have remained somewhat patronising towards these states, and previous difficulties in the tributary relationship have led to the perception that they are ungrateful and untrustworthy.

These historical perceptions, combined with the porous nature of Thailand's lengthy borders with Cambodia and Laos and a different pattern of political evolution in
Burma as opposed to Vietnam, helped define the major foreign policy concern of Thailand in the period under review. Sukhumbhand Paribatra and Suchit Bunbongkarn have noted that historically Thailand proved "vulnerable to landbased threats". Burma was the greatest enemy in the pre-colonial period (it conquered Thailand on two occasions), but the threat from the east, which became particularly important following Vietnamese unification in the early nineteenth century, has "proved the most enduring". The major reason for this is that:

the trans-Mekong region comprising lowland Laos and most of Cambodia is a rich and accessible area, with the river being a natural line not of division but unity between the population and resources on either side of it. While unable to exert direct control over this area, the Thais have always felt it had a keen interest in it not only for economic reasons but also for strategic ones given the fact that this area and the central plains form one geographical continuum unbroken by an easily defensible natural barrier, and consequently have always viewed with alarm any change which might lead to the domination of this area by another power.

A final comment should be made about the economy. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century Thailand prospered from the export of its agricultural sector, particularly rice, rubber, teak and tin. By the mid twentieth century such an economy was becoming untenable, particularly because suitable new land for extending the area under rice cultivation was no longer available, and rapid population increase was threatening to reduce the rice crop available for export. The government therefore began moving towards diversifying the agricultural sector, and, more slowly, to promote light industrial production and service industries. Such
policies required an export market for agricultural produce, and foreign investment, loans and technology for the industrial sector. The West and Japan were best placed in both these areas, in effect forcing Thai foreign policy to give priority to these countries.

The influence of the national level on Thai foreign policy, then, may be summarised as follows:

. Thailand’s historical importance and present status as a significant regional power in mainland Southeast Asia have made Thai leaders conscious of their country’s international standing.

. Historical experience has taught the importance of diplomacy, including the usefulness of aligning with more powerful states. However history has also shown that major powers are not to be trusted, and lines of communication must always be kept open with others.

. The pre-colonial system of international relations in mainland Southeast Asia, in which Burma and Vietnam were Thai rivals for regional dominance and Cambodia and Laos tributary states, continues to influence contemporary Thai perceptions of these states.

. Thailand’s greatest foreign policy concern is the trans-Mekong region, because geographical factors, and historical experience, suggest it is the most vulnerable area to outside attack.
Recent attempts to diversify agriculture and develop a light industrial sector have caused Thailand to orient foreign policy towards western countries and Japan.

**DECISION MAKING INFLUENCES**

The Thai foreign policy decision making process involves both formal government machinery, including different government departments and offices, the military, monarchy, cabinet, parliament, and other influences that may loosely be described as public opinion. This section focuses on the interrelationship between these elements, and the foreign policy approaches of the two major actors, the military and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

**Office of the Prime Minister**

The importance of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in foreign policy making is derived largely from the powerful, supra-legal position of the prime minister. As in other areas of government, if prime ministers were interested in foreign affairs; they were in a more powerful position than any individual or even institution to get their own way. In the Thai "bureaucratic polity" it was accepted that a prime minister had a discretionary decision-making power which did not require endorsement through the normal channels.

Sarit and Thanom were clearly anxious to play an active role, particularly where foreign policy was in any way related to security issues. As subsequent chapters
show, Sarit was the main actor in relation to events in Cambodia and Laos during the time of his premiership. Thanom specifically requested the U.S. to approach him directly rather than through the foreign minister on a wide range of issues, and had his ambassador in the United States report directly to him. In 1971, when personally requested to intervene by Taiwanese President Chiang Kai Shek, Thanom overruled earlier decisions by the National Security Council and Cabinet, and agreed to co-sponsor a U.S. proposed UN resolution (ultimately defeated) that, while allowing the People's Republic of China membership and a seat in the Security Council, would have allowed Taiwan to remain in the Assembly. There was, moreover, a tradition of foreign powers approaching the prime minister directly, which pre-dates the Thanom years. Of the remaining prime ministers Kukrit alone played a very active role, though in his case it was in cooperation with and not at the expense of the MFA.

Deputy prime ministers were also well placed to speak out on international issues. General Praphat regularly commented on such matters during his long tenure in this office. Major General Pramarn, as deputy to both Kukrit and Seni, was often critical of the accommodation then being sought with communist neighbours. By cooperating with some military leaders, and intensely anti-communist groups such as the Village Scouts, Red Gours and Nawapon, Pramarn made the process of accommodation a much more difficult one.

The prime minister's position was further enhanced by
four sections within the OPM concerned with foreign policy formulation or implementation. In approximate order of importance, these were the National Security Council, the Department of Central Intelligence, the External Policy Division in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, and the Public Relations Department.

**National Security Council (NSC):** The NSC, the government's highest advisory body on all security issues, was established in September 1959, superseding the Defence of the Realm Council. It had nine members, slightly fewer than its predecessor, including the prime minister as Chairman, the deputy prime minister as Deputy Chairman, five ministers whose portfolios touched on security issues (including the foreign minister), the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and the Secretary-General of the NSC. Interestingly, its role in international issues touching on security was made explicit, which had not been the case with its predecessor. A further innovation was the establishment of a secretariat, headed by a Secretary-General appointed by the prime minister. The importance of the Secretary-General's post was emphasised by the requirement that he attend meetings of cabinet.

Under the Sarit and Thanom governments the NSC occupied a key position in the foreign policy making process. In an interview Field Marshal Thanom identified it as the most important institution for this purpose. Issues such as the entry of U.S. troops into Thailand were, he claimed, brought to the NSC for its approval; cabinet was then merely informed. Since most of the
leading positions in this organisation were held by military men, including the Secretary-General's position, the NSC institutionalised a major military input into foreign policy making.

In the post-Thanom period the NSC was expanded into a somewhat unwieldy organisation of twenty six members, including additional ministers, military representatives, and representatives from the public service (mainly from the NSC secretariat itself). Partly because of its less manageable size, though more fundamentally because of the reduced influence of the military in the political arena after 1973, the NSC became a less influential element in the decision making process. It seems possible also that the growing influence of the NSC secretariat, composed largely of young, well educated, liberal civilians, may have muted earlier differences between this body and the MFA. Indeed the role of the NSC appears to have changed from one which facilitated the military playing a dominant part in foreign policy decision making, to one in which civilians gained military endorsement for their policies. Foreign ministers found Secretary-General Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Sawetsila (currently foreign minister) an eminently reasonable man to deal with, and were able to obtain NSC approval for their policies.

Department of Central Intelligence (DCI): The DCI, a military-dominated organisation with both domestic and international responsibilities, (recently reorganised as the National Intelligence Agency) was the main intelligence organisation dealing with foreign countries.
Directors had frequent, direct access to the prime minister, and DCI potential was enhanced by the dependence on intelligence information for understanding developments in Indochina countries. It had some capacity to run intelligence operations of its own, and perhaps more importantly had liaison arrangements with intelligence organisations from other countries.

Since DCI activities were largely covert, and all information provided to the government classified, it is difficult to evaluate the role it played. Most interviewees were highly sceptical about the value of all intelligence information on international events (including that provided by the CIA), but an ex-foreign minister considered DCI reports the most reliable of the many covert sources available.

**External Policy Division:** This division acted essentially as a coordinating body between the prime minister and other sections of the bureaucracy dealing with foreign relations. It was also drawn into practical issues when visiting foreign dignitaries met with the prime minister, or the prime minister visited overseas. The division had limited powers to decide which issues should receive the personal attention of the prime minister, and the form in which these were presented to him, enabling it to play a small role in policy making. However, it was organised essentially to perform routine bureaucratic tasks and had a very limited analytical capability.

**Public Relations Department (PRD):** During the Sarit years, and to a lesser extent throughout the 1960s, the
Director-General of the PRD played an important role as spokesman for the Thai government on both domestic and international affairs. By the 1970s his international role had been taken over by spokesmen attached to the MFA or the prime minister's secretariat. Another PRD activity that fell by the way-side in 1964 was the inclusion of all important government statements on foreign affairs in the department's journal, Khao Prachasamphan. The Foreign News Division of the Department continued, however, to issue news on foreign affairs and also monitor foreign radio broadcasts.

The Military

The influence of the military on foreign policy was derived in part from the position of the prime minister, which as noted was generally in the hands of an active or recently retired officer, and through its dominant voice in the NSC and DCI. Similarly, the military always occupied the post of Defence Minister, and used this position to intervene directly in foreign policy. In a number of instances military officers also served as foreign minister or deputy foreign minister: Thanom as foreign minister 1972-1973, Police Major General Sanga Kittikachorn (Thanom's brother) as deputy foreign minister 1970-1971, and Major General Chatichai Choonhavan (who was, however, a member of the foreign ministry from 1958-1971) as deputy foreign minister 1972-1974 and foreign minister 1975-1976. The high point of military control over the foreign ministry was the period between the November 1971 coup and the overthrow of Thanom in October
1973, when both the minister and deputy were military officers; though even then the actual running of the MFA was largely in the hands of deputy minister Chatichai, who had some fourteen years experience in the MFA. It should also be noted that Thanat was made a Colonel by Sarit, but this was purely an honorific title and did not imply actual military membership.

At least four additional factors reinforced the military's importance. First, in the 1960s and 1970s it was able to conclude important military agreements on its own, such as those allowing the stationing of U.S. planes and troops in Thailand. Secondly, it had long been committed to a doctrine of forward defence, involving various covert efforts to strengthen sympathetic neighbouring governments, weaken unsympathetic ones, or establish relations with prospective alternative governments. In the case of Laos, for instance, up to some 20,000 Thai troops were involved in an ultimately futile attempt to prevent victory by the communist Pathet Lao. Formal endorsement for such actions seems not to have been sought in the period under review. Thirdly, among political appointees to ambassadorships (admittedly a small proportion of these posts) nearly all, apart from those posted to Washington, were from the military. Countries with military leaders generally had military ambassadors. This was true, for instance, of the Republics of Vietnam, China and Korea. Also, members of the military or police held most ambassadorships in neighbouring countries in the mid 1950s, and retained some
in the 1960s and early 1970s.\textsuperscript{21} In addition, of course, military attaches were appointed to a large number of countries. Finally, and more generally, the military itself strongly believed - and had some support in wider circles - that foreign policy should be viewed essentially as a security issue. Senior military officials thus followed international events closely, and used both formal and informal avenues to influence policy.

Another foreign relations area in which the military played an indispensable role was that of border demarcation. It alone had the required cartographic expertise to take part in border demarcation exercises, and to comment authoritatively on the precise location of Thailand's borders. Since all borders with neighbouring countries were undemarcated in sections, and actually subject to competing claims in some cases, this was an important area to monopolize expertise.

One final way in which the military was able to exert some, though not exclusive, influence, was in the form of informal advisers to prime ministers. Because of the importance of personalism in Thai government, foreign policy decision making often owed more to individual contacts with influential figures - particularly the prime minister - than the formal institutions established for this purpose. It is difficult to analyse this systematically, as different people intervened on different issues, and did so in different ways. Sarit seems to have been less reliant on military advice than Thanom, perhaps reflecting greater confidence in his own judgement and a willingness to listen to "technocrats".
Thanat Khoman, Prince Wan, Pote Sarasin and Luang Vichit Vadakarn (a former foreign ministry official and noted proponent of cultural nationalism who was the first Secretary-General of the NSC till his death in August 1962) have all been identified as advisers to Sarit. Thanom saw his main foreign policy advisers as Prince Wan, Dr. Thanat, Pote Sarasin and Colonel Sawaeng Senanarong (an "intellectual" military figure attached to the OPM for several years). Other members of the foreign policy inner circle during Thanom's time were Deputy Prime Minister Praphat, Air Chief Marshal Dawee Chullasyapa, and in later years Major General Chatichai Choonhavan. ACM Dawee, the most urbane and articulate in the English language of the top military leaders, was the main negotiator with the U.S., but did not have an important decision making role.

Broadly it can be said that until October 1973 the military had the dominant role in foreign policy making. After 1973 the MFA became more influential than the military, but the latter fought a strong rearguard action. In an attempt to undermine MFA policy towards Indochina, military owned television and radio stations railed against the domestic and international communist menace, and border incidents with Laos and Kampuchea following the communist takeovers in 1975 were exaggerated for the same purpose. As government policies for a withdrawal of U.S. forces were implemented, leading military figures spoke out against this. The military was not, of course, completely united on such issues, but the minority calling for moderation were seldom heard. The vocal majority was
not able to gain its way at the time, but did make it difficult for the MFA to secure the implementation of its policies.

Military interest in foreign affairs grew in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Amongst the factors responsible were heightened instability in Indochina, the increase in liberal arts courses in the training curricula for military officers, and the opening of the National Defence College (NDC) in 1955. The NDC was a military dominated institution, bringing together senior military and civilian bureaucrats, that gave considerable emphasis to international issues in the context of general security threats to the country. Additionally, the decline of military influence over foreign policy after 1973 prompted a determined bid to reassert authority. Many of the military protests against foreign policies after 1973 were in reality directed against military powerlessness rather than the ostensible issues involved.23

For the period under review military leaders brought a distinctive perspective to bear on foreign policy issues. Socially, they came from lower middle class backgrounds, and found military careers a stepping stone to upward mobility. Educational training, which usually started in military cadet schools from the primary level, inculcated simple virtues such as love of duty, love of honour, and love of nation.24 As a result of these backgrounds military leaders were conservative, anti-communist believers in the two camps doctrine, prone to look to military solutions to the problems of managing relations with regional countries, and prone to an over-
simplistic division of foreign countries into enemies and friends. Such attitudes made them strongly pro-U.S., a sentiment that was strengthened by their dependence on the U.S. for military and other aid. They shared with senior members of the foreign ministry a belief that foreign policy should be managed by an elite and not placed in the public arena. Their views were expressed in frequent comments on contemporary issues, and also published in the army magazine *Yuttakot*, and the NDC publication, *Rattapiruk*.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

The MFA has long been the most comprehensively organised institution to formulate and implement Thailand’s foreign policy. To evaluate its actual input it is necessary to examine both basic "objective" factors - historical background, organisation size, finances and the quality of personnel - and its actual modus operandi.

As noted, Thailand has played an active role in international politics for centuries. From the time of Sukhothai in the thirteenth century, diplomatic relations were conducted with neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia and with China. In the early sixteenth century European countries began visiting Thailand, and in 1608 Thailand despatched its first diplomatic mission to Europe.

During these years foreign affairs was looked after by the Treasury, in particular a subdivision of this dealing with Ports. The Ports department was given a separate identity on 14 April 1875, and this date is now
officially observed as the birth of the MFA. A further
development occurred in 1882 when the first permanent
overseas envoy was appointed, based in London and
accredited to most of the West European countries and the
U.S. Ten years later, in the major administrative reform
of 1892, Ports was renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
(Krasuang Garn Tang Prathet) and assumed the normal
functions of such a ministry.25

This long tradition distinguishes the Thai foreign
ministry from its counterparts in most developing
countries. Its many notable diplomatic achievements over
the past century have served to weld a self-confident
esprit de corps, and have enhanced its stature in the eyes
of the Thai political elite.

The organisation of the foreign ministry, which
changed little in the period under review, is set out in
Appendix 1.26 The terminology used to describe the
bureaucratic framework differs from that in other
countries, but the familiar distinction between
"territorial" and "functional" sections applies. If one
accepts Boyce's claim that "most medium sized Western
foreign offices would need at least five territorial
divisions",27 then the MFA meets the appropriate
requirements. With regard to functional sections, Boyce
notes the difficulty in covering such areas as security,
communications, research, policy planning, and
international law, all of which were at least taken into
account. (Consideration of how well these sections
actually functioned follows below.) Responsibility for
foreign policy formulation, according to official ministry publications, rested largely with the Political Department and, since its establishment in late 1973, the Policy and Planning Division.28

In size the MFA is considerably better off than its counterparts in most developing countries. In 1962 there were some 25 embassies and one legation abroad, accredited to 47 countries; and by 1975 there were 39 embassies accredited to 56 countries, and permanent missions in the UN and Geneva. Throughout this period there was also around one hundred "diplomatic" officers in Bangkok.29 This may be compared with Boyce's observation that of 23 "new" Commonwealth states at a 1970 conference on diplomatic organisation in Singapore, only four had foreign offices with over 50 diplomatic staff.30 However, with a total staff of less than one thousand,31 the MFA was by far the smallest ministry in Thailand.

In the area of finance also the MFA appeared to be better placed than most new states. For new Commonwealth states, according to Boyce, expenditure on the foreign ministry represented a significant outlay. In their first three years of operation they usually accounted for "at least one per cent of total budget outlays, whereas recurrent spending... rarely reaches one per cent in the budgets of larger established states".32 In the Thai case the figure varied between approximately 0.8-0.9 from the beginning of the 1960s to 1966, and 0.5-0.6 from 1967 to 1976. Absolute expenditure rose nearly every year, but frequently failed to advance as quickly as the overall budget.33 It is difficult to assess how adequate this was
to carry out the functions required of a foreign ministry. But it is perhaps indicative that though financial problems were frequently noted by MFA interlocutors, they were never raised as a major problem.

The MFA generally attracted well qualified candidates into its ranks. Apart from a brief period after World War II, when there was a shortage of university graduates, a bachelor's degree was normally the minimum entrance qualification. Until about a decade ago the ministry selected some of its personnel at the secondary level and sent them abroad - generally to England - to complete their secondary and university education. Of forty six senior MFA officials included in a 1963 edition of Who's Who, three had only secondary education, twenty four had a bachelor's degree, nine a master's degree, and ten a doctoral degree. Twenty four of these had some overseas education, including all who completed doctorates. While a degree is normally required for entry into most foreign ministries, such an educational profile compares favourably even with developed countries, particularly in terms of postgraduate education.

After joining the MFA, most officers pursued a career in it. Other developing countries have found it difficult to retain experienced personnel, both because of greater bureaucratic opportunities outside the foreign ministry, and difficulties of working in such an area in politically unstable states. This has not happened in Thailand, largely because of the high prestige of the MFA vis-a-vis other government departments, and its relative isolation
from political intervention. Thus, unlike most developing countries, Thailand has long had a large pool of experienced foreign policy practitioners which it could draw on.

Modus operandi: The major problems inherent in analysing the workings of foreign ministries have been succinctly stated by T.B. Millar:\(^{35}\)

The role of a foreign office is never easy to determine, and books or articles on it are usually factual without being very informative... they do not tell us how it works, lives, palpitates; what alternatives to existing policy it puts up; which members are listened to and which are not; how reliable are its methods for collecting and assessing information; what are its continuing myths; what effect the office has on its ministers and through him on the government... The problem usually is that only the serving officer really knows what is happening and he is forbidden from reporting it.

In spite of those difficulties, the following section attempts to provide some insights into the modus operandi of the MFA. It is useful to start by looking at the social backgrounds of the members.

The MFA is often considered to be "elitist".\(^ {36}\) Compared with other ministries it had more than a proportionate number of aristocratic members, and a number of influential families - including Sucharitkul, Devakul, Kasemsri, Bunnag, Arthayuti and Jayanama - have played a key role in the MFA over several generations. This was not achieved by flouting normal public service requirements which included, inter alia, recruitment based on competitive examination. It was largely a natural process since the children or relatives of diplomats were likely to have acquired proficiency in such key areas as
foreign languages. Members of these families characteristically received an overseas education to tertiary level (usually at Oxford or Cambridge), often obtaining doctorates in fields such as international relations or international law. They then quickly rose through the ranks to top positions in the ministry.

Numerically most MFA members were not from the aristocracy and did not receive an overseas education. They were, however, generally from a privileged social background, attended prestigious schools in Bangkok, then completed tertiary education at Thammasat University or abroad. A fairly comprehensive picture of the background of senior MFA officials in the 1960s can be gathered from the forty six MFA entries in the previously mentioned 1963 edition of Who's Who. Around two thirds were born in Bangkok or adjoining provinces. Thirty four attended leading secondary schools in Bangkok, no less than twenty eight at only three schools (Tepsirin, Suankularb and Assumption). Twenty four attended Thammasat University, but only four went to Chulalongkorn. Amongst the twenty four foreign educated half went to France, eight to Britain, and the United States, Japan, Germany and Switzerland each had two. (Some, of course, studied in more than one country.) At least eighteen had served in other government departments before joining the MFA, a surprisingly high figure.

By the 1970s some changes had begun to occur. The introduction of politics courses at Chulalongkorn in the 1950s led to an increased intake from this university, though Thammasat retained its dominance. Britain and the
United States became more important than France as venues for an overseas education. Finally, recruitment from other branches of the bureaucracy became less common. Nonetheless, the broad picture described for 1963 remained accurate for the period under consideration.

Such privileged backgrounds, together with generous monetary rewards and the high prestige associated with a position in the ministry, naturally inclined most members to a rather conservative, anti-communist world view, and an "ivory tower complex". During the 1960s some officials became uneasy about the nature of the U.S. relationship, but until the following decade none questioned the general thrust of Thailand's then strongly anti-communist foreign policy. They also tended, until recently, to be Western centric. The most prestigious postings were in the U.S. or Europe. Only in the 1970s was there a concerted attempt to elevate the prestige of Southeast and East Asia. Most, moreover, saw their role in purely passive terms, that is to implement policies rather than play any part in devising them. One official estimated that only about ten per cent of members were interested in formulating policies, and amongst these the desire was often curbed by a heavy burden of routine work.

The ministry changed in the 1970s as a younger generation, influenced by the increasingly unfavourable trend in Indochina conflicts, and perhaps also by the entry of those educated in Western universities during the radical 1960s, reached senior positions. Officials began to favour a less confrontational approach to neighbouring
countries, and a less fulsome approach to the U.S. alliance. A concerted attempt was made to elevate the prestige of Southeast Asian posts. And, as discussed below, members of the ministry increasingly sought ways to influence the formulation of policy. The changes were, of course, greatly aided by the three-year "democratic interlude" from October 1973, but had commenced before then. The "ivory tower complex", however, was scarcely affected by such developments, and the belief that matters of foreign policy could best be handled by a small elite persisted well beyond the 1970s.39

In spite of broad social similarities, there were important divisions within the MFA. The largest faction was the Thammasat group, closely followed by the "Free Thai" group. Many members, including Thanat, supported the "Free Thai" during World War II, and in 1946-7 some 10-15 Free Thai supporters from the Justice Ministry were transferred to the MFA to ease a critical personnel shortage. Factions also congregated around the two long running foreign ministers during the 1950s and 1960s, Prince Wan and Dr. Thanat. Possibly the most cohesive group, however, were the "Oxbridge" graduates drawn from the ministry's leading families.40

There is no evidence that these divisions were so sharply demarcated as to have a significantly adverse effect on the ministry's functioning. People with expertise and ability generally did manage to get to the top. Dr. Thanat, during his long tenure, personally sought to promote those of ability, partly through his appointment of personal secretaries,41 and partly through
his general influence over the ministry as a whole. In the 1970s the MFA was also affected by changes throughout the bureaucracy, whereby an earlier reverence for seniority was modified and highly qualified technocrats in their thirties and forties advanced to the highest positions.

There were, of course, shortcomings in MFA operations. Dr. Thanat’s prodigious energies seem often to have precluded the participation of others, particularly on the policy formulation side. An anonymous former ministry official observed: 42 throughout the thirteen years of his tenure, he ran the Ministry effectively with just a group of only about a dozen young men whom he selected for their abilities to produce the work he required at the speed which he required. Thanat also kept all policy matters and their main implementations in his grasp and only those selected young men were privy to their unravelling.

On occasions the Under-Secretary was not even informed in advance of important policy changes.

There were also problems in areas identified by Boyce as particularly difficult for foreign ministries in developing countries: ensuring effective liaison between the home ministry and diplomatic missions abroad, and research and intelligence gathering and processing. 43 Foreign ministry interlocutors frequently commented on the difficulties, when serving abroad, of maintaining adequate communication with the Bangkok office. This may in part have been due to three problems noted by Boyce, namely, technical communications problems, junior officers in the home department, and political appointees who refused to report directly and regularly to the foreign
office. Indeed, Ambassador's Diary, a 1,000 page collection of reports sent to the prime minister by Bunchana Attakorn while ambassador to the United States in the late 1960s, illustrates this last point. The principal message of the book, however, is that on several bilateral issues Foreign Minister Thanat instructed the U.S. not to deal with Bunchana. Thanat did not even subsequently inform him about such matters. While this might partly be explained by personal rivalry between Thanat and Bunchana, it seems also a further reflection of Foreign Minister Thanat's inclination to run the MFA essentially on his own.

On research and intelligence gathering and processing matters, the MFA did have many skilled diplomats reporting on developments in the countries they were posted to, and a capability to process such reports into policy recommendations. They did not, however, have the resources to provide detailed information on military and covert operations in neighbouring countries - particularly China and the DRV - an area that had to be left to the Thai military, and intelligence organisations such as the DCI and its American counterparts. Given the continuous turmoil in neighbouring Indochinese countries following World War II, and poor relations between the MFA and the military most of this time, this was an important limiting factor.

A final noteworthy feature of the internal dynamics of the ministry is that it controlled its destiny with relatively little pressure from outside. Ministers were
generally drawn directly from ministry ranks, or at least people who had previous experience in the ministry. This was true of all ministers apart from Prime Minister Thanom and Bhichai in the period under discussion. Moreover, as the list of Foreign ministers in Appendix 2 illustrates, except for a period of rapid turnover in the 1930s and 1940s, a small number of ministers have exercised control over the ministry for much of its existence. As a former official notes, in over a century,\textsuperscript{47} just a handful of people have ruled over it for more than ninety per cent of the time. Compare that record, for example, to the Ministry of Commerce or Agriculture and you will probably count almost fifty each. Now take also into consideration the way Thai ministries are always so dominated in every direction by their ministers, and you can easily see the smug sense of security that our Foreign Ministry people have built up around themselves as being the most untouched officials in the realm.

The period from Thanom's November 1971 coup to his ouster in October 1973 is slightly different. The "sacking" of Thanat after November 1971 was not a military attempt to take over the foreign ministry,\textsuperscript{48} but having taken this step military leaders were anxious that they retained control. Nonetheless, by effectively handing the MFA over to deputy minister Chatichai, it remained in the hands of someone with vast experience in the ministry.

There were few instances of outside intervention in any other form. Ambassadors were rarely political appointees except, as noted, for Washington, Southeast Asia in the mid 1950s, and military-led governments such as Taiwan, South Korea and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). If political appointees were retained beyond the expiry of
their first appointment, which happened only rarely, they
were integrated into the ministry. No political
appointments were made in the three years after October

The one major exception to MFA independence occurred
after October 1976 when military leaders intervened to
suspend three senior officers. All were subsequently
reinstated, though Anand Panyarachun, a former Under-
Secretary, resigned shortly thereafter, becoming probably
the only MFA official to resign because of external
political interference.

**MFA Policy Making Role:** For most of the period under
review the MFA played only a minor role in the formulation
of foreign policy. This should not be exaggerated: in the
mid 1960s the MFA did participate with the military in
important negotiations with the U.S. on a Status of Forces
Agreement and U.S. use of the B-52 aircraft base at
Utapao, the August 1969 proposal for the U.S. to begin
withdrawing from Thailand originated from Thanat, and
after publicly clashing with military leaders over sending
Thai troops to Cambodia in mid 1970 Thanat had the
satisfaction of seeing the adoption of his policy (albeit
because the U.S. failed to provide support). In areas
that were not of major interest to leading military
figures - such as Europe and the Association of Southeast
Asian Nations (ASEAN) states - the MFA had a free hand.
The promotion of regionalism in Southeast Asia,
particularly through ASEAN, and Thailand's mediating role
over Indonesian "confrontation" of Malaysia, were
important initiatives crafted by Thanat. Moreover, MFA officials generally agreed with the policies adopted through to the early 1970s, and indeed Foreign Minister Thanat was an effective and often outspoken government publicist. But key issues on Thai relations with the U.S. and neighbouring countries rested with the military up to October 1973. An attempt was made to change this in 1972, according to a well-placed official, when the MFA presented to the government a blueprint which predicted the fall of the RVN, and advised a more independent, less anti-colonial policy; but there is no evidence of MFA advice being acted on. Thanat's impatience with this arrangement was expressed by several threats to resign, and two attempts to secure a position on the bench of the International Court.50

After October 1973 the military was forced to withdraw substantially from the political field, and the MFA was the organisation the new political leaders turned to for advice on foreign policy. The impact of this change was perhaps blunted during the interim Sanya period by the government's commitment to holding over major decisions for its elected successor. Nonetheless the move towards a more independent, less anti-communist foreign policy, as advocated by the MFA in 1972, was begun.

After the Kukrit government came to power following the 1975 election, the MFA came to play an even more important role. Foreign Minister Chatichai, a member of the ministry from 1958 and a deputy foreign minister under Thanom, was both a polished diplomat and a powerful figure

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in Thai elite politics in his own right. Not personally oriented towards policy matters he had a close rapport with members of the ministry, and effectively gained approval for the advice they presented him. Fortunately MFA views were also substantially in accord with those of Prime Minister Kukrit, who was also anxious to play a major foreign policy role.

Another important development during this period was the appointment of Anand Panyarachun as Under-Secretary of the ministry in January 1976. For perhaps the first time the Under-Secretary position was held by a highly able official who was a activist by temperament. This both helped consolidate the dominant role of the MFA in foreign policy making, and prompted a strong negative reaction from the military. As noted, Anand was one of the three senior officials suspended from the ministry by military leaders after the October 1976 coup.

The situation did not change markedly after the Seni government came to power in May 1976. Bhichai Rattakul was the first foreign minister to come from a non-MFA/military/bureaucratic background, but quickly established a relationship of mutual respect with senior officials in the ministry. He had a deep interest in policy matters, and played an active role in this area. Like his predecessor he was a man of considerable influence in Thai elite circles, which in turn accrued to the MFA. Bhichai’s position was enhanced by Prime Minister Seni’s willingness to delegate problems in this area to him. However Bhichai’s role, and the short interlude of MFA dominance in the foreign policy field,
The Monarchy

The Thai king maintained an active interest in foreign policy, intervened directly on a number of issues, and played an important role in support of Thai military leaders. It was not usual for the king to intervene openly in foreign policy matters, but there are some reports of instances were this occurred. Thailand’s decision to accept (albeit with reservations) the World Court decision to award the Phra Viharn temple to Cambodia in 1962 came after the king had counselled moderation.^{52} In September 1966 the king summoned Thanat to meet him in London and reportedly persuaded Thanat to abandon retirement plans.^{53} Thailand’s main troop contribution to Vietnam came only after President Johnson gained the king’s agreement.^{54}

More generally, the king was able to reinforce government foreign policy views in his frequent talks with international leaders,^{55} by representing Thailand on a number of important international visits (until the late 1960s, when he decided that threats to Thailand required his presence in the country on a full time basis), and perhaps most important of all by a number of public addresses in which he warned against the communist menace to the country. The 1966 new year message reflects the general tenor of these:^{56}

we were faced with a serious threat last year. Our enemy openly declared its intention to invade Thailand and has initiated its aggressive design by means of propaganda and infiltration as well as by the use of force. It is indeed to be feared that,
should we fail in our attempt to defend our freedom and to resist Communist aggression, a great catastrophe will surely develop. I therefore appeal to you... to co-operate with the authorities and to put national interests above all other considerations.

In most cases the king acted in support of government foreign policy objectives. However in the mid 1970s after communist victories in Indochina, and particularly after the abolition of the Lao monarchy in November 1975, the king sided with elements in the military opposed to the government policy of accommodation and moderation in dealing with the countries of Indochina. This was revealed openly in a speech on 14 December 1975 when he warned that sabotage against the country "has now reached the point of direct aggression. Thailand has thus become the target of an enemy who wishes to seize and control it, to dominate and to take advantage of it in their interest and for their supremacy". 57

Cabinet

Foreign policy in Thailand, as in most countries - particularly those influenced by the Westminster system - has traditionally been considered a matter for the executive rather than the legislature. The nation's top executive body, the cabinet, might therefore be expected to have played an important role in policy formulation. The available evidence, however, suggests that while it was generally informed and occasionally consulted on foreign policy issues, it had very little impact on them.

Most foreign policy issues brought before cabinet were strictly routine. The MFA nominated ambassadors to serve abroad, and made proposals for such matters as aid
relief for various disasters in other countries, or visits to Thailand by foreign dignitaries, all of which were given automatic approval. Important foreign policy matters were, however, considered, as published accounts of Thai cabinet meetings reveal. In June 1964, cabinet looked at the security situation in Indochina and Southeast Asia generally. At the prime minister’s initiative, a military briefing was given on this subject. In September that year the foreign ministry brought up the projected formation of the Asian and Pacific Council and obtained the cabinet’s endorsement. The broad question of Thai-U.S. relations following the massive introduction of American forces in 1965 was touched on in February 1966 when cabinet discussed and approved a large increase in U.S. military aid to Thailand. In May 1966 cabinet approved a Ministry of Defence request for military assistance to the RVN - both personnel and materiel - after approving this in principle in July 1965. From about mid-1966 public records of cabinet meetings appear to have been severely edited, and mention few foreign policy issues of interest. Several press reports, however, indicate that important issues dealing with Thai-U.S. relations were brought before cabinet.

Cabinet, however, was a large, unwieldy body including deputy ministers as well as ministers, and was not fully trusted or taken into confidence by the top power-holders. When important issues arose it was normal to "inform" cabinet rather than to seek its approval.
Thanat did exactly this, after consulting with the prime minister, before announcing Thai willingness to open a dialogue with China in February 1969. Issues were not presented in sufficient detail to allow substantial debate, only a few members had an interest in foreign policy, and almost all cabinet deliberations were pro forma in nature. Cabinet was essentially a consensus institution, in which members deferred to issues brought forward by colleagues so that they in turn would not face opposition when advancing their own proposals. A story in the corridors of the foreign ministry, possibly apocryphal, had Thanat angrily retorting to a cabinet enquiry on his portfolio with the words, "As I never interfere with your business, please do not interfere with my foreign affairs".

On one issue the question of cabinet involvement is controversial. Dr. Thanat has alleged on a number of occasions that the decision to allow U.S. bases in Thailand for prosecuting the Vietnam war was made entirely by the military, and he as foreign minister only came to learn of it many months later through reading U.S. media reports. This view was not, however, endorsed by three contemporary cabinet ministers, including Prime Minister Thanom, who maintained that cabinet was informed about this. Most foreign policy issues, it would seem, did go before cabinet, apart from certain "sensitive" topics such as Thai covert military operations in Laos and (to a lesser extent) Cambodia and Burma.
Parliament

Parliament played a much smaller foreign policy role than all the institutions discussed so far. From 1959-69 the only task of the appointed parliament was to draft the constitution. The elected parliament of 1969-1971 showed some interest in foreign affairs, with members generally calling for a more independent, less pro-American foreign policy. However, the extent of this interest was perhaps indicated by the fact that the post of chairman for the Foreign Affairs Committee was uncontested, and it was the least desired of all parliamentary committees. To ensure that parliament played no part in a field that the government believed was the prerogative of the executive, requests for a general debate on foreign policy were disallowed, and even the Foreign Affairs Committee was not allowed to meet. Virtually the only concession was that the prime minister facilitated a Committee visit to the RVN. The findings of this mission (highly pessimistic), were communicated directly to the prime minister.

When parliament was reconvened in late 1973, after a two year suspension, it demonstrated an unprecedented interest in foreign affairs, to a large extent a consequence of the dramatic nature of change in neighbouring countries during that period. The position of the Foreign Affairs Committee chairman was contested after elections in 1975 and 1976, and the committee itself played an active role monitoring international events. There is no evidence, however, that this flurry of activity made an impression on the executive. The parliament generally (right wing members excluded),
appeared to have few differences with government policy. Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee made visits to China in 1975, and Laos in 1976, just before the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, and just before an important visit to Laos by Foreign Minister Bhichai. In the latter case three parliamentarians even accompanied the minister on his visit. Parliamentary support for government policies perhaps helped gain wider popular support; that, however, was the extent of parliament’s role.

Foreign Policy Advisers

On two occasions in the period under review "advisers" were appointed with special responsibilities that included foreign affairs. Pote Sarasin was appointed as a general adviser to the Thanom Government after the cabinet reshuffle of December 1972, and was subsequently engaged in a wide range of diplomatic activities, including representing Thailand at the United Nations General Assembly. Early in 1974 Dr. Thanat Khoman was appointed a foreign policy adviser to the Sanya government and was quickly able to command as much of the public limelight as the foreign minister. Traditionally, however, "advisers" have been appointed more for the purpose of legitimising the role of the incumbent government than for actually giving advice. There is no evidence that the position enhanced the influence of Pote or Dr. Thanat in the formulation of foreign policy.
Ministry of the Interior

As the ministry primarily responsible for domestic security, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) was engaged in activities that at times impinged on the area of international relations. In border regions, for instance, the maintenance of peace and protection of the country's sovereignty was the responsibility of several offices under the MOI: the Border Police, the Provincial Police, and others such as provincial Governors and District Officers. Refugees from Indochina, Burma and mainland China were also the responsibility of the MOI. To deal with the international ramifications of such issues, a Foreign Affairs Division existed within the MOI. Like its counterpart in the OPM, this was essentially a coordinating body, and it is doubtful that it ever actually influenced policy. The MOI was also involved in the foreign affairs field in one other small way: the inclusion of an international relations section ("Analysis of International News") in its weekly publication, Sarn Prachachon.

The Interior Minister, occupying one of the most powerful positions in the cabinet below the prime minister, undoubtedly had the potential to influence foreign policy by adopting particular policies on issues such as refugees or border conflicts. For most of the period examined, however, the minister was General Praphat whose positions as deputy prime minister and Deputy Head or Head of the Army allowed him to speak and act freely in the foreign policy area.
Public Opinion

Public opinion may be important for foreign policy in either an indirect or direct sense. Indirectly, all decision-makers are influenced by shared national perceptions of the country and its place in the international system. This has been discussed in the first section of this chapter. But public opinion may also be expressed through official institutions such as parliament, political parties, interest group lobbying, mass demonstrations, or the media. Parliament has already been discussed in this context, and there is very little to record on political parties. While party spokesmen sometimes responded to specific foreign policy issues, there was almost a total lack of interest in examining international issues within parties. 71

There is only limited evidence of interest groups having an influence on foreign policy. Some, such as the influential banking sector, did of course have a preference for a pro-Western foreign policy that would encourage economic co-operation between Thailand and the capitalist world, but they were provided with this without needing to assert influence. A small group of academics with a particular interest in international relations did seek to play a foreign policy role through their articles and books, 72 but found a largely unreceptive audience. MFA officials preferred the security of their own organisation and were unwilling to establish a dialog with academics. Since most members of the group were at Chulalongkorn University they had few students in the ministry who could serve as intermediaries. Most also
taught part time in military academies, but felt quite frustrated by attempts to influence members of these institutions. Nonetheless there were at least two occasions when such people were called on to advise the government. Just before the 1971 coup Dr. Khien Theeravit was invited to brief the cabinet on developments in China; and in mid-1975, just before the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, Dr. Khien and others from the Chulalongkorn Political Science Faculty were called to the MFA to discuss the implications of this development.

Mass protests are a relatively new means of participating in the foreign policy field. Possibly the earliest instance of this occurring was in September 1958, when an anti-Sihanouk government-sponsored crowd marched on the Cambodian embassy in Bangkok. Public meetings were also held in 1963 to protest against the anti-Buddhist policies of the Diem government in the RVN. There do not appear to have been any further demonstrations until students led an anti-Japanese protest in November 1972. After October 1973 students very quickly organised protest rallies against the U.S. in Thailand, and U.S. policy throughout the region. At the time they occurred these demonstrations were viewed as largely helpful by the government, though important sections of the military disagreed. They did, however, have the important effect of strengthening government resolve in pursuing an independent foreign policy. On one occasion, the "Yala incident" in Southern Thailand in May 1976, a mass demonstration proved even more important. The government
was fundamentally in sympathy with crowd demands for the withdrawal of Malaysian troops from the region, but it was forced to implement this precipitously in a manner probably not of its own choosing.73

The remaining aspect of public opinion, the mass media, played a more complex role in the foreign policy process. Radio and television stations were mainly controlled by government departments and the military. As a consequence they generally supported the government, broadcasting educational talks on foreign affairs prepared by the PRD and backing all government foreign policy initiatives. The exception to this, as already noted, was the period after 1973 when the military-controlled radio and television stations attacked government policies towards neighbouring communist countries and demanded a much tougher line.

Newspapers were interested in international issues, particularly English language publications which were widely read amongst the political elite. Prior to 1973 most Thai newspapers were controlled by apolitical or politically conservative interests. Their approach to international events tended to be even more xenophobic and more anti-communist than the government. While often critical of the government in other respects, all government statements on the dangers of communism through the 1960s and early 1970s were given prominent coverage and often sensationalised. In this way they no doubt helped to keep anti-communist zeal at a high level, and reinforced this aspect of the government’s foreign policy.
The extent to which the government used the press for foreign policy ends is difficult to determine, but it obviously had an interest in encouraging anti-communist sentiments, and frequently provided detailed, generally accurate, briefings to the senior *Bangkok Post* journalist (later Editor) Theh Chongkadikij. Articles on the front page of the *Bangkok Post*, or sometimes the rival *Nation*, were a quick and effective means of alerting the international media and local foreign embassies.

After October 1973 the situation changed with the emergence of several liberal and left-wing newspapers, and the increasingly radical stance of some established papers. Many were strongly critical of the government’s pro-U.S. policy, calling for a more independent role and the need for a modus vivendi with communist neighbours. One leading journalist visited the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1974 and made a personal effort - through both his writings and informal politicking - to improve relations between this country and Thailand. The advocacy of such policies were often helpful to the government, then in the process of revising long standing Thai policies, and received some encouragement from them.

Such policies were, however, vigorously opposed by the right wing and conservative press. Thai language papers such as *Dao Siam* strongly attacked the government for policies it alleged were anti-U.S. and pro-communist. The *Bangkok Post* ran unattributed articles (believed by many observers to have been planted by the CIA) alleging detailed knowledge of Vietnamese plans to take over Thailand. Such articles and comment perhaps inhibited
the implementation of government policies, but could not
have done more than this with half the press taking an
opposing view.

Thailand also has a tradition of political journals,
most either weekly extensions of daily newspapers, or
university publications read only within the confines of
academia. An important independent journal was the Thai-
language Sangkhomsat Parithat (Social Science Review).
This started in 1963 as a liberal, critical journal
concerned mainly with literature and culture, but by the
mid 1960s began featuring sympathetic articles on
government and society in neighbouring countries. In the
late 1960s it moved to addressing broad problems of Thai
foreign policy. The Review was much earlier than the left
wing newspapers in warning of the dangers of too close an
alignment with the U.S., and urging the need to come to
terms with communist neighbours. These views were part of
a broader criticism of Thai government and society,
representing an intellectual revolution (Thailand's
equivalent of the Chinese May Fourth Movement) that
preceded October 1973. It helped in important ways to
establish the climate for debate in the 1970s. Having
done this its vigour wilted in the mid-1970s and its role
was taken over by newly established left-wing weeklies.76

Conclusion

From the late 1950s until October 1973 political
power rested firmly in the hands of a small number of
military leaders, who used this to ensure their control
over the determination of foreign policy. The prime
minister, a military man throughout this period, was in a position to dominate policy making, and was strongly supported by such military-dominated institutions as the NSC and DCI attached to his office. The MFA had primary responsibility for implementing policy, but its policy formulation role was confined largely to issues that military leaders considered did not significantly touch on security interests. The formality of submitting foreign policy issues before cabinet was generally observed, but only to legitimise decisions already taken. Parliament, political parties and interest groups had virtually no foreign policy role.

For the three years after October 1973 the military lost much of its political power, and the MFA became the main organisation responsible for formulating policy. The MFA, which by then sought a more independent foreign policy, encountered strong opposition from the military, but was slowly able to implement policies because of strong public support.
FOOTNOTES


6. In the case of Laos this is revealed in the frequent depiction of bilateral relations as analogous to those between a big and little brother. Thai leaders have also frequently commented that both Cambodia and Laos used to be part of Thailand in the past.


9. This was common knowledge among those interested in foreign affairs in Bangkok, and confirmed by a well-placed American official.


15. A list of members provided by an NSC official included the following: Prime Minister, Defence Minister, Finance Minister, Foreign Affairs Minister, Agriculture and Co-operatives Minister, Communications Minister, Commerce Minister, Interior Minister, Justice Minister, Education Minister, Health Minister, Industry Minister, Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command, Army, Navy and Air Force Chiefs of Staff, Secretary-General of NSC, Director of Department of Central Intelligence, Director of Public Relations Department, Secretary-General of Cabinet, Liaison officer for three armed forces in NSC, and four senior NSC officials.

16. As late as 1983 Foreign Minister Siddhi Sawetsila described it as probably the most important forum for deliberations on foreign policy (Nation Review, 16 February, 1983). However it clearly lacked the prestige it had during the time of Thanom, and had also become less a tool of the military. It is illustrative that when Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri retired as Secretary-General in August 1986 he was succeeded by a civilian.

17. The National Intelligence Agency was established in late 1985 as part of a move to upgrade the DCI. The DCI, until the 1980s, was led by and drew a large number of its senior officials from, military officers. The NIA, however, is a civilian organisation. Nation Review, 4 September, 1985.


19. Interview with Bhicai Rattakul, office in Bangkok, 11 April, 1978. Asadakorn Eksaengsri questions the capability of the DCI, which he says worked with limited manpower and a limited budget. In particular he believed it would be unable to verify intelligence reports provided by U.S. and Taiwanese allies. The evidence for this view is not, however, revealed. Ibid., p.129.

20. Interview with Dr. Chatri Ritharom, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, 28 April, 1978. Dr. Chatri worked in the External Policy Division before pursuing post graduate studies.

22. Interview with Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, Bangkok residence, 29 April, 1978.

23. It is notable that after the October 1976 coup the military quickly dissociated itself from the extreme anti-communist policies of the Thanin government. These policies, they discovered, heightened instability on Thailand’s borders with Laos and Cambodia, creating serious security problems for the armed forces. Following the ouster of the Thanin government Prime Minister General Kriangsak reverted to pre-October 1976 policies, without encountering any significant opposition from within the military.


25. This historical background is outlined in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs publication entitled The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, 1975, pp. 1-4.

26. This may be compared with the organisation as of 1986, set out in Funston, J., "The Role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thailand: Some Preliminary Observations", Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol.9, No.3, December, 1987, pp. 240-241. But see also comments on further planned changes, pp. 230-231.


29. Taken from the section on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Siam Directory (published annually in Bangkok) for 1962, 1966 and 1974-75. There is, however, no formal distinction made between diplomatic and non-diplomatic personnel in the ministry. For recent figures see Funston, J., op.cit., p.231.


33. The figures are taken from *Statistical Yearbook*, produced annually in Bangkok by the National Statistical Office, Office of the Prime Minister.


38. The term "ivory tower complex" is used by an anonymous former senior official of the Foreign Ministry, in an informative article appearing in *Nation Review*, 1 September, 1982.


40. Interview with a senior MFA official.

41. The three personal secretaries appointed by Dr. Thanat were Anand Panyarachun, Sompong Sucharitkul, and M.L.Biraphongse Kasemsri, all junior members at the time who subsequently went on the highest positions in the ministry. All, interestingly, were "Oxbridge" educated; Anand at Trinity College, Cambridge, Sompong at Worcester College, Oxford, and Birabhongse at Christchurch, Oxford.

42. *Nation Review*, 1 September, 1982.


45. Bunchana Attakorn, *op.cit.*


48. There were differences of nuance in the views of Thanat and military leaders at the time, particularly on the speed of rapprochement with China (Morrison, C.E. and Suhrke, A., op.cit., pp.125-126), but interlocutors agreed that personal conflicts, particularly related to a major row between Thanat and Bunchana Attakorn, were the main reasons for Thanat’s exclusion from cabinet. In a typically Thai approach to conflict resolution, Bunchana was also excluded.

49. Examples from Thai-U.S. relations are discussed in more detail in chapter four (pp.173-177), and Thai-Cambodia chapter six (pp.310-313).

50. In June 1964 Dr. Thanat told press representatives that he had already tendered his resignation three times (Siam Rath, 2 July 1964, in Siam Rath Weekly Review, 9 July 1964). In October 1966 he again told a reporter he would like to resign (Bangkok World, 2 October 1966).

51. The foreign ministry has, however, become influential again in recent years. See Postscript.

52. See p.295.


55. Commented on by several interlocutors. In August 1969 Foreign Minister Thanat also reported that "the King gave President Nixon his views about the situation in Laos because the King himself is watching the situation there very closely". Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Collected Interviews of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, Vol.III, 1969, p.188.


58. Khao Prachasamphan, June 1964, p. 436

59. Ibid., September 1964, pp.693-694.

60. Ibid., February 1966, pp. 136-137.

62. In April 1968 cabinet spent an hour discussing the implications of U.S. President Johnson's decision not to stand for re-election (Bangkok World, 3 April 1968); in September 1969 cabinet was consulted on approving details of U.S. troop withdrawals from Thailand (Ibid., 10 September 1969); in January and March 1971 cabinet approved steps to be taken in opposing the sale of subsidized U.S. rice to some of Thailand's traditional markets (Ibid., 6 January 1971 and 4 March 1971); and in May 1975 a special cabinet session was called to approve recommendations on the form of protest to the U.S. following use of Thai bases during the Mayaguez incident (Bangkok Post, 16-17 May 1975).


64. Nation Review, 1 September, 1982.


66. Interview with former Prime Minister Thanom at his Bangkok residence on 29 April 1978.

67. This is somewhat speculative, but is based on the very firm impression gained from interviewing several ex-cabinet members, that most were genuinely unaware of the details of such covert activities. Thanat, however, claimed to have been privately informed of covert activities in Laos, which he supported as this country was Thailand's "cordon sanitaire".


69. Interview with Mr. Bichai Rattakul, a mission participant, at his office in Bangkok, 11 April, 1978.

70. I am indebted to Dr. Somsak Xuto, of the National Institute of Development Administration, for drawing my attention to this phenomenon. Advisers have, however, become more important in the 1980s, and have been particularly to the fore under Prime Minister Chatichai's administration.

71. Based on interviews with Democrat, Chat Thai and New Force party members.
72. Khien Theeravit, "Kor Sanget Khiawkup Nayobai Tang Prathet Khong Thai", Sangkhomsat Parithat, is a good example. This article includes a direct appeal to foreign policy decision-makers to seek the advice of Thai academics. Another important commentator was Somsakdi Xuto. Several articles by him, published mainly in the 1970s, have recently been brought together in In Retrospect: Views and Comments from Selected Writings, Social Science Association of Thailand, Bangkok, 1982.

73. This incident is mentioned p.217, footnote 106.

74. See pp. 263-264.

75. See, for example, Bangkok Post, 6 April, 1975.

76. This is reflected in the fact that Sangkhomsat Parithat was not revived after October 1976, except for a while, in an English language version. A Thai language replacement, Jotmai Khao Sangkhomsat, began publishing in 1978.
CHAPTER 4
SYSTEMIC INFLUENCES ON FOREIGN POLICY

Discussion of systemic influences on Thai foreign policy - meaning the influence of the international balance and relations between states - involves examination of two separate but related issues. The first section will look at the changing strategic balance in Thailand's immediate neighbourhood, Southeast Asia, taking into account broader shifts in the Asian and world arena. The second section looks at Thailand's relations with the great powers and regional neighbours (excluding Indochina which will be considered in subsequent chapters), and touches briefly on its involvement with international organisations.

THE REGIONAL BALANCE

Southeast Asia emerged from World War II as a region of uncertainty and instability. In Burma and the Philippines colonial powers moved quickly to grant independence, notwithstanding doubts about how new governments would cope with communist and other insurgencies. Colonial powers elsewhere (apart from Thailand which had avoided colonial rule) sought to re-establish control, giving rise to nationalist, anti-colonial wars in Indonesia and the countries of Indochina. Communists led the nationalist movement in Vietnam, and
were important in all other countries. While communists and non-communists sometimes worked together because of a common commitment to anti-colonialism, conflict between these two groups was an important part of post-war Southeast Asian politics.

In the bipolar world that emerged conflict over communism soon became the main consideration defining the regional strategic balance, and remained so for most of the period under review. The key developments may be summarised as follows:

- U.S. involvement in support of France against Vietnamese communism from the late 1940's, and intensification of the Cold War because of the "fall" of China in 1949 and the Korean War in 1950
- the Geneva Conference and establishment of SEATO in 1954, which polarised the region by recognizing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) as the first communist state in Southeast Asia, and committed the U.S. to preserving the rest of Indochina and Thailand from communism
- the Bandung period following an April 1955 conference in Indonesia when, for a few years, an attempt was made to overcome polarisation with a non-aligned alternative
- a return to polarisation in the early to mid-1960's, reflecting an intensification of the Cold War generally, massive U.S. intervention in Indochina, and the declining influence of non-
alignment following anti-communist policies adopted after an abortive coup in Indonesia in October 1965

- a gradual U.S. reduction of forces in Indochina beginning in 1969, though frequently counter-balanced by intensification of the war effort
- a three year period beginning 1970 when the United States widened and intensified its military effort, while diplomatically effecting a rapprochement with China
- a rapid run-down of U.S. activities in Indochina
- 1975 communist victories, and emergence of a new balance of forces in which China and ASEAN took over some of the role formerly assumed by the U.S.

The Beginnings of U.S. Involvement

Apart from its special relationship with the Philippines, cemented by colonial rule for some forty years and major air and naval bases, initial U.S. post-war involvement in Southeast Asia was prompted largely by concern about events in Europe. Despite strong anti-colonial sympathies, the U.S. began extending important assistance to the French in Indochina, because it wanted French support in Europe and at the United Nations (UN), and feared its opposition might strengthen the hand of the French communist party. Similarly, the U.S. also supported the return of the Dutch to Indonesia, though not as generously since Holland was less important to U.S. interests in Europe.¹

U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia was also influenced by the belief, from the beginning of the Cold
War in 1946-47, that communism was a "global monolith". The 1947 Truman Doctrine focused on containing the Soviet Union and communism in Europe, but its logic was soon applied to Asia. As early as January 1949 the U.S. supported French efforts to establish former Emperor Bao Dai as a Vietnamese non-communist alternative to the communist Vietminh, even though they understood Bao Dai’s shortcomings and the overwhelming popular support enjoyed by the Vietminh. On 7 February 1950, five days after the French parliament approved a new Vietnamese state headed by Bao Dai, the U.S. extended official recognition.

The fall of Kuomintang China in October 1949, and the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, greatly reinforced U.S. fears of communism. The "loss" of China became a major preoccupation in domestic politics. It also led to policies designed to build up Japan as a counterweight, and this in turn enhanced the importance of Southeast Asia - particularly Indonesia and Malaya - which was seen as a necessary source of raw materials and a market for Japan. The belief, outlined in the Truman Doctrine and explicitly stated by Eisenhower, that the fall of one country to communism would have a domino effect, made the China experience even more difficult to accept. The subsequent unprovoked North Korean attack on the South served to confirm U.S. fears, and it responded, under the umbrella of the UN, by heading a multinational military force against the North. The anti-communist mood was further strengthened in the early
years of the decade by the McCarthyist phenomenon, and the appointment of Foster Dulles as Secretary of State.

In view of the U.S. concern about global communism, it is somewhat ironic that Soviet and Chinese involvement in Southeast Asia at this time was limited. Like the U.S., the main concern of the USSR was Europe. Anxious not to jeopardize the success of the French communist party, it stayed clear of developments in Indochina, not even extending diplomatic recognition to the Vietminh until January 1950, and granting nothing beyond moral support for a further four years. China also extended recognition at the same time, and gave only limited support until the armistice in Korea in July 1953.

Indeed the early 1950's was a period of mixed fortunes for the U.S. in its anti-communist crusade. Not only was it forced to negotiate a political solution in Korea after military efforts had reached a stalemate, but in Indochina the Vietminh continued to gain military superiority over France with military offensives extending to Laos in 1953, and Laos and Cambodia in 1954. U.S. financial support escalated from 33% of French military costs in 1953 to 78% in 1954, but it made no impact on the Vietminh. French efforts to make a last stand at Dienbienphu resulted in its biggest defeat on the eve of negotiations at the Geneva Conference in May 1954.

At the same time, however, Britain was beginning to get the upper hand in its war against the Malayan Communist Party, and Magsaysay was doing the same against communists in the Philippines. Outside Southeast Asia U.S. leaders felt they had achieved major gains in pre-empting
the success of communist movements in Greece, Iran and Guatemala. In this period of mixed fortunes, but determined anti-communism, senior U.S. officials in July 1953 identified Thailand as the most suitable country - politically and geographically - to establish a base for countering communism in Southeast Asia.5

Geneva and SEATO

During May-July 1954, Indochina was discussed at a conference in Geneva, bringing together the U.S., USSR, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Britain and all major participants in the conflict. The outcome had a profound influence on developments in the region.

The Vietminh came to Geneva in a strong position, controlling 75% of Vietnam and a substantial area in Laos. It hoped to gain control of all Vietnam, and acceptance of its presence, together with a role for its communist allies, in Laos and Cambodia. However, it had not taken into account Soviet and Chinese interests in detente. The USSR, which co-chaired the conference with Britain, was influenced by liberalisation after Stalin’s death in 1953, and concerned that opposition to the French might precipitate its participation into a projected anti-Soviet European Defence Community; the PRC was moving to a policy of “peaceful co-existence”, and gave highest priority to excluding U.S. influence from Indochina. Both countries were therefore willing to make concessions to the French-U.S.-British negotiating position.

Ultimately, the Vietminh was forced to accept a temporary division of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel,
and regroupment of Vietminh to the north and pro-French forces to the south, prior to national elections within two years. The exercise was to be supervised by an International Control Commission (ICC) composed of India, Canada and Poland. The Vietminh was also forced to agree to the neutralisation of Laos and Cambodia. All foreign troops were to be withdrawn from the two countries, except for 5,000 French defence and training instructors who would remain in Laos. In Cambodia, Vietminh influence was not recognised at all; in Laos, Pathet Lao allies were allowed to regroup in two provinces prior to eventual national integration.\(^6\)

Despite U.S. successes at Geneva, the fact remained that it had, in effect, endorsed the establishment of a new communist regime, the DRV, and paved the way for its further expansion by provision for national elections within two years. The U.S. therefore refused to endorse the Final Declaration, though with one minor qualification, it "took note" of the agreements and declared it would "refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb them".\(^7\) Nevertheless, the U.S. quickly moved to subvert these agreements by supporting a separate non-communist state in the south, and by establishing a collective defence treaty which included the southern State of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos as protocol members.

The U.S. decision to support a non-communist regime in the south represented a considerable escalation, as experience in China and Korea had made it wary of assuming direct responsibilities in Asia. Indeed in Indochina it
had refused French attempts to involve it beyond the provision of military assistance and limited logistic support. What led to the change? It was, in part, a response to traditional influences, namely a view of communism as global and monolithic, and China as expansionist, together with domestic pressures from the "loss of China" syndrome. But there were also additional factors. Secretary of State Dulles concluded that defeat in China was largely due to a territorial integrity shibboleth - that is, a policy of dissipating resources by seeking to win control over all of China concurrently. Secondly, U.S. experiences in the Philippines, Greece, Iran and Guatemala, and the British in Malaya, were seen as demonstrating that the communist tide could be rolled back.8

Having decided on intervention, the U.S. looked around for an alternative to the ineffective Bao Dai, and by mid May 1954 had secured the appointment of Ngo Dinh Diem as prime minister. It then proceeded to ignore provisions in the Geneva Agreement stipulating that the seventeenth parallel was not a political or territorial boundary, and that arrangements be made for elections throughout Vietnam within two years.

Even as the Geneva Conference was in session, the U.S. was making arrangements for a Southeast Asia collective security agreement that was to include protection of a non-communist state in southern Vietnam. The outcome was a conference in the Philippines from 6-8 September 1954, between the U.S., Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines and
Thailand. The Manila Pact adopted at this meeting was directed at both open communist aggression and subversion. In the first case, signatories were to act against the aggressor "in accordance with their constitutional processes"; in the case of subversion, to "consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defence". Apart from full members, the State of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were designed as protocol states covered by the same guarantees. (Cambodia, however, quickly rejected this status, and Laos was later excluded from participation by the 1962 Geneva Agreement.) Only a very loose organisational framework was initially provided for, namely a "Council" which had representatives from all members and held meetings as required. The first Council meeting in February 1955 established a Consultative Committee with headquarters in Bangkok, and between 1956-58 additional supporting organisations were added, including a military organisation in 1957. Collectively, these were known as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO).

SEATO became the cornerstone of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. Apparent limitations imposed by the requirement to consult in response to subversion were circumvented by successive presidents simply defining insurgency as outside aggression. Thus, as Kahin notes: during the decade prior to the August 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution, SEATO provided the major rationale for a U.S. military role in Indochina. And when, within two years, the 1964 resolution had become discredited ... SEATO once more provided the
President with what was asserted to be "the legal basis" for that involvement.

The implications for the region were indeed even broader, as it also became the main justification for the close U.S.-Thai relationship.

To sum up, 1954 was a major turning point in Southeast Asia, with the U.S. making a stand on behalf of non-communist forces in Vietnam, and through SEATO to a much wider area. At the same time, the DRV gained international recognition, giving communism an acknowledged foothold in the region.

**The Bandung Era**

If 1954 was a year of polarisation between the forces of communism and anti-communism in Southeast Asia, 1955 marked an attempt to provide a non-aligned alternative. Indonesia took the initiative by hosting the Bandung Conference, the forerunner of the Non-aligned Movement, in April. China and the DRV both attended, impressing anti-communist countries with their reasonableness and willingness to pursue detente. Trade and visits between China and Southeast Asian countries increased substantially during the next two to three years, and neutralism/non-alignment gained increasing popularity as a foreign policy option. The trend was strengthened by the opening of Sino-American talks in Geneva in August, by U.S. willingness to provide economic and even military support to non-aligned countries such as Indonesia and Cambodia, and the continuation of de-Stalinisation in the USSR. In Indochina, the consequences
of such developments were seen in the failure of the PRC and the USSR to oppose the U.S./Diem decision not to hold scheduled national elections in 1956, and the DRV failure to provide material assistance to the resistance movement in the south for some four years. In Laos a coalition government comprising communists, neutralists and the right wing was established in November 1957.

Aspects of the Bandung era continued throughout the 1950's, but its main impact was in the first two to three years. The process of detente with the USSR suffered a major setback with the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. 1958 saw a marked upsurge in communist-led insurgency in Diem's Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in response to increasingly repressive rule, the coalition government in Laos broke down and the Pathet Lao intensified military activities, and China returned to inward looking policies during its Great Leap Forward (1958-60).

**Polarisation and Escalation**

The early 1960's was a period when internationally the Cold War once again intensified. Among the incidents to occur were the Soviet downing of a U-2 spy flight over East Germany, building of the Berlin Wall, Krushchev's 6 January 1961 speech in which he pledged support for wars of national liberation, the Bay of Pigs debacle, and the Cuban missile crisis. This was also a period in which the Sino-Soviet conflict became apparent, but it was several years before non-communist countries realised it could be turned to their advantage. Its implication for Southeast
Asia was perhaps also disguised by the success of the DRV in gaining support from both sides.

When Kennedy took over the U.S. presidency in 1961, having won by the narrowest of margins, he was determined not to lose ground to the opposition by appearing to be soft on communism. Indochina was a key area in which he had a chance to prove his credentials. In the case of Laos, faced with a series of Pathet Lao advances a few weeks into his office, he provided logistic support to right wing troops, threatened further intervention if necessary, and warned the USSR and China that the U.S. would not permit a communist takeover. To avoid escalation of the superpower conflict, however, Kennedy then proceeded to negotiate with the enemy over the establishment of a tripartite coalition government committed to a neutral Laos. The second Geneva Conference got underway in May 1961 and did not end until July 1962. Before this was achieved, the U.S. had expanded its commitment to the region by the Rusk-Thanat communique in March, establishing, in effect, a bilateral defence link between the U.S. and Thailand, and at a particularly critical point in May sent 10,000 troops to Thailand. Paradoxically, then, while Kennedy was more committed to a neutral solution in Laos than his predecessor, he projected U.S. military power into the conflict in a far more intensive way than Eisenhower ever had.

In Vietnam, Kennedy responded to the continuing growth of the communist National Liberation Front (NLF) by increasing U.S. troop numbers from 685 to 16,000, notwithstanding the instability and eventual overthrow
(with CIA assistance) of the Diem regime. Ironically, the falling out with Diem, and with several later RVN leaders, was partly caused by indications that they were not as strongly anti-communist as U.S. leaders.

After Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, the same policies were continued under Johnson. Throughout 1964 and 1965 a series of escalations took place which plunged the U.S. into a major and ultimately humiliating war in Indochina. On 4 August 1964, an alleged attack on U.S. naval ships by DRV patrol boats - which never in fact occurred\(^{11}\) - caused reprisals in the form of the first bombing attack on the DRV, and passage of the Tonkin Gulf resolution by the U.S. Congress (unanimously in the House, and with only two dissenting votes in the Senate). The resolution gave the president executive power to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression", and to "take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or a protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty requesting assistance in defence of its freedom".\(^{12}\) This provided the president with virtually unlimited powers to take whatever action he felt necessary in regard to states covered by SEATO. Further escalation quickly followed. In December 1964 the U.S. began bombing the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, and two months later followed this with regular bombing of the DRV. In March 1965 the first U.S. combat troops arrived in the RVN. These increased to
184,000 by December, and in a series of increments eventually peaked at 543,400 in April 1969.

The conflict between the forces of communism and anti-communism in Southeast Asia at this time was not confined to Indochina. In Indonesia during the early 1960's the communist party became a major political force, and the country adopted an increasingly radical and pro-communist foreign policy. It strongly opposed the merger of Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak as Malaysia in 1963, and was supported by the Philippines because of its claims to sovereignty over Sabah. The net result was intensification of the already serious divisions between Southeast Asian states. An attempt to promote regionalism by establishing the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) in 1961 attracted only Thailand, Malaya and the Philippines, and conflicts between the latter two over Sabah soon reduced it to virtual inactivity.

The abortive coup attempt in Indonesia in October 1965 did, however, introduce an important change. Indonesian politics became strongly anti-communist, both domestically and internationally, and Indonesia became more interested in cooperating with non-communist neighbours. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), established in August 1967, expanded ASA to include Indonesia and Singapore, and although it faced many of the problems of its predecessor, slowly began to forge regional cooperation. Ostensibly committed to economic and social cooperation, from the outset political - though not defence - cooperation was high on the agenda.
The regional conflict between the forces of communism and anti-communism was further intensified by the Cultural Revolution in China. Between 1965-1968 China adopted strongly antagonistic policies towards almost all countries, particularly non-communist neighbours in Southeast Asia.

From August 1963, an alternative approach to regional policies was suggested by France, with a series of proposals for the neutralisation of Indochina. In the atmosphere of confrontation that existed at the time, however, the suggestion of U.S. withdrawal from the region was rejected out of hand by anti-communist countries.

**U.S. Falters, But Does Not Concede Defeat**

From 1966 the anti-war movement in America started to gain momentum, and Congress began to question the account of U.S. actions in Southeast Asia given by the executive. Both these developments gained a major boost from the communist Tet offensive in Vietnam at the beginning of 1968. Though ultimately a military defeat for the communists, the high cost of U.S. victory produced a massive outpouring of anti-war sentiment. In the face of popular opposition to the war, on 31 March Johnson announced he would not seek re-election to the presidency, and would reduce the bombing of the DRV in an effort to achieve a political solution. At the end of October all bombing of the DRV was ended, and negotiations involving the U.S., RVN, DRV and NLF, began in Paris in January 1969. In May President Nixon announced U.S. troops would gradually be withdrawn from Vietnam, the first batch of
25,000 left in June, and the "Guam doctrine" announced in July declared that henceforth the U.S. would provide military assistance for its Asian allies but, except in the event of major aggression, would not do the fighting for them.

At the same time, the Congress was becoming increasingly critical of U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia, publicising a "contingency plan" for the U.S. sending troops to Thailand in August, and in both September and December passing bills designed to prevent the introduction of U.S. combat troops in Thailand or Laos.

Notwithstanding such changes, top U.S. officials continued to claim that they would fulfil all their treaty commitments in Southeast Asia. Moreover what was being conceded with the right hand was often taken back with the left. When the bombing of the DRV was stopped in October the bombing of Laos was greatly intensified, and in March 1969 the secret bombing of communist refuges in Cambodia started.

Such assurances and activities were not, however, enough to disguise the fact that the U.S. had been forced on to the defensive. This also coincided with a British announcement that it was speeding up its withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia, and would complete it by 1971. Complicating matters further China, after ending the Cultural Revolution in early 1969, and the USSR, both made conciliatory overtures to the region. Soviet initiatives included a June 1969 proposal for an Asian collective security arrangement.
Withdrawal Through Escalation and Diplomacy

In the early 1970's U.S. leaders continued to be under congressional pressure to limit their activities in Indochina. The Tonkin Gulf resolution was repealed, U.S. military personnel were barred from Cambodia in June 1970, aid to Thai volunteers in Cambodia was prohibited in August, and Congress continued to press for reduction of troops in Vietnam. The administration responded by escalating the war, hoping to gain a military advantage that would enable them to negotiate a withdrawal from a position of strength, and by seeking to divide communist countries through establishing ties with China.

The Indochina war was substantially widened following the overthrow of Sihanouk in March 1970, by joint U.S.-RVN attacks on communist sanctuaries in Cambodia from March through to June. The bombing of Cambodia was stepped up at the same time, along with bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, as the changed situation in Cambodia made the trail even more important for logistic supplies to the south. In another attempt to disrupt DRV supply lines the U.S. provided air and logistic support for a major RVN incursion into Laos in February 1971, though in the face of stiff resistance the invading force was compelled to withdraw a little over a month later. Taking advantage of the run-down of U.S. troops - only 136,800 were left by December 1971 - the DRV launched major attacks in the south at the beginning of 1972. This in turn caused the U.S. to resume bombing the DRV in April, and in May Nixon ordered the mining of
northern harbours and waterways, together with destruction of all transportation and communications. Late in the year, when last minute problems arose over a draft U.S.-DRV peace agreement, Nixon unleashed a massive bombing of northern cities.

While attempting to place maximum military pressure on the DRV, Nixon took quite a different diplomatic track. In July 1971, in a gesture which buried two decades of blaming China for all the problems in Southeast Asia, National Security Adviser Kissinger made a secret visit to Peking and reached agreement on a visit there in the new year by Nixon. The basis for a high level Sino-U.S. exchange had been slowly developing for some years, but had not been widely recognised. The move shocked both Chinese and U.S. allies. Hanoi's leading newspaper accused Nixon of "dividing the socialist countries, winning over one section and pitting it against another ... trying to achieve a compromise between the big powers in an attempt to make the small powers bow to their arrangements". No doubt Nixon did have such objectives in mind, and at the same time hoped to improve his standing with the anti-war movement in the U.S. This was followed by Nixon's visit in February 1972 and the "Shanghai communique", which produced no major breakthroughs but prepared the ground for a gradual normalisation of ties on the basis of "peaceful coexistence".

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Countdown on U.S. Involvement

Following both military pressure and diplomatic moves with China, a peace agreement was finally signed on 27 January 1973, between the U.S. and RVN on one side, and the DRV and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG) on the other. While it did not provide for a comprehensive settlement of the dispute, overall it was highly favourable to the communist side. One section dealt with a termination of hostilities, and included provisions for a cease-fire in place, along with withdrawal of American and allied troops. However, this made no reference to the 150,000 DRV forces in the south and did not create an effective machinery to supervise the truce. A second section provided broad outlines on the basis of a political settlement. This reaffirmed the unity of Vietnam, and the provisional nature of the seventeenth parallel, as outlined in the 1954 Geneva Agreement, and recognised the PRG as having equal status with the RVN, though both were considered transitory until agreement had been reached on establishing a new government. In the absence of clear guidelines on establishing a new government, and with ineffective arrangements for supervising a cease-fire, both sides stepped up efforts to attain a military victory. Although further meetings and agreements were held to arrange a cease-fire, this was never successfully implemented.

After the Paris Agreements, the forces leading to a U.S. exit from Indochina gained rapid momentum. The Watergate scandal broke early in the year, placing Nixon on the defensive in all areas until his resignation in
August the following year. In June Congress approved 15 August as the deadline for an end to the bombing of Cambodia, and on 15 November prohibited funds for any U.S. military action in Indochina. The situation continued to deteriorate throughout 1974 as the DRV stepped up military pressures, and Congress refused to grant increased aid to beleaguered governments in Vietnam and Cambodia. In April 1975 victorious communist armies routed the opposition in these countries, while by the same time in Laos a series of political changes that commenced in 1973 had given the Pathet Lao a dominant position in government. The U.S. Indochina humiliation was complete.

**After The Fall**

After its defeat in Indochina the U.S. sought to retain a residual presence on the mainland in Thailand, but under Thai pressure removed all its combat aircraft by the end of 1975, and all military personnel, except for 270 advisers, by July 1976. While it retained a formidable presence in the Philippines, defeat in Indochina strengthened the forces of isolationism in the U.S., which greatly reduced its influence throughout the region. Reflecting the new era, Thailand and the Philippines jointly announced in July 1976 that SEATO (though not the Manila Pact) would be phased out.

The end of the Indochina War brought with it a sharp polarisation between countries of the region under DRV leadership, and the non-communist members of ASEAN. The DRV unified Vietnam in a little over twelve months, and assumed a dominant position in Laos, but although not
widely apparent for some two years, was unable to establish a similar relationship with Cambodia. All Indochinese countries adopted a position of strong hostility towards the ASEAN countries, which began to moderate only towards the end of the decade following open conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam, and Vietnam and China.

The vacuum left by the U.S. withdrawal from the region was, however, largely filled by the erstwhile former number one enemy, China, and the growth of a regional consciousness among ASEAN countries. Differences between Vietnam and China, which were clear from 1971 when Kissinger visited Peking, grew after 1975, and resulted in several ASEAN countries seeking to develop relations with both countries to balance each other. ASEAN, at the same time, galvanised by the communist victory, began an extensive series of meetings and consultations on political and economic issues, while member countries strengthened their military forces and increased bilateral military/security co-operation. The early polarisation between Indochina and ASEAN gradually gave way to détente as communist powers competed with each other in improving relations with ASEAN, but this proved a short respite before Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia at the end of 1978 opened a new chapter.

THAI-U.S. RELATIONS

Systemic influences on Thailand were not confined to the general regional balance, but also included bilateral relations with a large number of countries, particularly
great powers and regional neighbours. The U.S. stands out as the country of overwhelming importance to Thailand in the period under review.

Official Thai-U.S. relations date back to the signing of a Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1833, the first treaty between the U.S. and any Asian country. The long relationship has generally been without significant frictions. Nineteenth century U.S. missionaries made important contributions in areas such as health, education and printing. Successive American advisers to the foreign ministry, appointed from 1903-1938, played a major role in re-negotiating treaties to eliminate extraterritoriality; U.S. citizens were chosen for this purpose because no fears were held of the U.S. representing any threat to Thailand. During World War II, the Thai ambassador refused to present his government’s declaration of war against the Allies, and the U.S. obliged by refusing to recognise it. In the immediate post-war years the U.S. again assisted by helping to moderate British and French demands for reparations.

The co-operative and supportive nature of earlier relations provided a strong incentive for Thailand to look to U.S. aid and security protection in the immediate post-war era. After the November 1947 coup there were additional reasons for this. The coup leadership shared similar views on communism to U.S. leaders. Moreover their record of war-time collaboration with Japan ruled out the possibility of looking to countries such as Britain and France.
Early Cold War Period

The year 1950 was a seminal one for Thai-U.S. relations. The U.S. indicated the importance it attributed to Thailand by selecting Bangkok as the site for a regional conference of U.S. ambassadors in February, held to conduct a major review of U.S. policy in the wake of communist victory in China. In the course of this meeting, the U.S. requested the Thai government to recognize the French-U.S. supported Bao Dai regime in Vietnam, and its counterparts in Cambodia and Laos. Thailand did so on 28 February, some three weeks after the U.S., notwithstanding opposition from Foreign Minister Pote Sarasin, who subsequently resigned. This action, and Thailand's prompt offer of troops and other assistance to the U.S. side on the outbreak of the Korean War, greatly strengthened bilateral ties.

The February conference in Bangkok agreed in principle to expand economic, technical, educational and in some cases military assistance to countries in the region. In April a U.S. economic mission arrived to draw up specific recommendations. Arising out of this, an educational exchange agreement was signed in July and an economic aid agreement in September, providing the framework for the provision of important social and economic assistance in subsequent years, amounting to $650 million for 1950-1975.17

Military aid developments were perhaps even more important. Early in the year President Truman had approved a $10 million grant, and a mission to investigate
Thai requirements arrived in July. This gave rise to a Military Assistance Agreement (MAA), signed on 17 October 1950, enabling each side to "make available to the other, such equipment, material, services or other military assistance as the Government furnishing such assistances may authorise". Two clauses were of particular importance. One provided that the two governments would, "from time to time, negotiate detailed arrangements necessary to carry out the provisions" of the agreement; a second stipulated that all personnel required for administering the agreement have diplomatic immunity. The former was the legal basis for a series of important executive agreements in the 1960's facilitating the stationing of U.S. planes and troops in Thailand, extension of U.S. logistic aid to Thailand, and the establishment of important telecommunication facilities. The provision of diplomatic immunity for all personnel brought to Thailand under these agreements subsequently provoked strong popular opposition to what was viewed as a new form of extraterritoriality. Regular military assistance arising out of this agreement represented over 59% of the Thai military budget for the period 1951-1976. Total costs exceeded $1 billion, while others associated with building bases in Thailand, supporting Thai military forces in Vietnam and Laos, and U.S. military expenditure on rest and recreation in Thailand added around a further $2 billion. 

Thai-U.S. relations were further strengthened by joint cooperation in the United Nations in response to Vietnamese incursions into Laos in 1953. The U.S. brought
the issue to the Security Council, supporting the Thai request to send an observation team to the Thai-Laos border, where it was vetoed by the USSR.

Dramatic events in 1954, particularly those associated with Geneva and SEATO, drew the two countries even closer together. Thailand watched the Geneva Conference proceedings with considerable anxiety, and was less than happy with its outcome. It therefore welcomed U.S. proposals for the establishment of SEATO, hoping for a NATO-style organisation with a standing army and an automatic commitment to act against aggression, a treaty covering subversion as well as outside aggression, and inclusion of the non-communist Indochina states. As noted, it did not achieve all these objectives, but nevertheless felt covered by a U.S. pledge made outside the Conference to act immediately in the case of communist aggression against any treaty member.20 The Thai ambassador to the United States declared that "in operating effect, SEATO is similar to NATO".21

Participation in the Bandung Conference, where cordial contacts were established with the PRC and DRV, caused a shift in Thai policy towards a more independent path, and included a slight loosening of ties with the U.S. Indeed in the rivalry between Sarit and Phao, the former used anti-Americanism, including talk of following a "neutral" policy, to solicit popular support. Once in power, however, Sarit promptly dropped references to neutralism and brought the government into line with a policy of close Thai-U.S. cooperation.
Impact of Developments in Laos

Events in Laos from the late 1950s to 1962 provided a major test for Thai-U.S. relations. Thailand reacted to a series of developments which improved the position of the communist Pathet Lao, by attempting to gain U.S. intervention on behalf of the Lao right wing. U.S. actions generally fell short of Thai expectations as they focused on supporting a neutralist alternative, and did not involve a willingness to send combat troops into Laos either unilaterally or under the auspices of SEATO. Nonetheless there was considerable joint Thai-U.S. cooperation, which led to several important security and military agreements, and paved the way for intensified cooperation in subsequent years.

One of the first instances of direct Thai-U.S. cooperation over Laos followed the Kong Le neutralist coup in August 1960. Both countries aided right wing forces under General Phoumi Nosavan independently, but in addition Air America (nominally a private airline but in fact controlled by the CIA), operated out of Bangkok in ferrying military supplies to Phoumi. Support for Phoumi's forces was increased in March 1961 when the U.S. sent 15 helicopters along with 200 marines to fly and maintain them to Udorn, in the northeast of Thailand near the Lao border. Udorn also became the base for Air America (and later Continental Air) operations. In April 1961 an aircraft control and warning system was established at Bangkok's Don Muang airport, and U.S. aircraft stationed there. Bangkok was used as a base for
reconnaissance activities over Laos from November 1961-July 1962 and again during 1963, but the primary purpose of the planes and warning system was for defending Thailand against possible communist retaliation - a concern deeply felt in Thailand during the 1960s. Subsequent expansion of Thai-U.S. military cooperation vis-a-vis Indochina was generally accompanied by such a quid pro quo, either in the form of increased military aid or firmer assurances of U.S. support against outside retaliation.

Notwithstanding these actions, from the Thai perspective events in Laos continued to deteriorate. The opening of international negotiations at Geneva in June 1961, deadlock within SEATO over what actions it should take, and continuing U.S. support for neutralists, all created difficulties in Thai-U.S. relations that were reinforced by a number of trade disputes and annoyance at the level of U.S. aid then being extended to neutral countries. Thailand responded by emphasising the importance of regionalism, making tentative overtures to the USSR, and at the same time seeking to reform SEATO and obtain a bilateral guarantee of its security.

The U.S. sought initially to reassure Thailand by stationing combat troops in the country. However attempts to send troops in May 1961 and January 1962 were rejected by Prime Minister Sarit, who along with other Thai leaders was anxious to see U.S. troops in Laos but wanted a minimal U.S. presence in Thailand. He did, however, agree to the presence of a 600-strong engineering battalion for road construction, which arrived in February 1962.
At the same time, the U.S. indicated its "interpretation" of SEATO as imposing a unilateral obligation to defend Thailand. In the Rusk-Thanat joint statement on 6 March 1962, the U.S. declared "the preservation of the independence and integrity of Thailand as vital to the national interests of the United States and to world peace", and that in the event of communist aggression the obligation under SEATO "does not depend upon the prior agreement of all other parties to the Treaty, since this Treaty obligation is individual as well as collective". In addition, "the United States regards its commitments to Thailand under the Southeast Asia Collective Defence Treaty and under its Bilateral Economic and Military Assistance Agreement with Thailand as providing an important basis for United States actions to help Thailand meet indirect aggression".23

It would be correct to observe that the literal wording of the joint statement did no more than reaffirm the original intention of the Manila Treaty, which had provided for unilateral action in the case of communist aggression. But to see it in these terms would be to miss its significance for Thai-U.S. relations. For one thing, the stalemate in SEATO over Laos had produced doubts about the possibility of unilateral action (though it must be acknowledged that the case of aggression had never been clearly proved). More importantly, while the joint statement did not commit the U.S. to intervene unilaterally under SEATO in the case of indirect aggression, the references to assistance in the case of
indirect aggression were assumed to amount to the same thing. Prime Minister Sarit observed that it was a pledge to help defend Thailand against communist aggression, "be it direct or indirect". Subsequent U.S. statements generally endorsed this interpretation, and the communique has been seen by both sides as representing a bilateral commitment.

The U.S. did not take long to put the new understanding into effect. In the face of further communist gains in Laos, it again sought to send combat troops to Thailand. For two days Thai leaders rejected this, because of concern that such an act might provoke a direct attack on Thailand. Eventually, fearing a reduction or suspension of U.S. military aid, they agreed. Invoking SEATO and the Rusk-Thanat communique, Thai and U.S. statements on 15 May announced the despatch of U.S. military forces to Thailand to counter Pathet Lao actions that were considered not only a violation of the Laotian cease-fire but a threat to Thai security. One thousand U.S. troops in Thailand after a SEATO exercise were moved towards the Lao border, and were later reinforced by some 9,000 others. Australia, New Zealand and Britain subsequently made small contributions.

U.S. actions have generally been seen as having the effect of reassuring Thailand that it would fulfil its commitments. This may in part have been true, though the fact remains that U.S. action did not involve intervention in Laos, which was what Thailand desired. Foreign Minister Thanat was also irritated that President Kennedy's 15 May statement said Thailand had "invited" the

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U.S. to send forces to Thailand, rather than that the Thai government had "agreed" to this.

Events over the next two years lacked the drama of the Rusk-Thanat statement and the U.S. troop movement, but were no less significant in consolidating the bilateral relationship. By 1963, following the rapid breakdown of the July 1962 Geneva Agreement, Air America flights operating out of Thailand were dropping tons of supplies daily to anti-Pathet Lao groups. On 19 March 1963 a Special Logistics Agreement Thailand (SLAT) was signed, falling under the umbrella of the 1950 MAA and SEATO. This was drawn up to meet logistical shortcomings encountered by SEATO troops in May 1962. The SLAT had three parts to it: improving the capacity of the rail system to move petroleum products by providing ten locomotives and 100 POL cars; the building of a new airfield at Nakorn Phanom; and the emplacement of strategic engineering equipment, which the U.S. retained ownership of, at Udorn Thani and Korat. All facilities were to be made available to U.S. and other SEATO forces in the case of military contingencies. In September 1965 a U.S. military spokesman stated that if Thailand were the target of aggression through infiltration or overt attacks, thousands of U.S. troops could immediately be flown into Korat, obtain equipment there and be ready to fight within hours. Randolph notes that "Equipment maintained in a state of constant readiness for deployment eventually included tanks, trucks, jeeps, bridge units, railway ties and rails, all varieties of guns and ammunition. In 1965,
more than 41,000 tons of equipment, valued at $50 million, were stored at Korat, enough to equip a full combat division".29

In 1964 a combination of U.S. troops brought in under the SLAT, and increased U.S. air operations over Laos, led to a rapid expansion of the U.S. presence in Thailand. U.S. ground forces that came during the Laotian crisis of May 1962 were all withdrawn between July and December that year, leaving a few hundred personnel, most attached to the Military Assistance Programme. SLAT and other logistic support staff (excluding USAF personnel), totalled 3,300 by the end of 1964, and continuing to grow to a peak of 11,494 in 1968.30

Increasing U.S. use of air power in the Laotian war resulted in an agreement early in 1964 to the use of Thai bases for photo-reconnaissance and search and rescue missions. Reconnaissance activities were intensified and put on a more formal basis in May when Lao Prime Minister Prince Souvannaphouma requested U.S. assistance in this area. In June, the shooting down of two planes resulted in the U.S. providing an armed escort for such flights, which in practice often became a means of launching offensive air attacks.

Initially, Thailand set stringent limitations on the use of its airfields. In June 1964, it required that U.S. armed sorties be limited to search and rescue operations only, with the further condition that no public mention be made of Thai bases. Later the U.S. embassy reported that Deputy Defence Minister Dawee had agreed to remove any restrictions on the launch of U.S. combat sorties out of
Thailand, subject only to exercise of the utmost discretion in exercising this authority, and lateral information at the time of launch.\textsuperscript{31} There was some subsequent uncertainty over the Thai position, but the agreement with Dawee did stick.\textsuperscript{32} On 14 December, operating from Thai bases, the U.S. began heavy bombing attacks (Operation Barrel Roll) on DRV infiltration routes through northern Laos. By this time some 3,000 United States Air Force (USAF) personnel, and 75 planes, had arrived in the country.

Throughout 1964 and beyond, the U.S. and Thailand engaged in joint contingency planning, under SEATO, to improve logistic arrangements and response capability in case of a communist invasion through Laos. The Taksin Plan provided for the despatch of around two U.S. divisions, with the Thai prime minister having overall command, but operational command in U.S. hands.\textsuperscript{33} Not publicly revealed till critics of U.S. policy learned of it in 1969 - though earlier U.S. and Thai statements had hinted at such arrangements \textsuperscript{34} - it gave Thai leaders, in the words of Prime Minister Thanom, "the certainty and confidence that the United States will not desert us and let us fight against the communists on our own".\textsuperscript{35}

Two further agreements signed at this time were the innocuously titled Agreement Respecting Radio Communications Research and Development Activities by the United States in Thailand, 24 June 1964, and Agreement Respecting the Establishment, Conduct and Support of Radio Communications Research and Development Activities in
Thailand, 19 January 1965. The two agreements, said to fall under the October 1950 MAA, set out arrangements for the provision of land (286 rai and 500 acres respectively) for the U.S. to conduct radio communications research and development, U.S. communications equipment and training support, and a U.S. personnel ceiling of 1,000. Both agreements, concluded without foreign ministry knowledge, had open-ended clauses to the effect that land made available for this purpose "will remain available to unrestricted United States Government use as long as the United States required it".36 They were the basis for the establishment of an alternative communications network throughout Thailand and, more importantly, a number of communications intercept facilities directed particularly against communist military movements in Indochina. The centre known as Ramasun, located near Udorn, "was the largest and most sophisticated facility of its kind in Southeast Asia, and in the world ranked second only to the mammoth U.S. facility, in Augsburg, Germany".37

The remaining area of Thai-U.S. cooperation in 1964 was in relation to covert military activities in Laos. As noted elsewhere, Thai activities were expanded at this time, including units of artillery, a police special forces unit, and Thai pilots for the Lao airforce.38 In such cases, Thai participation was organised in such a way that it could be "legally disavowed and plausibly denied".39 As with subsequent intervention in Laos, all Thai forces were technically - though often not in fact - "volunteers", who had no link with the Thai armed forces. The U.S. build up in Thailand was also handled in a
similar manner. While the U.S. began from 1964 establishing what were in effect U.S. bases in the country, no agreements recognising this were concluded, thus enabling Thai authorities to deny that U.S. bases existed. Indeed when Thai-U.S. cooperation moved to its next phase, the provision of bases for conducting the air war in Vietnam, Thailand officially denied its bases were being used for the bombing of the DRV for two years.

**Cooperating Over Vietnam**

In 1965 the primary focus of Thai-U.S. cooperation changed from Laos to Vietnam. This was not entirely new, as Laos had always been considered important as a transit route for DRV supplies to RVN. Moreover, Thailand despatched a small Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) team to the RVN as early as 1964. But the start of bombing the DRV from Thai bases in February 1965 changed the nature of Thai-U.S. relations. Cooperation over Laos remained important, and Cambodia also entered the picture from the late 1960's, but even here attention was focused mainly on DRV supply routes and sanctuaries in these countries.

The new relationship, reflecting the U.S. need for air bases close to Vietnam but without the security risks present in the RVN, saw a major U.S. investment in Thai air bases and communications, together with the build up of U.S. air power. Between 1964 and 1967 seven major air bases were turned over to U.S. use - Bangkok, Udorn, Takli, Korat, Ubon, and Utapao. A Thai commander remained officially in charge, and in many cases the RTAF used the facilities jointly, but the USAF, answering directly to
the U.S. 7th Air Force in the RVN, operated autonomously. By the end of 1965 there were 9,000 USAF personnel and 200 planes in the country; this continued to climb steadily until it reached over 33,000 personnel and 600 planes in 1968, was then slightly reduced, before rising again to its highest level in 1972. The existence of the planes became public knowledge early in 1965, but Thai leaders strongly denied there were any U.S. bases, and that bombing of the DRV and Laos originated from Thailand. U.S. planes in the country were variously described as being solely for the defence of Thailand, on brief "stopover" visits, or under SEATO cooperative defence plans.40

As a quid pro quo, the U.S. increased economic and military aid to Thailand, with a new emphasis on directing these to combating an expanding Thai insurgency. Unlike the situation in other countries, however, the U.S. mission in Bangkok generally enforced strict regulations limiting forces brought in for this purpose to an advisory role.41

Reflecting the growing importance of Thailand to the U.S., the Military Assistance Command Thailand (MACTHAI) was transferred from the RVN to Bangkok. It was established in 1962 when the U.S. sent 10,000 troops to Thailand, and was then under the Military Assistance Command Vietnam. Initial responsibilities included a general oversight of all U.S. forces in Thailand, apart from those directly involved in providing military assistance, which came under the Military Assistance
Advisory Group from 1951-1963, renamed the Joint United States Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) in 1963. The new MACTHAI, established by an exchange of notes between U.S. Ambassador Martin and Thanom as Minister of Defence in July 1965, brought JUSMAG directly under its control, and had general responsibilities for all U.S. military activities in Thailand, though not operational control over the USAF. MACTHAI was said to fall under the 1950 MAA, and until its abolition in 1976 had a staff that varied in size from around 500-1,000.42

By early 1966 the U.S. sought to formalise its position in Thailand by concluding a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The MFA, however, was strongly opposed to this, as it considered the conditions the U.S. wished to obtain deprived Thailand of sovereignty over criminal acts committed by U.S. forces on its territory; the military were initially in favour, but backed the MFA once they saw a U.S. draft.43 As a result, negotiations continued inconclusively for several years. In practice, U.S. military committing offences under Thai law were generally handed over to the U.S. for disciplinary action, with offenders normally shipped out of the country immediately. In a few serious cases, or when Thailand wished to assert its independence because of dissatisfaction with other aspects of U.S. policy, offenders were tried by Thai courts.44 An exchange of notes between U.S. Ambassador Unger and Foreign Minister Thanat in February 1968 agreed on the establishment of a Thai committee (headed initially by the Deputy Minister of Defence, ACM Dawee) to decide if U.S. servicemen
committing offences should stand trial in Thai courts.\textsuperscript{45}

In a further effort to emphasise Thai sovereignty, a foreign ministry statement in May 1966, accompanying the signing of a new Treaty of Amity and Economic Cooperation (replacing one signed in 1947) stressed that this was based on equality between the two countries. Though largely concerned with technical aspects of economic cooperation, it was said to underline the fact that Americans in Thailand did not enjoy any special military or political rights above those possessed by the Thai people.\textsuperscript{46}

Thai sensitivity on the issue of sovereignty was no doubt a reflection of two related developments, the continued rapid expansion of Thai-U.S. military cooperation, and growing criticisms of the relationship in the U.S. media and Congress. USAF personnel increased by a further 14,000 to 25,000 in 1966, and aircraft doubled to 400. An air defence unit was established at Udorn in response to Thai concerns about possible communist retaliation.\textsuperscript{47}

From early 1966 Thai-U.S. military cooperation came under increasing criticism in the U.S., with many suggesting the U.S. was becoming involved in a new Vietnam-type situation.\textsuperscript{48} Thai leaders responded promptly to such criticisms, but were reassured by members of the administration that such sentiments belonged to a minority and that, in the words of President Johnson on a state visit in October, "Thailand can count on the United States to meet its obligations under the SEATO treaty".\textsuperscript{49}
By early 1967 Thai leaders finally accepted that the veil of secrecy over U.S. activities in Thailand was only likely to fuel speculation, and on 9 March acknowledged the U.S. military presence and permitted press visits to the bases. The purpose of the bases, a foreign ministry spokesman noted, was to speed up an end to the war in Indochina and restore peace in the area.\textsuperscript{50} Subsequent U.S. requests to base B-52 bombers at Utapao were publicised, and a formal agreement concluded. It was also publicly noted that the agreement would "remain in force so long only as, in the opinion of the Thai government, the threat of communist aggression against free nations in Southeast Asia still continues".\textsuperscript{51} Subsequent elaborations by Foreign Minister Thanat noted that U.S. forces, along with those of Britain, Australia and New Zealand, were in Thailand under SEATO, and that there were no U.S. bases, only Thai bases which the U.S. was permitted to use.

Details of the Utapao agreement, which were not revealed at the time, provided the basis for a further important expansion of Thai military cooperation. To reassure Thailand, the U.S. agreed to a further increase in military assistance, including delivery of long-promised anti-aircraft missiles, together with an exchange of documents acknowledging that if communists attacked by air, U.S. planes, operating within the SEATO framework under the Thai armed forces, would defend Thailand.\textsuperscript{52} In the event the U.S. was apparently not prepared to be as specific as this, but in July 1967 the head of the RTAF, and a senior USAF officer in Thailand, signed a Joint Use and Air Defence Operations Agreement, which committed the
U.S. to cooperate with the RTAF, though under a separate command, in the defence of Thailand. Other provisions in this agreement were much to the U.S. advantage. Radar bases (a euphemism for communications bases, including "spy" bases such as Ramasun) would be operated jointly, but in an emergency could be completely taken over by the U.S. Finally, all data obtained through operation of the agreement would be forwarded to CINCPAC.\textsuperscript{53} These two agreements, along with Thai acquiescence in U.S. requests to send combat troops to Vietnam, announced in January (2,000) and November (12,000), and agreements on U.S. compensation for this, marked another significant advance in bilateral cooperation.

\textbf{Adjusting to U.S. Changes: Formal Distancing While Reaffirming the Security Relationship}

Though the U.S. presence in Thailand subsequently grew even higher, 1967 marked the summit of Thai-U.S. cooperation. In August Prime Minister Thanom was awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit, Degree of Chief Commander, the highest U.S. award. When President Johnson again visited Bangkok in December he strongly affirmed that there would be no change in Vietnam policy, and that the U.S. would adhere firmly to commitments under SEATO.\textsuperscript{54}

Thai leaders were then jolted by Johnson's announcement, only three months later, of a partial bombing halt and his decision not to recontest the presidency. Prime Minister Thanom moved to distance Thailand from the U.S. by declaring in May that the present agreement permitting the stationing of U.S. forces
in Thailand "is valid only for the duration of the war in Vietnam. In August Foreign Minister Thanat began talking in vague terms of negotiating with China. More significantly, when the U.S. sought to bring in a substantial number of extra military personnel in the latter half of the year, Thai leaders requested that any increase be offset by reductions in existing personnel, setting a ceiling of around 48,000. This was a significant departure from previous occasions when U.S. requests had always been acceded to. The complete bombing halt in October, and initiation of peace negotiations in Paris, caused further concern.

Thai leaders were pleased by the election of Nixon as president at the end of 1968, but Thanat's announcement of willingness to negotiate with China and the DRV in February 1969 was an indication that they were less than totally reassured. Nixon's announcement of the Guam doctrine in July was followed by a visit to Thailand in which he promised that "the U.S. will stand proudly with Thailand against those who might threaten it from abroad or from within". During August, to the dismay of Thai leaders, details of the Taksin contingency plan were leaked to members of congress opposed to U.S. policy in Indochina, and Secretary of Defence Laird stated that it did not have the approval of the Nixon administration. In response, Thanat called for the U.S. to begin negotiations on withdrawing its troops from Thailand. Having made this gesture, however, Thai leaders indicated clearly that they were not in a hurry to see U.S. forces leave, and in
September announced agreement on the withdrawal of a modest 6,000 personnel in twelve months. Congressional actions banning commitment of U.S. combat troops to Thailand or Laos in September, and a ban on funds for introducing U.S. combat troops in Laos or Thailand in December, ended the year on a discordant note.

Thailand's response in the new year included increasing restrictions on U.S. visitors, creating difficulties in negotiating an air transport agreement, and a number of vituperative attacks on the U.S. by Foreign Minister Thanat. In an address in February extolling the virtues of regionalism Thanat was severely critical of the "enemy within" in the U.S., and warned that U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia "may not only be ineffective, but may even become a liability". However, the U.S.-RVN invasion of Cambodia in March was strongly welcomed by Thai leaders and helped improve relations. At the same time Thailand increased its covert involvement in the U.S.-led military activities in Laos, and sought to play a similar role in Cambodia until stopped by a congressional ban in August. In September Thailand and the U.S. agreed to reduction of a further 9,800 U.S. personnel, to be achieved by July 1971.

Yet despite concern about U.S. staying power, and a public position of distancing itself from the U.S., Thai leaders made it clear they valued the U.S. security relationship and expected the U.S. to fulfil its commitments. In January 1971 Thanom and Thanat jointly indicated that the U.S. might postpone withdrawals because of stepped up communist aggression in Laos and Cambodia.
ACM Dawee also noted approvingly that in spite of withdrawals to that point, there had been no reductions in USAF operational units in Thailand. Once U.S. forces were down to 32,200 in June, no negotiations were scheduled to discuss further reductions.

Following the November 1971 coup, the sentiment against changing the Thai relationship with the U.S. hardened. With the rapid reduction of the U.S. presence in Vietnam, U.S. leaders persuaded their Thai counterparts that the withdrawal could be accomplished successfully if they strengthened U.S. air power in Thailand. Thai leaders were also reassured by firm U.S. actions, including the resumption of bombing against the DRV in April 1972, which Thailand had urged all along. By mid year the number of U.S. forces in the country was back to its pre-1970 peak (48,000), and aircraft had risen from 450 to an all-time high of around 750. Officially the increase was considered "temporary", and the personnel ceiling remained at 32,200. Thai leaders welcomed Nixon's re-election at the year's end, and readily agreed to a U.S. request to shift the headquarters for air operations in Vietnam to Nakorn Phanom in the northeast, a move that was officially announced early in March 1973.

**Retaining the U.S., But At A Reduced Level**

Though the U.S. presence reached its highest level ever in 1972, congressional opposition in the U.S., and gradually anti-U.S. sentiment in Thailand, forced the Thai leadership to accept that if the U.S. presence were to be maintained it would have to be at a reduced level. The
Vietnam cease-fire announced in January 1973, and the congressional ban on bombing Cambodia, which came into effect in August, caused particular concern. Commenting on the latter, Deputy Prime Minister Prapat warned the U.S. that it would lose all its friends if forced to abandon its peace-keeping commitment to Southeast Asia, and declared that the time was ripe for Thailand to lay down its policy for removing U.S. troops from the country.60 Prime Minister Thanom, however, counselled moderation, arguing that U.S. air units would be useful as a check against violations of the Indochinese cease-fire, and also a deterrent to aggression against Thailand.61 A joint Thai-U.S. statement on 17 August announced talks on reducing U.S. forces, but reaffirmed that "this reduction shall be gradual and related to the security requirements of Southeast Asia".62 Negotiations were held in August, September and December, leading to the departure of 7,350 men and 151 planes by January 1974,63 leaving some 35,000 troops and 600 planes.64

The move towards defining a new relationship with the U.S. continued to grow after the ouster of the military government in October 1973. The new government was by no means anti-U.S., but was forced to take some account of an increasingly critical public opinion. Two events immediately contributed to this, the appointment of William Kintner - a man with army and CIA connections, and a somewhat abrupt personality - as U.S. ambassador, and a hoax letter sent to the government by a CIA operative in December, purporting to come from the CPT and offering a
truce in return for government recognition of CPT liberated areas - apparently an attempt to alert the new government to the communist danger. Both events sparked student-led anti-U.S. protests and demonstrations. Reflecting the new atmosphere, on 16 January 1974 Foreign Minister Charunphan declared that future relations with the U.S. would have to be modified. In the past there had been an over-emphasis on military co-operation, and adjustments would have to be made to achieve a more balanced relationship.

Bilateral relations continued uneasily over subsequent months. In March agreement was reached on a phased withdrawal of 10,000 personnel, leaving a total of 25,000 and 350 aircraft by the year’s end. In July Ambassador Kintner was summoned to the foreign ministry and asked to end surveillance of the Indian Ocean from bases in Thailand, as this has never been approved by the government.

Nevertheless the approach of the new government was not fundamentally different from that of its predecessor, and it accepted the need for a continuing U.S. presence in the country. The joint statement announcing U.S. withdrawal on 29 March noted that the residual force “will be adequate to help preserve the security of Indochina”. Further, the U.S. withdrawal was postponed in February 1975 as communist offensives in the RVN and Cambodia gained momentum. The interim Sanya administration, however, was immune from public pressures in a way that popularly elected governments following it were not, and perhaps had the good fortune to leave office before the
imminent collapse of non-communist governments in Indochina was absolutely certain.

**Managing the U.S. Withdrawal**

Elected governments continued to see an important role for the U.S. in guaranteeing Thai security, but as the U.S. moved rapidly towards defeat in Indochina, and public opinion became increasingly anti-American, further distancing of the bilateral relationship became necessary. The Seni government which came to power briefly in February 1975 announced, for the first time, a policy of total U.S. withdrawal, within an eighteen month timeframe. Its successor, under Kukrit, lowered the deadline to twelve months. In May, anti-U.S. feeling was greatly strengthened by the Mayaguez incident when, in opposition to Kukrit's express instructions to its Charge d’Affaires, the U.S. used Utapao as a staging base for military action to free a U.S. merchant ship detained by the communist government in Cambodia. The U.S. had, as in the past, cleared the action with military officials, but in view of Kukrit's position the action was seen as tantamount to ignoring Thai sovereignty, apart from embarrassing Thai attempts to seek a modus vivendi with its new neighbouring communist regimes. A strong protest was lodged, forcing the U.S. to issue a contrite statement of regret, but not before the cabinet had decided to review all existing treaties and agreements between the two countries.

Marking a further change in the relationship, Prime Minister Kukrit, during a visit to the Philippines in July 1975, agreed on the phasing out of SEATO (though not the
Manila Treaty). At a subsequent meeting in September SEATO members agreed to wind the organisation up by June 1977.

The U.S. withdrawal then proceeded rapidly, with all Special Forces, USAF personnel and combat aircraft out by the end of December 1975. Significantly, however, by November the 12 month ultimatum had been redefined to refer to "combat" forces, rather than all U.S. forces, and press reports referred to agreement in principle on the retention of several hundred U.S. "advisers". The U.S. was in fact concerned to retain some 3,000 personnel for intelligence facilities at Ramasun and other sites, and in addition stopover right at Utapao, strategically located mid-way between U.S. bases in the Philippines and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. The Kukrit government was sympathetic, but with anti-U.S. sentiment strengthening, and elections about to be held, was concerned that the U.S. presence be as low-key as possible and Thai sovereignty unambiguously affirmed. Towards this end, on 4 February 1976, it asked the U.S. to agree to seven general principles governing future relations. Tense negotiations followed, but the question of legal jurisdiction over U.S. troops could not be resolved before the deadline for the departure of U.S. troops on 20 March, 1976. As a result the Thai government announced that all remaining U.S. troops, except for 270 under the 1950 MAA, would have to depart within four months, and revoked the 1964 and 1965 telecommunication agreements.
Thai-U.S. relations were now at their lowest level ever. The U.S. made one further attempt to retain a residual presence after the Seni government come to power, but this again ultimately failed on the issue of sovereignty. Seeking to explain the impasse, U.S. officials settled blame on one individual, MFA Under-Secretary, Anand Panyarachun. But while personal conflicts were a contributing factor, this analysis underestimated the extent to which the nature of Thai-U.S. relations had changed, as well as the extent to which Anand reflected the policies of his political mentors.

OTHER GREAT POWERS

Apart from the U.S., the country that impinged most directly on Thai foreign policy and security interests was China. As noted in the previous chapter, recognition of China's importance has been a factor throughout Thai history. From Sukhothai, in the thirteenth century, Thailand sent envoys to Beijing, and recognised a loose Chinese sovereignty over the region until the mid-nineteenth century. In the following century Thailand generally eschewed direct contacts with China, not because it had downgraded China's significance, but because it feared Chinese intervention in Thai affairs.

A major factor influencing bilateral relations, particularly since the late nineteenth century, has been the role of the Chinese minority in Thailand. Until early in the nineteenth century the Chinese minority was small, less than five percent of the population, and well assimilated. By the end of the century the percentage had
doubled, and the arrival of more women, along with the growth of nationalism in China, temporarily brought an end to the assimilation process. The Chinese played a major role in promoting economic development, but their economic success was often resented by ethnic Thais. In 1914, King Rama VI (who was in fact part Chinese) wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Jews of the East*, urging Thais to play a more active economic role, and strongly criticising Chinese for their sense of racial superiority and practice of repatriating savings to China. After Phibun became prime minister in December 1938 a series of laws were passed harshly restricting Chinese economic activities. Justified by the need to provide economic opportunity for ethnic Thai, they were also a reaction against the intensification of Chinese nationalism following the outbreak of the Sino-Japan War in 1937. In essence, Thai concern was that the Chinese gave their first loyalty to China, and were thus potential fifth columnists, along with fear of China intervening on behalf of its ethnic kin. These concerns remained important throughout the period of this study, particularly in the case of some 300,000 Chinese who did not hold Thai citizenship.

Thai policy towards China and the local Chinese changed towards the end of World War II, partly because of the fall of the pro-Japanese Phibun government, and partly to gain China's support for Thailand's admission to the UN. The anti-Chinese legislation was rescinded, and on 23 January 1946 the two countries signed a Treaty of Amity agreeing to the establishment of diplomatic relations. However, after Phibun's return to power in 1948 many of
the anti-Chinese policies were reintroduced. Relations with the mainland did not remain for very long, as Thailand refused to extend diplomatic recognition to the PRC after it gained power in October 1949, and continued relations with the Taiwan-based "Nationalist China". Indeed the relationship with Taiwan remained very close through to the mid 1970s, with frequent exchanges of military leaders between the two countries, and close cooperation in gathering and exchanging intelligence on the PRC.74

During the early years of the PRC, government leaders and the official media were hostile towards Thailand, criticising it for its treatment of the local Chinese, communists (the 1952 anti-communist act) and military cooperation with the U.S., particularly the 1950 MAA and SEATO.75 In January 1953 the establishment of the Thai Nationality Autonomous Area in Yunan province, though only involving a population of 200,000, was seen by Thai leaders as an attempt to offer an alternative focus for Thai loyalties.76 Further alarm was caused in July 1954 when Beijing radio broadcast a report of an article in the People’s Daily by Pridi – not previously known to be in China – calling on Thais to wage a struggle against U.S. imperialism and its puppets the government of Thailand.77

This era of confrontation changed when Foreign Minister Prince Wan met PRC Prime Minister Chou En Lai at Bandung in April 1955. Chou was most conciliatory. He stressed that the Autonomous Region was purely an internal matter, that Pridi was in Beijing but not engaged in anti-
Thai activities, that China was ready to conclude an agreement on citizenship similar to that concluded with Indonesia (meaning it would not extend protection to Chinese who accepted Thai citizenship), and that China was anxious to establish contacts based on the principles of peaceful coexistence. Prince Wan did not take up Chou's invitation for an official visit to China, but a number of private visits were made (some, perhaps, with unofficial government approval), and trade increased after a ban on non-strategic goods was lifted in June 1956.

Moves towards detente ended abruptly after Sarit seized power for the second time in 1958, and pursued an intensely anti-communist policy both at home and abroad. In January 1959 a ban was placed on all trade and travel to China. Conflicting interests in Laos and Cambodia over the next few years, and increasing Beijing support for the fledgling CPT, particularly the establishment of a China-based Voice of the People of Thailand (VOPT) in 1962, led to charges and counter-charges.

1965 perhaps marked the high point of Thai-Chinese hostility. In January Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi was reported to have told a visiting European diplomat of plans for a guerrilla war in Thailand within the year, a statement described by Foreign Minister Thanat as an official proclamation that China "will commit aggression against Thailand". In the same month the formation of a Thai Patriotic Front was announced by the VOPT then given considerable publicity by the Chinese media. In August the first armed clash between CPT guerrillas and Thai security forces occurred, a date that became known as the
beginnings of "people's war" in Thailand. For its part, China strongly criticised Thailand for allowing the U.S. to use Thai bases for bombing Indochina, warning Thai leaders they were "courting self-destruction by their complicity in the U.S. imperialist war of aggression in Vietnam". 80

For the next four years, with Thailand increasingly drawn into the Indochina conflict and China in the grip of the Cultural Revolution, relations were severely strained. The only open contact was at the tenth anniversary of the Bandung Conference in 1965. Thanat left this meeting two days ahead of schedule as a protest against China and the DRV using it for propaganda purposes. However there have been reports of various covert Thai-Chinese contacts. Terrill, for instance, notes that these started under Phibun, and continued under Sarit. "Amidst a series of gestures, notable for charming naivete and spectacular ineffectiveness, the hand of Praphas could often be discerned. In 1961 the British in Hong Kong caught a Thai in conspiracy with Chinese communists and arrested him. They found that he was a member of Praphas' staff". 81 Prince Sihanouk has also reported Mao Tse Tung as saying that covert contacts were frequent. 82

By the late 1960s Thai policy began to change, partly in response to uncertainties over U.S. intentions, and partly with a view to balancing China and the DRV. In August 1968, with China in mind, Thanat declared that if tomorrow "there are straws in the wind...we may decide to go directly and face the danger, and try to talk and see
what is going to happen". On 20 February 1969 he declared his willingness to meet with China (the DRV, Viet Cong and North Korea were also mentioned, though subsequent discussion focused on the PRC) to discuss the question of peace in Asia. The proposal was reiterated on several occasions over the next few months, and also endorsed by Prime Minister Thanom. Though initial comments on the Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in April 1969 emphasised Lin Piao's support for revolutionary wars and national liberation movements - seen as a hardening of China's position - the proposal remained open, and was later supplemented by one for Chinese participation in an Asian Bandung-style conference. The move towards detente continued as the end to the Cultural Revolution became clear. At the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 1970 Thanat reiterated support for the continued seating of Taiwan, but instead of vociferously speaking against PRC participation recommended that this be left to the Chinese people themselves. In October a China "task force" was set up in the MFA. And in a further concession, Deputy Prime Minister Praphat announced in May 1971 that the PRC could import Thai products directly, and even appoint an agent for this purpose, though exports to Thailand would not be allowed.

The Kissinger visit to China in July 1971 imparted increased urgency to Thai efforts. Recognising the inevitable, Thailand supported the seating of the PRC at UNGA in September, though it continued to support Taiwanese membership. Help was also sought through French
mediation, and according to reports some progress had been made before this was interrupted by the November coup.87 Just prior to the coup the government also decided to allow government-to-government trade, relax anti-communist laws, and allow visits to China by invited sports and non-political missions.88

Moves towards détente did not stop with the coup. In its two years in office the new government firmly resisted the idea of diplomatic relations, but made gradual progress in other areas, a process facilitated by the breakthrough in Sino-U.S. relations. A Thai pingpong team visited Beijing in September 1972, followed by an economic mission to the Canton Trade Fair in November, which made a side visit to Beijing. In June 1973 Taiwan intelligence operations based in northern Thailand were ordered stopped, Thailand invited a Chinese pingpong team to Bangkok, and diplomatic contacts with Taiwan were reduced. In July cabinet agreed to amend the prohibition on trade and a badminton team left for China, while the following month telephone and cable links were opened with Beijing. The process gained even greater momentum after the October 1973 change of government. In late December Deputy Foreign Minister Chatichai arrived in Beijing for a one week visit, followed by Minister of Defence Dawee (officially, in his capacity as head of the Thai Olympic Committee) in February 1974, and Chatichai again later in the year. By the end of the year remaining obstacles to trade were finally removed after some eight months delay in parliament.89

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Talks up to this stage focused largely on trade and improving people-to-people ties, with both sides agreeing that there was no need to rush diplomatic relations. An important result of Chatichai’s visits was Chinese willingness to provide 50,000 and 75,000 tons of diesel fuel at "friendship prices", at a time when Thailand was suffering severely from the effects of the 1973 oil price rises and shortages. In addition, however, Thailand took the opportunity provided by such meetings to ask that China end its support to the Thai insurgency. Dawee reported Chinese assurances that it would not continue to support Thai communists, but Chinese insistence on retaining links with the CPT, through the formula of separating government-to-government and party-to-party relations, delayed progress towards diplomatic relations.

A breakthrough finally came after the formation of the Kukrit government in April 1975, on the eve of communist takeover in Indochina. Confronted with a situation in which the military assured him Thailand was incapable of defending itself against a Vietnamese invasion, and realising that the U.S. could no longer be completely relied on, Kukrit sought a new means of ensuring Thai security through establishing diplomatic relations with China. This was finally accomplished with the signing of a joint communiqué on 1 July 1976. The problem of China continuing party-to-party relations was smoothed over by a Chinese assurance that it would settle all disputes by peaceful means, and not aid subversion. China’s transition from number one adversary
to an important counterweight against Vietnam was finally complete.

The Soviet Union has never approached China’s importance in Thai foreign policy concerns. Contacts between royal families provided the basis for close relations between Thailand and Czarist Russia, but no diplomatic relations were established with the USSR prior to World War II. Requiring Soviet support for entry into the UN, Thailand repealed existing anti-communist legislation and agreed to open diplomatic relations in 1946. Diplomatic, trade, and occasionally cultural relations were retained thereafter, but were never of major importance.

On a number of occasions Thailand expressed an interest in improving trade or cultural relations with the Soviets. This was particularly apparent during the early and late 1960s, when extensive publicity was given to attempts to conclude a trade agreement. Thai initiatives on this issue coincided with difficulties in relations with the U.S., and were undoubtedly intended to pressure the U.S. A trade agreement was eventually signed in December 1970, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s similar agreements were concluded with other communist East European countries, and diplomatic relations opened with Poland, Outer Mongolia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and East Germany between 1972 and 1974.

Most of the time Thai-Soviet relations were difficult, mainly because of conflicting policies towards Indochina and the U.S. role in the region. In the 1950s
and 1960s a number of Soviet officials were expelled for alleged espionage activities, and Thai leaders and newspapers reacted strongly to frequent criticism of Thai support for U.S. policies in Indochina, particularly a heavy-handed warning from the Soviet ambassador in May 1965 that Thailand was assuming a "grave responsibility" in permitting U.S. planes to use its military bases.\textsuperscript{92}

Thailand was also conscious of the need to maintain good relations with other great powers, both because of their general importance in world affairs, particularly in the UN, and economic importance as markets and a source of investments. Britain was the main power relied on in the nineteenth century to protect Thai interests against the more predatory French. The Thai alliance with Japan during World War II caused a sharp break in relations, and led to post-war compensation demands. Ultimately, however, these were not too onerous, and the start of the Malayan Emergency in June 1948 meant that good relations with Thailand had to be given priority to ensure cooperation along the common border. British membership of SEATO, its role as co-chairman of the 1954 and 1961-62 Geneva Conferences, and its military presence in Malaya even after independence, gave it considerable importance in Thai eyes. While frequently concerned that British policies on Indochina made too many concessions to communist interests, there were no open conflicts between the two countries.

With France, Thailand faced not only post-war demands for compensation, but also a dispute over territory in Cambodia and Laos transferred to Thailand after Japanese
mediation in 1941. To gain French support for its UN membership Thailand reluctantly returned the area in dispute. Thai leaders also had some sympathy with anti-colonial groups fighting the French in Indochina, but as such movements came increasingly under communist domination found little difficulty in cooperating with the French.

Thailand recognised that France's colonial links with Indochina, and its membership of SEATO, gave it an important role in the region. However bilateral relations were strained during the 1950s by the cautious and limited role France played within SEATO, particularly its opposition to SEATO involvement in Laos, and during the 1960s by repeated French proposals for the neutralisation of Southeast Asia. In Thanat's view, this policy 'indicated French acquiescence in the Communist idea of eventual Communist victory, with Southeast Asia becoming a Communist satellite'." Relations however improved in the late 1960s, when a pro-French policy seems to have been judged a suitable way of indicating dissatisfaction with the U.S., and France acted as an intermediary in Thai approaches to China.

A number of other great powers were recognised as having an important role in Asian affairs. Japan was an important ally through the 1930s and until the end of World War II, and was Thailand's main trading partner after this. But apart from lobbying Japan to join the Asian and Pacific Council (AS PAC), Thailand appears to have accepted that the nature of the Japanese state that
emerged after World War II precluded it from playing a significant military or even political role in the region. West Germany was the remaining great power that Thailand had significant economic and diplomatic links with.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

In the aftermath of World War II Thai policies towards Southeast Asia evolved slowly, a reflection both of the immediacy of demands placed by the great powers, and the slow emergence of the region from colonial rule. Diplomatic relations were not exchanged with any of its neighbours until 1949.

One of the first regional countries Thailand despatched a diplomatic mission to was its traditional rival, Burma, in November 1949. In the first few years the main focus of attention was the presence of several thousand Kuomintang (KMT) forces, driven out of China during the civil war with the communists, along the northern Thai-Burmese border. Concentrated mainly on the Burmese side, Rangoon officials felt that Thailand was hampering efforts to suppress them by being too forthcoming in providing refuge. In 1954, however, Thailand did act, and arranged the evacuation of 3,500 KMT to Taiwan. Following this relations improved markedly, with an exchange of visits by heads of government in 1955, and the signing of a treaty of friendship the following year.

The KMT problem did not, however, go away. In 1961 a joint Burma-PRC military operation drove most of the
remaining KMT troops out of Burma into Thailand and Laos. A further 4,374 troops were repatriated from Thailand to Taiwan in March-April that year, but several thousand remained in Laos until driven into Thailand by Pathet Lao-DRV forces in mid 1962. These established themselves near the Burmese border, took over control of the opium trade in the area, and remained a major obstacle to Thai-Burmese relations. Thai authorities, for their part, turned a blind eye to KMT activities, in return for assistance in opposing communist activities in the north. Only in 1973 did they begin to take action to end KMT opium trading.

The KMT were, however, only one of a number of groups on the Thai-Burmese border creating trouble for the two countries. The existence of numerous opposition tribal groups outside the effective control of the Rangoon government, the widespread cultivation of opium by many of these groups and its marketing through Thailand, a flourishing black market trade in consumer goods from the Thai side and forest products and gem stones from the Burmese side, a strong Burmese Communist Party (BCP) in northeastern Burma, and a long tradition of banditry, gave rise to numerous conflicts and often armed battles that spilled across both sides of the border. From the 1950s Thailand provided refuge, and at times more direct support, for thousands of opponents of the Rangoon government. While it has been argued that Thailand simply took the line of least resistance, since it did not have the resources to control the situation, it is clear that in some instances Thailand encouraged opposition groups to
secure a "buffer" against possible threats from Burma. The threats which caused most concern were the BCP, the possibility of a general breakdown of law and order in Burma, and the possibility of Burmese neutralism tying Burma more closely to China, either by allowing PRC troops in the country or - unlikely as it may have seemed to most observers - by transforming Burmese socialism into Burmese communism.

Possibly in response to a personal initiative of Burmese leader Ne Win, who visited in December 1962, Thailand and Burma signed an Agreement on Border Arrangements and Cooperation, modelled on Thai-Malayan arrangements, on 17 May 1963. This provided for foreign minister-level meetings twice yearly, and a series of meetings by lower level committees. It also allowed police actions five miles across the border, provided that prior notification were given and the authorities of one side accompanied by a liaison officer from the other. Meetings at various levels were held with considerable fanfare for the first couple of years, but seldom thereafter. A third meeting of the ministerial level committee was not held till August 1973, and there were none after this. Frequent high level exchanges between heads of government (Ne Win visited Bangkok three times between 1962 and 1973), foreign ministers and senior military figures (normally ACM Dawee on the Thai side) were exercises in damage limitation by both sides. These never succeeded in creating the basis for a genuinely cooperative relationship, though under the circumstances
the absence of overt hostility could perhaps be considered a notable achievement. A particularly low point in relations was reached when ousted former Prime Minister U Nu was granted political asylum in late 1969, and used this to try and unite opposition groups along the Thai-Burmese border. Thailand finally expelled him in July 1973.

Post Thanom governments do seem to have made more of an effort to establish cooperative relations, with a decision in September 1975 to stop Burmese rebels broadcasting from Thailand, and to establish the same stringent conditions on political activities by Burmese refugees as those applied to refugees from Indochina.\textsuperscript{102} The following year in February Thailand agreed, at Rangoon’s request, to expel a further seven major rebel leaders.\textsuperscript{103} Relations showed signs of improvement, but ingrained suspicions ran too deep on both sides for any overnight breakthrough.

To its south, an important relationship with Malaya (later Malaysia) was established before its neighbour had gained independence. Following the outbreak of the communist-led Emergency in June 1948, Thailand and Britain reached an agreement on border cooperation, described by Fifield in the following terms:\textsuperscript{104}

A British consul, having communications with Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, has operated at Singora [Songkla] to report on border developments. Thai officials and police in the south have been ordered to prevent Communists from going to Malaya or to arrest them if the try to enter Thailand. A Thai army officer has been stationed in Kuala Lumpur for liaison purposes with the British. Joint operations along the frontier area have been allowed; Thai and Malay police have functioned across the border from 10 to 20 miles; British
helicopters and reconnaissance and supply-dumping aircraft have flown across the frontier in support of joint police action. A joint intelligence center has been organized at Singora and a frontier planning staff established. Frequently (sic) visits by high British and Thai officials have furthered the cooperation.

Following Malayan independence an agreement along much the same lines was signed in 1959, and updated in 1965 and 1970. This instituted an annual ministerial level meeting responsible for coordinating all activities, a regional committee that met more frequently with direct oversight of military planning, and a jointly staffed office in Songkla with an intelligence gathering function. It also allowed a 200-500 strong Malaysian Police Field Force to be based in the southern Thai town of Betong, and gave police on both sides of the border the right of hot pursuit up to five miles in the other's territory. Following amendments in 1970 the right of hot pursuit was extended to soldiers, and the five mile limit removed.105

These agreements did not hide a fundamentally different perception of problems in the border region. The main Thai concern was not the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which generally avoided causing trouble, but Muslim separatists, fighting to gain autonomy for the four southern ethnically Malay provinces. Thai authorities were deeply resentful that border agreements were confined to opposing communists rather than all subversives, and were suspicious of Malaysian support for the separatists. Malaysia, on the other hand, felt that Thailand was less than sincere in cooperating against the MCP, and sympathised with difficulties faced by their ethnic kin
across the border. In early 1976 Thai misgivings, together with a heightened concern over sovereignty caused by relations with the U.S., led to demands for a revision of the border agreement so as to end the stationing of Malaysian police in Betong and the automatic right of hot pursuit, and to extend military cooperation to all subversive elements rather than communists only. Such changes, apart from the extension to non-communist subversives, were finally incorporated in a new agreement signed in March 1977.106

Despite these underlying tensions, government to government relations remained close. The basis for this was perhaps laid as early as 1955 when Tunku Abdul Rahman visited Bangkok and agreed not to support Malays in southern Thailand in exchange for Thai assistance to his independence campaign. Having a Thai mother, and having attended primary school in Bangkok for two years, the Tunku was sympathetic to Thailand, and as the country's first prime minister got relations off to a good start.107 Ties were then consolidated by Thai sympathy for Malaysia in the face of Indonesia's confrontation, and joint participation in ASA and ASEAN. The two countries shared a similar anti-communist foreign policy, and although each chose different military alliances, saw their fortunes as interlocked by common British, Australian and New Zealand participation in SEATO, the External Defence and Mutual Assistance Agreement, and its successor the Five Power Defence Arrangements.
With Indonesia, a good start was made when Thailand airlifted supplies to Indonesian nationalists at Jogjakarta during their war of independence against the Dutch. Early relations seem to have proceeded quietly. Thailand established its diplomatic mission in Jakarta in 1951, the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship in 1954, and the Thai king and Indonesian president exchanged visits with much pomp and ceremony in 1960 and 1961. Thailand was, however, unsympathetic to Indonesia's nonaligned foreign policy, and apart from Indonesian importance as a market for Thai rice there was little substance in the relationship.

The gulf between the two countries widened in the early 1960s with Indonesia's development of a militantly anti-colonial, anti-Malaysian and pro-communist foreign policy. During this period Indonesian intelligence agents were arrested while attempting to set up a secret intelligence unit in Thailand. Sukarno's eventual dismissal after the abortive October 1965 coup was welcomed by Deputy Prime Minister Praphat as "a big step forward for the Free World." Thailand then established a cooperative relationship with the Suharto government. Differences emerged in a few areas, such as Indonesia's resolute opposition to ties with the PRC in the 1970s, but these had no serious effect on the bilateral relationship. Thai efforts to promote regionalism recognised the importance of Indonesia, and the two countries worked together closely in ASEAN from its inception in 1967.
Relations with the Philippines have run a more even course. Thailand extended diplomatic recognition on 21 September 1946, just two and a half months after Filipino independence. The two countries exchanged legations in 1949, signed a treaty of friendship in the same year, and raised their representation to embassy status at the beginning of 1956.\textsuperscript{113} More importantly, both joined SEATO, the only Southeast Asian nations to do so, and had much in common as regional allies of the U.S. The presence of major U.S. air and naval bases in the Philippines greatly increased the importance of that country in Thai eyes. Thai-Filipino contacts were extensive under SEATO, and also important in ASA and ASEAN.

Such links notwithstanding, relations between the two countries were not as close as one might expect. Thailand was displeased by Filipino claims to sovereignty over Sabah from the early 1960s because of the strains this placed on ASA and ASEAN. Cultural differences between the Thai and the Americanised, Catholic Filipinos were greater than those with any other neighbouring country, and caused difficulties. Finally, a different course of political evolution also seems to have caused problems: during the 1960s the Philippines was a more open society than Thailand, while in the 1970s Thailand was moving towards a more democratic society at the same time as the Philippines under Marcos was moving in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{114}
With Singapore, the remaining ASEAN neighbour, diplomatic relations were established immediately after its emergence as an independent state in August 1965. Initially there was some concern about the new state. Speaking off the record leading Thai officials warned that Singapore's plans to trade with China and Indonesia would amount to the establishment of a beachhead by these two countries "right under Malaysia's nose and very near to Thailand". Such a view was, however, soon dispelled by the republic's quick, successful transition to independence, and its outspokenly anti-communist foreign policy. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew became a regular visitor to Bangkok and cultivated close personal relations with Thai leaders. Military ties were an important area of cooperation, with Singapore sending troops for training in Thailand from 1973, and at the same time making available facilities to provide Thailand with logistical support. The two countries also worked together closely in ASEAN.

The Region

Apart from bilateral relations with Southeast Asian countries, the promotion of regionalism was also an important aspect of Thai policy. This was perhaps first evident immediately after World War II in advocacy of a Southeast Asian Union incorporating Thailand and the countries of Indochina, and the brief formation of a Southeast Asian League including unofficial representatives from Burma, the Indochina countries, Indonesia and Malaya. Promotion of broader regional
objectives can perhaps also be seen in Thailand's successful lobbying for hosting the ECAFE office, and even membership of SEATO, though here the main intention was to get assurances of support from the U.S. It is nonetheless true to say that until the late 1950s, regionalism did not have a high priority in Thai foreign policy goals.

This changed with Thanat's appointment as foreign minister in February 1959. In July that year the foreign ministry circulated a draft entitled "Working Paper on Cooperation in Southeast Asia" to all regional countries except the DRV. This built on an earlier Malayan proposal for regional cooperation, suggesting specific areas where economic cooperation might occur, and proposing loose administrative arrangements within the states concerned rather than a central secretariat. An organisation that owed much to these proposals, and to Thanat's efforts in reconciling different Malayan and Filipino approaches, came into being with the launching of the three member ASA at a meeting in Bangkok in July 1961. Though the three countries were all strongly anti-communist, ASA espoused non-political aims, particularly economic and social cooperation.

Promoting regionalism of a broader type, in 1966 Thailand supported the establishment of ASPAC. Thailand, particularly Thanat, played a major role in getting the organisation established, including the hosting of an ambassadorial-level meeting in May which laid down the basic framework. ASPAC was launched the following month with nine members, namely Thailand the Philippines, Malaysia and RVN from Southeast Asia, plus Japan, South
Korea, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand. Strongly anti-communist in orientation, and perhaps seen largely as a means of mobilising diplomatic support for the RVN, Japan resisted efforts to turn it from a socio-economic to a political-security group, causing a paralysis that saw it fade into obscurity by the early 1970s.

In the mid 1960s Thanat worked untiringly to overcome the major disputes preventing the development of regionalism, particularly Indonesia's confrontation of Malaysia and the Philippine claim to Sabah. By 1963 the latter conflict had reduced ASA to inactivity, though Thanat carefully ensured that it remained in existence. Conditions favourable to these efforts only emerged after changes in Indonesia following the abortive October 1965 coup. Thanat then focused on bringing Indonesia into the process of regional cooperation. The extent of Thai willingness to accommodate Indonesian concerns was revealed in a December 1966 Thai proposal for a Southeast Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which retained ASA's organisational form but borrowed its objectives from Maphalindo, the short-lived alliance between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines established in 1963. These included, inter alia, "agreement that foreign bases are temporary in nature and should not be allowed to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence of Asian countries, and that arrangements of collective defense should not be used to serve the particular interest of any of the big powers".

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Again, after protracted debate, Thanat's proposals were largely adopted, and ASA was transformed, with the addition of Indonesia and Singapore, into ASEAN. In his final years as foreign minister Thanat continued to play a major role containing bilateral differences between ASEAN members, and resolving divergent views on such key issues as the Malaysian-initiated proposal for a Zone of Peace Freedom and Neutrality in 1971.¹²¹

Thanat's promotion of regionalism was something of a personal crusade which was tolerated but never enthusiastically supported by other Thai leaders. Nonetheless commitment to the idea remained after he was removed from the ministry. As the reality of a U.S. withdrawal from the region became increasingly apparent, ASEAN began to look more attractive, particularly after the change to civilian government in October 1973. While not able to offer any firm security guarantee - the U.S. was still seen as having a role in this area, along with China after the establishment of diplomatic relations - ASEAN's increasing coherence as a political organisation, prompted to a large extent by communist victories in Indochina in 1975, placed it at the top of Thai foreign policy concerns.

OTHER

In addition to the countries and institutions so far mentioned, it should also be noted that Thailand maintained important bilateral relations with a wide range of additional countries, particularly in West Europe, Australasia and South Asia. Also, as implied on a number
of occasions, Thailand gave high priority to the UN. After gaining membership on 16 December 1946 it played an active role in all aspects of UN activities, including providing the prestigious position of General Assembly Chairman (Prince Wan) in 1956. In the political and security areas this included sending troops to South Korea, appealing for UN intervention on various occasions in regard to Laos, and involving the UN - particularly as a mediator - in its disputes with Cambodia in the 1950s and 1960s.

CONCLUSION

From the systemic viewpoint, the Cold War, and related U.S. involvement in Indochina, were the main factors influencing Thai foreign policy. These gave rise to the 1950 MAA and SEATO in 1954, which established the basis for a close security relationship between Thailand and the U.S. The Bandung era of peaceful coexistence challenged this briefly in the mid 1950s, but the Cold War soon returned. Events in Laos from the late 1950s drew Thailand and the U.S. closer together, resulting in the first direct military cooperation, and the 1962 Rusk-Thanat communiqué which provided an even firmer security assurance. By 1964 the U.S. had gained access toThai airforce bases for armed attacks on neighbouring countries, and with the massive expansion of the U.S. role in Vietnam Thailand became an invaluable ally, from which 80% of the bombing in Indochina originated. To cement the relationship the U.S. engaged in contingency planning for the defence of Thailand against external attack (the
Taksin plan), and signed several important agreements, including two on communications (facilitating the Ramasun communications intercept station), one on base rights for B-52s at Utapao, and another on cooperation in air defence. Thailand was thus locked into a relationship that was extremely difficult to cut loose from, even after the U.S. began its withdrawal from the region. Indeed while governments of different complexions saw the necessity of reducing the U.S. presence in the 1970s, particularly after the Vietnam cease-fire in January 1973, all were keen to maintain at least a limited presence.

This is not to say that U.S. policies always determined Thai policies. Thai leaders were consistently more hawkish on Indochina than the U.S., and were often publicly critical of U.S. policies. Moreover, when Thai leaders ultimately realised that the U.S. was leaving the region, and that Thai interests could only be served by either accommodation with the DRV or alliance with another "guarantor", they acted to end their close cooperation. The U.S., for its part, was constantly concerned that Thailand did not fully trust it, and sought ways and means to offer reassurance.

But for most of the relationship the massive deployment of U.S. military might in Thailand greatly limited the options Thailand could pursue, particularly in relation to the "enemy" in Indochina. Moreover with a large embassy in the country (one of the largest, and for a while after the fall of Saigon in 1975 the largest, U.S. missions in the world),\textsuperscript{122} the U.S. was well placed to make its views known. U.S. intelligence briefings and
exchanges, in particular, provided a major source of Thai information on international events.123

There were, however, other systemic influences. Divisions between Southeast Asian countries limited opportunities for regionalism, but the formation of ASA in 1961 marked the beginnings of a change. The abortive coup in Indonesia in October 1965 created the preconditions for the expansion of regional cooperation, which made steady if unspectacular progress after the formation of ASEAN in August 1967. With the fall of Indochina to communism in 1975 ASEAN acquired a new importance to all its members, and became a major actor on the regional diplomatic stage, one that was to a considerable extent able to compensate for the U.S. withdrawal.

Relations with other great powers, particularly hostile relations with China and the USSR, were largely shaped by the U.S. relationship. Indeed even the rapprochement with China was facilitated by improving Sino-U.S. ties. However Thailand and the U.S. always had rather different interests in relation to China, and from the late 1960s Thai leaders looked to China as an important counter-balance to its relations with the DRV. With the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975 China played an part in filling the security gap left by the U.S. withdrawal.

Systemic changes in the region were geographically located to Thailand’s north and east (Indochina), and to a lesser extent in the south (ASEAN). To the west developments in and relations with Burma were always
unsettled, but for the most part remained in a state of equilibrium that only rarely required attention to be focused in this direction.
FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid., p.27.

3. Ibid., pp. 21-23.

4. Ibid., pp. 69-70.


7. Ibid., p.61.

8. Ibid., pp. 68-70.


11. Ibid., p.220.

12. Ibid., p.219.


15. Key excerpts from the agreement are included in *FEER*, 29 January, 1973.


34. As previously noted, in September 1965 a U.S. military spokesman talked of the immediate dispatch of U.S. forces if Thailand was the target of aggression through infiltration or overt attack. (Bangkok World, 10 September, 1965.) Earlier, Prime Minister Thanom observed that if necessary U.S. troops would come to Thailand should China carry out the alleged threat of its Foreign Minister to start a guerrilla war. (Ibid., 30 June, 1966.) Deputy Prime Minister Praphat also observed that Thailand could call for U.S. troops if it could not keep communist insurgency in the northeast under control. (Ibid., 30 June, 1966.)


36. The agreements are reproduced in FEER, 30 April, 1976, p.31.

37. Randolph, R.S., op.cit., p.60.

38. See p.369.


42. U.S. Congress, op.cit., p.879.


45. The Japan Times, 14 August, 1968.


47. U.S. Congress, op.cit., p.726.

48. See Bangkok World, 8 February, 6 and 24 September, and 4,12,13 October, 1966.


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64. It should perhaps be noted that figures for U.S. planes in the early 1970s are not easy to reconcile. Randolph, for instance, using various official and unofficial reports and estimates, cites a figure of 600 planes in 1972, and elsewhere has claimed over 750 (*Thai-American Relations in Perspective*, Jackson, K.D. and Wiwat Mungkandi (Eds.), *United States-Thailand Relations*, Institute of Asian Studies, University of Berkeley, 1986, p.29); for April 1973, a figure of 518 is used, despite the absence of any indications of withdrawals; and in January 1974 (after 150 planes were withdrawn) a figure of 600 is used. (Randolph, R.S., *The United States and Thailand*, pp. 155,156 and 176.) The April 1973 figure is taken from Lowenstein, J.G. and Moose, R.M., "Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973", A Staff Report Prepared for the use of the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1973, p.4. This is inconsistent with most other figures for 1972 and 1974, though other figures are largely based on press reports and might be considered less authoritative.


71. Reproduced in Randolph, R.S., *op.cit.*, pp.189-190. The seven principles were:
(1) American facilities and personnel shall be subject to Thai jurisdiction unless exempted by specific agreements between the Royal Thai Government and the United States Government
(2) These facilities and personnel shall in no way be used to threaten or interfere with the national sovereignty of any other country
(3) In keeping with the spirit of mutual cooperation and interests, reports on the activities involving these facilities, including information and data derived from such activities, shall be communicated directly to the Royal Thai Government
(4) On-the-job training programs shall be launched with the view to the rapid replacement of American personnel operating the facilities by Thai personnel
(5) American personnel authorized to operate facilities in Thailand shall not exceed the number agreed by the Royal Thai Government
(6) These authorized American personnel shall enjoy such privileges as are accorded to technical experts from other countries
(7) Agreements pertaining to such cooperation shall continue for the duration of not more than two years, but shall be renewable or may be terminated earlier by either party giving advance notice

72. *loc.cit.* The view was even more forcefully expressed in a confidential interview in 1977 given by a senior U.S. official involved in Thai-U.S. negotiations.

74. Several Thai government leaders interviewed noted that Taiwan was an important intelligence source on the PRC, and many government statements on the PRC activities were from this source. Thailand also allowed Taiwan to mount intelligence operations into China from northern Thailand, using KMT troops in the area, until June 1973. The operations were finally ended as part of Thai moves to improve relations with the PRC.


76. Stanton, E.F., Brief Authority, p.278.


87. Terrill, R., op.cit.


89. There is a convenient summary of these events in the section on Thailand in FEER, Asia Yearbook, 1974 and 1975.


91. See the joint communique on establishing diplomatic relations in FAB, Vol.XV, No.3, July-September, 1975, pp. 68-70.

93. Ibid., 8 March, 1964.


99. This view was frequently expressed during interviews with Thai policy makers and academics.


106. Foreign Minister Bhichai claimed the basis of this agreement had been settled at the prime ministerial level when Tun Hussein Onn visited Thailand in February. (FEER, 23 July, 1976, p.13). However the government was only seen to act after public protests, probably communist led, against the Malaysian presence following a military operation in May. The 1977 agreement, amongst other matters, stipulates that before crossing the border during a unilateral action the other country must be informed and approve the distance and duration of the crossing. Apart from joint staff at the Regional Border-Committee Office, liaison officers and members of intelligence field teams "no Security Forces of one country will be stationed in the territory of the other". Military operations are to be against "the Communist Terrorists and members of their related organisations". Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Agreement Between the Government of Thailand and the Government of Malaysia On Border Cooperation", dated 4 March, 1977, mimeo.


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114. As a reflection of this see the sharp exchange between Filipino officials and the Thai media, following a *Bangkok Post* editorial in August 1973 criticising Marcos' policy towards Senator Aquino. *Bangkok Post*, 29 August-3 September, 1973.


119. See discussion of ASPAC in the context of Thai diplomatic initiatives on Vietnam, pp.


122. In May 1976 embassy staff included 55 Foreign Service Officers, 25 members of the Foreign Service Staff, 24 communications personnel, and nine military attaches. There were also three 2-3 person consulates, an economic aid mission, a military aid mission, the United States Information Service, and the CIA. (Darling, F.C., "Political Functions of the United States Embassy in Thailand", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XVIII, No.11, November, 1978.) Estimates of the size of the CIA in the early 1970s generally put it at around 100.

123. This is the major theme of the article by Khien Theeravit, "Kor Sanget Khiawkup Nayobai Tang Prathet Khong Thai" (Points to Observe About Thai Foreign Policy), *Sangkhomsat Parithat*, Vol. 13, No.1, January-March, 1975.
CHAPTER 5
VIETNAM: LINCHPIN OF INDOCHINA

THE SETTING

Diplomatic relations between Thailand and Vietnam were established only towards the end of the period of this study, in August 1976. Prior to this Thailand opened relations with the non-communist southern State of Vietnam in February 1950, which became the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) under Ngo Dinh Diem, and these were maintained until the fall of this state in April 1975. A number of contacts were made with the northern communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and after 1975 with the southern Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam, but these did not lead to diplomatic relations.

A comparison of the national power of Thailand and Vietnam - in terms of such key variables as land area, population, gross national product, and military strength - reveals the two countries to be fairly evenly matched. While the land area of Thailand is nearly twice as large as that of Vietnam, and its GNP some two and a half times greater, this is more or less compensated by Vietnam's larger population, and much greater military strength.¹ During most of the period of study this picture was distorted by the existence of two Vietnamese states, but even so in terms of military strength the DRV alone,
fortified by Soviet and Chinese aid and the renowned military prowess of Vietnam's battle-hardened soldiers, exceeded that of Thailand. These facts, together with proximity of the two countries - only 150 kilometres separating parts of Thailand with both Vietnam's north and south - made it virtually inevitable that a degree of rivalry would develop between the two sides.

Ideological factors, and different alignments with great powers that resulted from this, were perhaps the most important determinants of bilateral relations. Thailand and the RVN shared a common commitment to opposing communism, and both cooperated closely with the U.S. in pursuing this. The DRV, by contrast, was a communist state, closely aligned with the USSR and - most of the time - the PRC.

Social and cultural relations between Thailand and Vietnam were generally divisive rather than unifying factors. Cultural patterns found in Thailand belong to an Indianised tradition, whereas those in Vietnam are Sinicised. This distinction is more accurate for Thailand and the DRV, as the southern part of Vietnam represents an intermediary zone between the two spheres. Some perceived links do exist with respect to Buddhism, though the Mahayana version found in Vietnam differs from Thailand's Theravada school. Persecution of Buddhists in the early 1960s under the Diem regime caused considerable public concern in Thailand.

While there were only limited direct cultural links between the two major ethnic groups, there were important
minority groups of Vietnamese in Thailand, and Thais in Vietnam. The former came in two major waves. A few thousand militia who called at Bangkok in the late eighteenth century opted not to return to their homeland and quickly integrated into the local community. In the mid-nineteenth century larger numbers of Vietnamese Catholics fled religious persecution and settled in various parts of Thailand, mainly around Bangkok and in the northeast. Unlike the first arrivals, members of this group have generally not integrated with Thai society beyond the extent necessary for business purposes. They continue to use the Vietnamese language amongst themselves, remain Catholic, and marry within their ethnic group. Quite a few have built prosperous careers in commerce and as skilled tradesmen. The number within this category by the mid 1960s has been estimated at around 22,000,² virtually all of whom are Thai citizens.

The second major influx of Vietnamese occurred in the mid 1940s and early 1950s, when Vietnamese in Laos and Cambodia, fleeing the reassertion of French control in these countries, crossed the Thai border at several points in the northeast. Initially welcomed by Thailand, which was at that time sympathetic to the anti-colonial movement in Indochina, they quickly came to be considered actual or potential agents of Vietnamese communism. The consequences are discussed at length below.

Vietnam, particularly the area formerly covered by the DRV, is host to a large Thai minority. According to a census in 1960 there were 385,000 Thai in the DRV, concentrated in the northwest of the country bordering
Laos, representing 2.4 per cent of the total population. Additionally, there were 504,000 "Tay", located largely in the northern part of the DRV, which, though better integrated with the Vietnamese, were considered to belong to the Thai ethnic group. The Thai enjoyed a high degree of autonomy under Vietnamese emperors, and this continued during French rule. When France sought to return to northern Vietnam after World War II, it established a nominal "Thai Autonomous State" under Thai feudal leaders, but this soon fell to attacks by the Vietminh, which included many Thai amongst its allies. In the DRV, Thais were a majority in the North West Autonomous Zone, established in 1955 and maintained until the abolition of all Autonomous Zones for minorities in the 1970s.

There have been very few direct links between Thais in Vietnam and those of Thailand, and there are a number of cultural differences, including the fact that Thais in Vietnam are animists rather than Buddhists. The language spoken by Vietnamese Thais is, however, reportedly similar to the dialect spoken in Thailand's northeast. In view of such links, the sometimes hostile relationship between the Vietnamese and this minority group, and the strategic location of the Thai along the Laotian border close to Thailand, it would be surprising if the DRV did not view them as potential fifth columnists, or at the least as a group susceptible to infiltration by foreign agents. The RVN, by contrast, in the mid-1950s had only some 25,000 Thai within its borders. Thailand made no irredentist claims on its ethnic kin in Vietnam, and did not generally
seek to act as their patron. Military officials did, however, organise a seven day visit to Thailand by ten representatives of Thai communities from the RVN in 1970.5

Informal contact between Thai and Vietnamese leaders was never an important factor, though regular exchanges between Thai and RVN military leaders led to some close friendships. Lt. General Duong Van Minh - one time RVN Premier - arrived in Bangkok in January 1965 as a special "Envoy of the Chief of State" for an eight day visit, when opposing groups in RVN sought to remove his influence and he was forced to prolong his stay. He did not return to Saigon until October 1968, and in the interim established a wide circle of friends among leaders of the Thai military. After his return General Minh had some influence on RVN political affairs, though he remained essentially on the periphery. Military leaders interviewed felt that at least the military background of RVN leaders made possible a common perception of regional problems. As will be seen, however, this was not always the case.

Thai-Vietnamese economic relations have not been of great significance, though on occasions conflicts over the sale of Thai rice to the RVN led to minor crises. As can be seen in Appendix III, in the best year prior to 1975 Thai exports to the RVN totalled only $16,353,000, while the comparable figure for imports from the RVN was $2,113,000. Annual exports and imports from the DRV in the same period never exceeded $10,000. Total trade dropped away sharply after the communist victory over the RVN in 1975. From 1964 Thailand occasionally provided
economic aid to the RVN, but this was soon overtaken by military aid, and was not sufficient to provide a significant bond between the two countries.6

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There is not a long history of direct contacts between Thailand and Vietnam, but from about the time of Ayuthia (established 1350) the expansionist ambitions of Thailand and Annam (northern Vietnam), and the search by Cambodian elites for powerful allies, brought the two countries into conflict in the region of Cambodia. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were at least seven occasions when Vietnamese armies were sent to support a "Vietnamese candidate for the Cambodian throne, in his struggles against a rival candidate favoured by Siam".7 When the area adjacent to Cambodia in southern Vietnam was brought under the control of a unified government at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Vietnam's southern expansion was finally complete, and it emerged as one of the three major powers - along with Thailand and Burma - on the Southeast Asian mainland.

Before becoming the first ruler of a unified Vietnam, Nguyen Anh (Emperor Gia Long), was forced by opponents to flee to Bangkok in 1783, and was granted protection and an allowance by Rama I. The relationship was cemented by the marriage of Nguyen Anh's sister to Rama I. After leaving in 1786 Nguyen Anh regularly sent tribute to Bangkok, until installed as emperor in 1802. His ultimate success was due, in part, to military assistance which Thailand provided. Relations were then placed on an equal footing.
In the years before the French acquisition of Cochinchina, missions were exchanged every few years, in spite of frequent conflicts over Cambodia and Laos. War between the two sides occurred in 1813 and 1818 in Cambodia, 1827-1828 in Laos, and again in Cambodia during 1831, 1833-1834, and 1840-1846. Cambodian leaders sent tribute to both Vietnam and Thailand during this period, and ultimately a formalised accommodation, agreed to by both Bangkok and Hue, was reached along these lines. The conflict showed both sides to be fairly evenly matched, though Vietnam had a slight upper hand from 1813-1840, and Thailand thereafter.

French intervention in Vietnam from the early 1860s ended government to government relations between Thailand and Vietnam. Contacts continued, however, between Thai officials and members of anti-French movements in Vietnam. In 1892 Thailand sent several pack trains of guns and ammunition to aid an anti-French rebellion led by members of Vietnam’s traditional elite. The noted Vietnamese reformer Phan Boi Chau, and several supporters, spent a number of years in the early 1900s in Bangkok. During this time Phan had an audience with the king and gained the backing of one of the king’s uncles. In 1929 Ho Chi Minh visited Vietnamese communities in the northeast of Thailand, and in the 1930s communists and other Vietnamese nationalists frequently sought refuge from French authorities in this region.

Thai attitudes to Vietnamese at this time were ambivalent. While sympathising with anti-colonial
activity (particularly as this was against the colonial power most hostile to Thailand) and harbouring vague pan-Thai ambitions best served by a French exit from Laos and Cambodia, Thailand was anxious to maintain good relations with colonial powers, and was alarmed by leftist and communist elements in the nationalist movements. Perhaps even more importantly, Thai officials feared that as Vietnamese nationalists were seeking Chinese support, their ultimate victory might strengthen China's position in the region, and directly threaten Thailand. This was noted in comments sent by King Prajadhipok to senior advisers, which continued:

As long as French rule continues in Vietnam it is a "safe-guard" for Siam. No matter how much we sympathize 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 the French rule.

In practice, however, Thailand did not follow such a clear-cut policy. While it readily agreed to hand over proven criminals and communists from Indochina to France, it sometimes resisted pressures to hand over other nationalists.

There is little information on how the 1932 Revolution affected Thai attitudes towards Vietnam. Since it brought to power a somewhat more radical leadership it presumably resulted in greater support for the anti-colonial movement. At the same time, however, the vigorous assertion of pan-Thai doctrines in the early
1940s, encompassing Cambodia and Laos, conflicted with the regional ambitions of Vietnam's Indochinese Communist Party.

Thai-Vietnamese relations entered a new phase immediately after World War II. The Free Thai-led governments had considerable sympathies with their wartime allies, the Vietminh, and through 1945 and 1946 Thailand was locked in conflict with France (ultimately lost by Thailand) over the return of parts of Cambodia and Laos which France had ceded in 1941. Thailand thus provided a safe refuge for the Vietminh, along with moral and even some material support. In May 1947 Pridi tried to mediate in the armed conflict that had developed between France and the Indochinese nationalist movements, by proposing that Thailand and France sponsor a Southeast Asian Union to include Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos as free and independent states. Predictably, this plan was rejected by France. Later in the year the Vietminh was included in the Thai-sponsored Southeast Asia League, but this was disbanded following the October military coup.

There was not, however, a major policy change on Vietnam for another two years. After Phibun again became prime minister in April 1948 he continued, as Nuechterlein notes,\(^{12}\) to support the nationalist aspirations of the Laotian, Cambodian and Vietnamese peoples, and he did not try to prevent arms from being smuggled across the Mekong River. In part, this policy was motivated by a deep anti-French feeling which persisted in official Thai circles after the war and was reinforced after France had threatened to veto Thailand's membership in the United Nations unless former French territories in Laos and Cambodia were returned. Another factor was Phibun's suspicion that Viet-Minh forces under Ho Chi Minh
might well defeat the French, and that it would be unwise to antagonize the Viet-Minh, at least until it was known that the United States and Britain were prepared to support the French in this war.

Nonetheless such considerations were overridden two years later by the need to obtain U.S. support. As previously noted, on 28 February 1950, three weeks after the U.S. recognised the anti-Vietminh French-created regime headed by former Emperor Bao Dai, Thailand followed suit. A diplomatic mission was established in Saigon before the end of the year.

During the 1950s relations with Vietnam were closely linked to events surrounding the approximately 50,000 Vietnamese refugees who had fled conflicts in Laos and Cambodia during the late 1940s and early 1950s. They were initially welcomed because, although many were Vietminh supporters, they were viewed more as nationalists than communists. However, as communist forces began to gain the upper hand in China and Vietnam, and Vietminh agents became increasingly active with the refugees, the government came to view them as a positive danger. Not only were they supporting an external communist cause, but there were also fears of them spreading communism among the Thai.

In April 1949 the Thai government made the first move towards exercising close control over the refugees by ordering their confinement to thirteen border provinces, and issuing them with special identification papers. The number of provinces in which residence was permitted was reduced to five in 1950. In April the following year the Special Branch of the Police Department was charged with
implementing newly issued "Rules for Control of Vietnamese Refugees". Chan Ansuchote has noted the principal features: 13

heads of Vietnamese families were made responsible for the behaviour of their families, and headmen were selected to do the same for several families. A census was to be taken of the refugees, and detailed information was to be collected about the names, birth dates, relatives, education, skills, occupations and residences. And close checks were to be imposed in order to prevent refugees from moving around within their restricted provinces and outside them and to limit contact between the refugees to nonpolitical matters.

New orders were issued in March 1952 requiring the five provincial Governors in the designated areas to establish refugee settlements under the supervision of an ethnic Thai, take a new and thorough census of the Vietnamese, and take further steps to restrict travel. This subsequently remained the legal framework for dealing with the refugees, and was reinforced during this period by the arrest of forty Vietnamese allegedly involved in subversion in 1953, and another 279 later in 1958. In practice, however, while police maintained close surveillance of the refugees, they were never actually placed in settlements, and many resided outside the five designated provinces.

Restrictions placed on the refugees were strongly criticised by both the DRV and the RVN. At the same time, from the Thai perspective, they did not appear to lead to any reduction in refugee subversive activities. 14 In order to overcome both problems the government decided, in July 1953, to explore the possibility of repatriation to the RVN. Discussions were initiated with the RVN embassy, but soon abandoned when the embassy claimed it did not have
the authority to negotiate. This appears to have been the first indication of RVN unwillingness to assume responsibility for a group comprised overwhelmingly of Vietminh supporters. In July 1954, the U.S. ambassador to Thailand, General Donovan, visited Saigon and acted as an intermediary in arranging further negotiations. In August representatives of Thailand, the RVN and the U.S. met in Bangkok, but during this and subsequent meetings between Thai and RVN authorities throughout the 1950s, no agreement could be reached. Chan notes that ostensibly negotiations broke down over the question of who would pay for repatriation, but a more significant factor was the RVN's reluctance "to receive thousands of potential subversives." The DRV on the other hand, reacted to Thai-RVN negotiations in 1954 with an accusation that Thailand was putting refugees into "concentration camps" and planned to "expel" them to the RVN.

By 1955 Thai policy makers were considering a bold way out of this impasse: repatriation to the DRV. This was raised informally with DRV representatives at the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, but there was no progress over the next three years, apparently because of the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries. By 1958 Thailand had decided to approach the DRV indirectly through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a move that is discussed in detail below.

Two further developments during the 1950s help explain concern about Vietnamese refugees, and Thailand’s
relations with the two Vietnams generally. These were the arrival of Vietminh troops in Laos and Cambodia during 1953-1954, and events associated with the Geneva Conference and formation of SEATO the following year.

In April 1953 over a division of Vietminh troops moved into Laos, and came to within fifteen miles of the Thai border before withdrawing. They returned in December and seized the border town of Thakhek. In April 1954 Vietminh forces moved into northeastern Cambodia. This widening of the war seems to have come as a considerable shock to Thailand. As late as 1953 Prime Minister Phibun was reported to believe that the Vietnamese themselves would defeat the Vietminh if they were given independence.17 In June, Thailand's U.N. representative, Pote Sarasin noted in an address to the Security Council that:18

For nearly eight years, the war has been going on in Vietnam, but up to April 1953 its character was not such as to give great concern to my Government. Much as we have deplored its continuation, it has been largely within the border of Vietnam and had only indirect effect on Thailand's immediate neighbours, Laos and Cambodia.

Overnight, perceptions of the Vietminh changed from that of an organisation with little support in Vietnam, to that of a dangerous agent of international communism. Pote Sarasin, in a carefully worded statement, described Vietminh forces in Laos and Cambodia as "large, powerful and well organised. There is considerable evidence that they have received material and political support from outside of Indochina".19 Furthermore, the great danger which their presence in Laos and Cambodia created for Thailand "was aggravated by the fact that 60,000 persons
of the Vietnamese race live within Thailand along the Laotian-Thai frontier, in the area fronting the scene of this military operation. The presence of this group has made it possible for Viet Minh agents to infiltrate these Viet-Name communities. Left unstated also was the fear that the expansion of Vietnamese influence in Laos might, with little Vietnamese effort, spread among the ethnically similar northeasterners, giving sustenance to irredentist sentiments in this region.

When the Geneva Conference took place in 1954 Thailand’s major preoccupation was the fate of Cambodia and Laos. It appears to have accepted that the DRV would gain northern Vietnam and be well placed to expand its influence in the south. Nonetheless, recognising that Vietnam was the linchpin of Indochina, it was quick to support the RVN once it had been established (albeit on a temporary basis) by the Conference. Initial support included lobbying within SEATO to ensure its recognition of the RVN’s right to protection, sending a special mission to Saigon to discuss common problems in June 1957, and hosting a visit to Bangkok by Diem in August.

To examine Thai-Vietnamese relations during the main period of study it is useful to discuss bilateral relations with the RVN and DRV separately, then to look at problems after April 1975 in reaching an accommodation with the victorious forces of Vietnamese communism.
Thai-RVN relations in the late 1950s and early 1960s were focused mainly on the problem of refugees and the Diem government's anti-Buddhist policies. At the same time, however, concern about the RVN's importance in opposing the expansion of communism in Indochina was never far in the background, and was probably responsible for preventing disputes in other areas getting out of hand.

By August 1958 the Thai government had initiated steps to repatriate refugees to the DRV, but before going ahead it made another attempt to persuade the RVN to take them. In February 1959 Foreign Minister Thanat flew to Saigon, but again failed to gain RVN cooperation. The signing of a Thai-DRV agreement the following August led to a strong RVN protest, Chan notes:

South Vietnam claimed that the Agreement would adversely affect the friendly relations between Thailand and South Vietnam; that by opening negotiations about the refugees, Thailand under international law recognised the sole jurisdiction of South Vietnam over the refugees and therefore the Agreement was a legal device to violate the spirit, if not the letter, of international law; that the refugees deserved to remain in Thailand and not be repatriated to North Vietnam, and that their repatriation will assist the communist regime in North Vietnam materially, in terms of manpower and skills, and will add to its prestige among Vietnamese.

When steps were taken to actually implement the agreement the RVN threatened to close its embassy in Bangkok, and President Diem summoned the Thai ambassador in Saigon and asked for an explanation of the "arrests" of Vietnamese nationals.
Nonetheless, government leaders did not wish to escalate the conflict. A Thai weekly publication was closed for two weeks after it criticised the RVN's protest against the August agreement. More significantly, Saigon was made the first port of call when the king, accompanied by the prime minister and foreign minister, began a series of overseas visits in December 1959.

Relations became increasingly strained in the early years of the following decade. The leading Thai daily, Siam Rath, reflected this mood when it expressed concern over the growth of communism in Vietnam, but unsympathetically - if percipiently - attributed this to corruption by leading government figures, and the continuing nationalist appeal of DRV President Ho Chi Minh. Less realistically, however, it felt that the large increase in U.S. aid in late 1961 would greatly improve the Vietnamese government's efficiency and capacity to oppose the communists.

Bilateral relations sank to an all-time low in mid-1963, following a major conflict between Buddhists and the Diem government, dramatised before the world when several Buddhist leaders committed self-immolation by fire. On 9 July reports indicated that the Thai cabinet had discussed the problems of Buddhists in RVN "with consternation". The cabinet concluded that no action could be taken as it was the internal affair of another country, but expressed hope that the problems would be quickly solved, and agreed to watch further developments. Eight days later Foreign Minister Thanat called in the Vietnamese ambassador to stress the necessity of an early peaceful settlement.
The same message was later conveyed to Vietnamese officials in several unpublicised diplomatic contacts. The conflict escalated nearly a month later, on 15 August, when Prime Minister Sarit voiced strongly critical remarks on RVN policy towards Buddhists, and in thinly veiled innuendo placed the blame on the sister-in-law of the president, Madame Nhu. In the following week Thai leaders again spoke out sharply against Vietnamese policies, and publicly mooted the possibility of involvement in international efforts by Buddhist countries to influence Vietnam.30

To this point, Thailand had moved towards acting on this issue with some reluctance, not wishing to intervene in the internal affairs of an ally, and fearing that any action might strengthen the communist cause. Caution was, however, swept aside after 22 August when Vietnam called in the Thai ambassador to account for Sarit’s critical comments. A spokesman for the MFA claimed that Thailand had previously considered the matter an internal one and made no attempt to intervene, but as the situation progressively deteriorated, "An internal affair began to have repercussions abroad ..." Noting that the crisis had caused reactions throughout the world, even from leaders of non-Buddhist religions, the statement concluded:31

However the South Vietnamese Government, or, more accurately the persons who have power of control over the Government do not heed these appeals. Their minds are darkened by ambitions for power and methods to attain that power which are distasteful and shocking to civilized nations. It is no more a matter concerned with just religion but it [is] one that involves general humanity...
Thai public opinion was also disturbed by the crisis, and may have exerted some influence on government policy. The press was scathingly critical of the RVN government. In addition the Buddhist Association of Thailand called a number of meetings to discuss the issue, collected funds to aid the victims, and issued statements criticising the policy of the RVN government. One meeting in late August, called specifically on this issue, was attended by 2,000 members from 63 of Thailand's 71 provinces.

After August Vietnam's Buddhist crisis subsided somewhat, and a more cautious Thai policy - advocated throughout by Minister of the Interior, General Praphat - began to prevail. In mid October Thailand announced it would not agree to raising this issue in the General Assembly, or join a proposed UN observer team to investigate it in Vietnam.

The "Buddhist problem" was subsequently largely overcome by the military coup that ousted the Diem regime at the beginning of November 1963; later manifestations of Buddhist disquiet, in the form of a group seeking a neutralist alternative for the RVN, were not supported by Thai leaders, and were strongly criticized in the Thai media. No regrets were expressed at the passing of the Diem government. Foreign Minister Thanat observed that it was "no surprise because the past administrators had not been attentive to public feelings". Deputy Premier Thanom felt the change would benefit the RVN's security as the leaders were young, able men with fine reputations, and were pro-West. The leader - Lt. General Duang Van Minh - was a person whom he had met several times and knew
Such considerations led to the extension of diplomatic recognition for the new government as a matter of routine, and established the basis for closer bilateral relations than had hitherto been enjoyed.

In 1964, following visits by the RVN Defence Ministers in January and July, and a U.S. request in May, Thailand began to extend military and economic aid to the RVN. After January Thailand began training RVN airforce pilots for jet aircraft. In July Thailand announced it would provide RVN with 10,000 pieces of galvanised iron sheets and 100 tons of cement. At the same time the prime minister observed: "Thailand does not want to give military assistance to South Vietnam. It does not want to send Thai soldiers to fight in South Vietnam". This, however, was an early case of Thailand's public policy towards the states of Indochina not according with covert military activity. As subsequently revealed, a team of 10 Royal Thai Air Force pilots and 7 maintenance men were sent to the RVN in July 1964.

In December 1964 Thailand made a major contribution to support of the RVN when it permitted the USAF to use Thai air bases for the bombing of DRV supply routes through Laos. Two months later this was extended to bombing of the DRV, and subsequently to all of Indochina. At the same time Thailand began a sustained diplomatic drive to shore up international support for the RVN, a subject that is discussed separately below.
Bilateral relations between Thailand and the RVN continued to improve in 1965. Two high ranking RVN delegations called at Bangkok. In May Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Tran Van Do, made a one day visit. This coincided with the announcement of a new "get tough" approach to Vietnamese refugees carrying out subversive activities. In August Prime Minister Ky, together with Foreign Minister Do and a large party, visited Bangkok for three days. Following this it was announced that Thailand would negotiate with the RVN on refugees, though no such negotiations appear to have taken place. A senior Thai military official, Lt. General Kris Sivara, visited the RVN during National Day celebrations in October.

Two further aid packages were agreed on in 1965. In July Thailand announced it was extending additional construction materials, 100 tons of rice, and the loan of a 15,000 k.w. generator. In August, during the Ky visit, pledges were made of additional facilities for the training of Vietnamese pilots and an increase in the number of medical units helping in Vietnam. (The prior existence of such units had not previously been acknowledged.) However, at a time when other countries were being called on to commit combat troops to Vietnam, Thailand was reluctant to do so. Military leaders made it clear that in their view the escalation of warfare in the region made it all the more imperative that Thai troops remain in Thailand.

Bilateral relations continued to consolidate in 1966, with several official RVN visits to Bangkok, including the
RVN Minister for Information and Psychological War in January, and the foreign minister in November. Thailand sent its Minister of Communications to Saigon for RVN national day celebrations in October. An increase in Thai military aid was announced in May, including a plan to send a landing ship tank carrying 161 men, a coastal patrol boat with a 23-man crew, and two C-123 military transport planes with a Thai crew. The RVN was also offered an extension of credit for the purchase of 100,000 tons of Thai rice. Thai military leaders, however, continued to rule out sending combat troops until at the end of the year Deputy Prime Minister Praphat conceded this might be possible once a situation was reached where "our reserves are no longer naked, when they have shirts and trousers to wear, and guns to carry with plenty of ammunition".

A marked increase in the Thai military role in the RVN occurred in 1967. In January Thailand announced it was sending a battalion of combat troops (some 2,200 men), and in November a full division (12,000 men) was promised. Why the sudden volte-face? In both cases the decision was explained in terms of the necessity of forward defence for Thailand's own security, and probably for this reason gained full support from the media, and even middle of the road politicians such as Democrat leader, Khuang Aphaiwong. There was no mention at this time that Thailand acted in response to a request from the RVN, and Foreign Minister Thanat later noted that it was directly at the instigation of the U.S. Thailand may have been

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partly influenced by U.S. willingness to underwrite costs, and have feared a reduction of U.S. support if it did not comply. But in addition it was concerned to demonstrate a united front with RVN allies, both to strengthen the U.S. resolve and to influence international opinion more generally.

In February 1967 the RVN moved to bring its diplomatic standing in Bangkok up to ambassadorial level, a matter it had neglected since the fall of the Diem regime. Partly because of initiatives undertaken by the new ambassador, and partly because of deteriorating relations with the DRV (following allegations of DRV assistance to the Thai insurgency) Thailand again reopened negotiations with the RVN on repatriation of the remaining refugees in May. This, however, appeared to have foundered by September, when government sources were reported as saying that most of the estimated 40,000 refugees wanted to return to the DRV. Thailand's influential Deputy Prime Minister, Praphat, visited Saigon in November for the official inauguration of President Thieu.

At the beginning of 1968 General Thanom visited the RVN. The main purpose seems to have been to meet Thai troops there, but while in Saigon Thailand's support for the RVN cause was strongly reiterated. Also, the question of repatriating refugees to the RVN (in this case 300 alleged communists) was again raised, but once more nothing concrete emerged. One aid item was reported in May, namely an emergency grant worth $230,000 to assist victims of the January "Tet offensive".
Thai-RVN relations began a slide in 1969 as a result of sharply deteriorating relations between Thailand and the U.S. Thai attempts to assert its independence of the U.S. led it also to dissociate itself from U.S. policy in the RVN. In August, when Thai anger at American congressional revelations of a "contingency plan" for U.S.-Thai defence cooperation led to a request that the U.S. withdraw some of its troops from Thailand, Foreign Minister Thanat also stated that Thailand wanted to withdraw its forces from the RVN.\textsuperscript{52} While this was qualified by an assurance that Thailand would stay as long as the RVN needed its support and assistance, it would not have been welcomed by a RVN government then witnessing the first phases of an American withdrawal. In December the RVN became embroiled in a conflict between Thailand and the U.S., when the latter pressured it not to go ahead with a rice purchase from Thailand. While the main Thai hostility was directed towards the U.S., a government house spokesman declared that the RVN's agreement to purchase was legally binding and indicated that Thailand intended to hold it to this.\textsuperscript{53} In the new year the U.S. withdrew its opposition and the sale went ahead.

In January 1970 Thailand sought to negotiate on the withdrawal of troops stationed in the RVN with the embassy in Bangkok. The RVN requested Thailand to withhold any decision on withdrawal until a more suitable time, and Thailand agreed to do so.\textsuperscript{54} It was in fact brought up again in July, after several disputes between Thailand and the RVN. These arose out of different views on joint
action that might be taken in Indochina, following the ouster of Prince Sihanouk in Cambodia and an escalation of communist activities in Laos, and a controversial statement highly critical of Thailand by a senior Vietnamese military leader.

In response to events in Cambodia and Laos, RVN President Thieu suggested the formation of a formal alliance between the RVN, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, to battle communism in Southeast Asia. This call, reiterated by Vice-President Ky on 21 May, drew a cautious Thai response. Foreign Minister Thanat observed that it was of such magnitude that it could only be adopted and carried out after much deliberation among participating nations. The RVN then turned more specifically to the task of persuading Thailand to follow its own example and station some of its troops in Cambodia. Several Thai military leaders were willing to assist along these lines, but Prime Minister Thanom found opposition from the RVN when he visited Saigon in late June and sought agreement to transfer some of the Vietnam-based Thai troops to Cambodia. In early July Vice-President Ky reportedly advised Thanat that RVN troops were taking full responsibility for the north and northeastern regions of Cambodia, and suggested Thai troops take responsibility for the west side of this country. Thanat then invited Ky to Bangkok to discuss this proposal with the prime minister.

Discussions in Bangkok between Ky, the RVN armed forces Supreme Commander, and Thai leaders in mid July again failed to result in any agreed position. Thanat
expressed the view that communist actions in Cambodia might spark the creation of an anti-communist alliance, but pointedly added that self help would be the order of the day in the future defence of the region.\textsuperscript{58} Prime Minister Thanom did briefly express support for the idea, only to see President Thieu change track and reject the proposal, and the Thai foreign ministry eventually deny that Thailand had ever supported any such alliance.\textsuperscript{59}

Thailand's unwillingness to enter into any specific agreements at this time may in part have been out of deference to the call of the Jakarta Conference, which it participated in mid-May, for the withdrawal of all troops from Cambodia. Perhaps a more critical factor, however, was Thai reluctance to take any major initiatives without an assurance of financial backing from the U.S.\textsuperscript{60}

Relations between Thailand and the RVN reached a new low just after the Ky visit when the commander of RVN forces in Cambodia, Lt. General Do Cao Tri, charged that Thailand was shirking its responsibility to help defend Cambodia because the U.S. would not pay them enough money. Additionally, he suggested, the Thai military might fear they would turn in a poor performance; Thai troops in Vietnam had done very little to help defend the country.\textsuperscript{61} Thailand's Deputy Foreign Minister, General Sanga Kittikachorn (brother of the prime minister) quickly retorted that his country's position vis-a-vis Cambodia was not the same as that of the RVN. The latter had to enter Cambodia to destroy Viet Cong sanctuaries, whereas Thailand faced no direct threat from Cambodia, and
remained uncertain as to whether it should join an Indochina alliance that would take military and political steps to confront defence problems, or follow the Jakarta conference resolutions which called for political and diplomatic measures. Deputy Prime Minister Praphat was less diplomatic. General Tri, he alleged, "is jealous and has a dirty tongue"; his words were possibly a bait to gain increased Thai involvement.

The dispute was subsequently smoothed over with a qualified apology from General Tri, but not before Thailand had threatened to withdraw all its 12,000 troops from the RVN. At the end of August the prime minister publicly announced Thailand's intention to do this. Negotiations were not concluded until November, and in the course of these it became clear that the action was being taken in spite of the RVN's opposition. While other factors contributed to this decision - particularly difficulties in Thai-U.S. relations - the Tri incident decisively affected the timing of its announcement.

A final indication of the deterioration in Thai-RVN relations was the re-opening of negotiations with a DRV delegation on the repatriation of refugees. These ultimately proved abortive, though as noted below they initially seemed to hold promise of a breakthrough.

Relations between Thailand and the RVN underwent a marginal improvement after these difficulties. The RVN's extension of the war against the DRV into Laotian sanctuaries in February gained the warm endorsement of Thai leaders. However, Thailand was not prepared to give more than verbal support. When asked if the
withdrawal of troops from the RVN might be slowed down because of this escalation, the prime minister replied that it might even be accelerated as expansion of the Indochina conflict increased the threat to Thailand.66

In mid March the RVN prime minister came on a three day visit to discuss withdrawals and other bilateral problems. Four specific matters came out of these meetings. Thailand informed the RVN that it would begin withdrawing troops in October and complete the operation in three months. The RVN initially requested a delay, but withdrew this when Thai officials explained the troops were needed in Thailand. Secondly, the two sides agreed to cooperate in protecting traditional rice markets from the invasion by non-rice consuming countries. This was presumably to strengthen Thailand's case against the U.S. over access to the RVN market, but would also be in the RVN's interest if it regained its former status as a rice exporter. Thirdly, it was agreed to work towards a joint commercial fisheries venture and coastal patrols. This followed repeated intrusions into RVN waters by Thai fishermen, and strong protests by members of the RVN parliament. Finally, agreement was reached on the need to establish a committee to resolve the problem of Vietnamese refugees who were pro-RVN. The RVN prime minister urged the Thai government to permit their stay for better supervision and security protection.67 The first two of these issues was quickly resolved in the next few months, but the remaining two continued to be contentious up to the fall of the RVN government in April 1975.
The refugees issue again came to the fore some six weeks after the Bangkok meeting. Deputy Prime Minister Praphat rejected a RVN request that Vietnamese refugees be allowed to stay in Thailand, saying they could return either to the RVN or the DRV.68 The following day a Ministry of the Interior official claimed that moves were underway to resume discussion of repatriation with the DRV.69 In July a further policy twist occurred, and plans were announced to deport all refugees who had committed offences to the RVN, as well as arranging the departure of others wanting to go there voluntarily.

In June 1972 refugee policy changed yet again, apparently along lines desired by the RVN. According to General Praphat, the following steps would be taken: citizenship would be given to law-abiding citizens wanting to stay; steps would be taken to win over those whose reverence for Ho Chi Minh was not considered detrimental to Thai interests; and communists would be separated from the rest, then either confined under close surveillance or expelled.70 There is, however, no evidence of serious attempts to implement this policy.

After the cease-fire in Vietnam in January 1973 Thailand once again began overtures to the DRV on refugee issues, as part of a more general move towards detente. Relations with the RVN cooled, and in June a major conflict broke out when the RVN declared an extension of its exclusive fishing zone by 50 miles beyond the 12 mile territorial waters limit. In the first week eight Thai trawlers were seized, together with 52 crew members, and these numbers quickly escalated. In one incident a RVN
gunboat opened fire, damaging the trawler seriously and killing its captain. Thailand claimed it had not been officially informed about the extension of the fishing zone, and challenged the right of the RVN to make such a proclamation unilaterally. Some reports even suggested the government was considering sending a gun-boat to protect its trawlers.71 A spokesman for the RVN embassy, in response, said the Thai government was informed of the new zone on 5 April.72 While refusing to make any concession on the principle involved, the RVN did move quickly to release the crew and trawlers, though fines were imposed in most cases.

In late April 1974 it was decided to lodge a protest against Vietnam's extension of its fishing zone, but not to take 'strong action'.73 When submitted on 3 May, the protest stated that Thailand recognised only a 12-mile limit, requested the RVN to refrain from taking action against Thai trawlers, and noted that Thailand was prepared to negotiate on the question of territorial limits.74 The RVN continued to assert its right to act as it had, and on 6 May gained a surprising ally, the pro-government Bangkok Post: an editorial noted that while Thailand might not agree with the RVN actions, these were in accordance with international law. This admonishment perhaps had a salutary effect, since anti-RVN broadsides soon abated. A week later Thailand and the RVN announced that talks would be held on the fishing dispute, and both made separate conciliatory statements expressing a desire for peaceful cooperation. In late June a Thai party, led
by the Foreign Affairs Under-Secretary, visited Saigon and held three days of unproductive negotiations. The RVN expressed "interest" in proposals Thailand put forward for solving the dispute, but made no effort to take up the offer of further talks in Bangkok. Relations stalled on this unresolved note until the fall of the RVN in April 1975.

**Diplomatic Support for the RVN**

Apart from the issues touched on so far, Thailand also played a major role in supporting the RVN at the diplomatic level. Foreign Minister Thanat, in particular, defended the RVN cause before an international audience, and sought to neutralise U.S. critics opposed to the administration policy of support for the RVN. For reasons that included both cool relations with the Diem regime, and confidence in the U.S. commitment to the RVN, such efforts did not get underway until the end of 1964. As late as July 1964, in an article published in *Foreign Affairs*, Foreign Minister Thanat touched on the RVN only briefly, noting that the DRV had failed to make headway in its efforts at conquest because of U.S. assistance. Nonetheless by late 1964 Thailand had apparently concluded that continuing internal instability in the RVN, and some shortcomings in U.S. assistance to the RVN, necessitated a more activist stance.

In December 1964, Thanat made the first of many attempts to resolve the dispute through internationalising it. Speaking to the New York Overseas Press Club, he urged the creation of a international force to fight
communism in Vietnam. Possibly foreseeing some of the problems which the single-handed U.S. approach later led to— including problems of domestic and international image—he observed that the U.S. had the necessary power, but it would be better for the U.S. and Southeast Asia if as many nations as possible were charged with the responsibility. SEATO, he implied, was too restrictive for such a purpose, hence it might be better to try a new approach.\textsuperscript{75} The U.S., however, was not at this stage willing to contemplate such an escalation, and the initiative seems to have been opposed by other Thai leaders.\textsuperscript{76}

The escalation of the Vietnam war in 1965, first with the regular bombing of the DRV from February, followed by the introduction of U.S. combat troops who gradually took over much of the fighting from the RVN military, gained the enthusiastic support of Thai leaders. Visiting Washington in May, Thanat focused almost exclusively on Vietnam in speeches to the SEATO ministerial meeting, and in meetings with the press. This conflict, he told the SEATO meeting, was crucial not only for Southeast Asia but also the entire free world. He singled out for criticism "people ... known as 'doves' who claim to be the apostles of peace. In fact, by bowing to the aggressors and allowing the latter to fortify themselves with the flesh and blood of their victims, they are deserting and even betraying the cause of peace".\textsuperscript{77} At a Meet the Press session on NBC Thanat asserted that "what the United States has been doing in Viet-Nam will go down in history as a courageous decision and a measure which will save not
only South Viet-Nam but the whole of South-East Asia from
Communist domination". The war could, he stressed, be
won, and there was already evidence that "things are
getting better". Speaking to the National Press Club he
dismissed arguments which saw events in Vietnam as a civil
war or a war of national liberation: "The truth ... is a
pure and simple attempt by the Communist north to extend
their regime of Communist colonialism to the south". Returning to the UN for the General Assembly in October,
Thanat again returned to these themes, and predicted that
as a result of Free World activities the Viet Cong might
be defeated within two years.

Similar activities were carried out in 1966. In
addition, though, Thai efforts to strengthen the regional
unity of non-communist nations were also linked with
diplomatic support for the RVN, and went together with the
first Thai proposals towards finding a political
settlement to the conflict.

In early 1966, as previously mentioned, Thailand
supported a Korean proposal to establish the nine-member
ASPAC. It was largely events in Vietnam that Thailand had
in mind in supporting this initiative, and the first joint
communique of ASPAC duly expressed strong support for the
fight against "external aggression and subversion". In
August the ASA held its first foreign minister's meeting
for three years, following sustained efforts by Thanat to
mediate between Malaysia and the Philippines. In his
opening statement, Thanat suggested that efforts should
now be made to find an Asian solution to the Vietnam
conflict, "through negotiating and pacific settlement ... After due preparations have been completed a Peace for Asia Committee composed of interested nations of the area might attempt to hold a conference, this time not in Geneva, but somewhere in Asia, where all the principals in the war in Viet-Nam might be invited to participate to thrash out the existing difficulties with a view to ending the present conflict". This call was backed by ASA, and subsequently supported by most non-communist Asian countries and the U.S. Communist countries, however, unanimously opposed it, and the initiative thus lapsed. In responding to Chinese criticisms Thanat clearly revealed the nature of the negotiations envisaged: "We want to give certain nations involved in the war in Vietnam an honourable way out ... if the call comes from fellow Asian nations it would be a much more honourable way for them to seek peace". It remains unclear, however, whether Thanat actually believed communist countries were on the verge of defeat, or whether the initiative was more a tactical move to project an image of reasonableness and commitment to a peaceful, negotiated settlement.

Thailand then dropped all pretences of playing a mediating role, and gave all-out support to those supporting the RVN. In October 1966 a summit meeting was held in Manila bringing together the heads of seven Asian-Pacific nations militarily involved in the RVN (including the RVN itself). Also billed as an "Asian" initiative (U.S. participation notwithstanding), it was said to have been called by the Philippines after consultations with
Korea, Thailand and the RVN. There are reports that Thailand's prime minister had first put the idea forward, though this has also been claimed by Korea and the Philippines. Whatever the case, it is clear that Thanat's earlier initiative through ASA started the idea of an Asian-led search for a Vietnamese settlement. The meeting expressed its determination to continue with military and all other efforts as long as necessary to ensure that the people of the RVN "shall not be conquered by aggressive force and shall enjoy the inherent right to choose their own way of life and their own form of government". The "sole demand" to the leaders of the DRV was that "they abandon their aggression". Thailand also initiated the proposal, adopted by the meeting, that the allies continue to hold regular conferences at ambassadorial or foreign minister level. Thereafter foreign ministers met annually, usually immediately after SEATO meetings, until the signing of the Vietnam cease-fire agreement in 1973.

These developments indicate a degree of Thai initiative independent of the U.S. They were undoubtedly undertaken as a conscious attempt to differentiate Thai policy from that of the U.S., and were probably to some extent a reflection of Thai anxiety over the actions of the "doves" in America. Yet the substance of Thai policy remained overwhelmingly wedded to that of America. Thailand applauded the increase in U.S. troops - taking the total from around 150,000 at the beginning of 1966 to 370,000 twelve months later - together with the escalation
of the bombing to include Hanoi and Haiphong in June and the demilitarised zone in October. Encouraged by this display of American resolve, the foreign minister predicted in January that the war would not last much longer,\textsuperscript{87} and in June that it would end in eighteen months to two years.\textsuperscript{88} Thai leaders probably concurred with a view expressed by the \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review}: "By the end of 1966, many observers felt that it was only a question of time before North Vietnam was brought reluctantly to the conference table".\textsuperscript{89} French suggestions for a solution to the Vietnam conflict through the neutralisation of Southeast Asia, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region, were rejected out of hand.\textsuperscript{90}

In January 1967 Foreign Minister Thanat observed that while many military gains had been realised in Vietnam, a very important time had been reached on the propaganda front, because "there are some persons, and some groups of persons, who try not to understand the issue, and their efforts help and are in the interests of the enemy - the Communists - though those persons or groups are not Communists".\textsuperscript{91} For this reason the emphasis of Thanat's diplomacy changed slightly at this time, shifting to a more direct attempt to strengthen American's commitment to the RVN and to discredit U.S. dissidents. He did this in a number of forceful public performances during visits to the U.S. in April and October, through providing frequent interviews for foreign journalists throughout the year,\textsuperscript{92} and through directly addressing U.S. interests in Thailand.

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By late 1967 the focus of international debate began to shift ground as Thailand’s own motives for its alliance with the U.S. came increasingly under question. Thanat spent considerable time responding to allegations that Thailand was partly responsible for involving the U.S. in Vietnam, and welcomed foreign bases in its country for the direct benefits which it gained including, potentially, U.S. support in countering the local communist insurgency. "How", Thanat asked rhetorically, "can a great power be induced by smaller nations, such as Thailand, to get involved anywhere or in any place, against its will?" Thailand was actually now involved in Vietnam at the suggestion of the United States, though the decision to become involved was based on an assessment that it was in its own interest to be involved. "That is why I suggest that it is idle talk to say either that Thailand has dragged the United States into Vietnam or vice versa. It is rather a manifestation of our realization of our national interests". Thai leaders also repeatedly stressed (as they had done earlier) that U.S. troops in Thailand were there only for the purpose of the war in Vietnam, and except for a small number involved in training and a minor operation in which U.S. pilots had ferried Thai troops into combat by helicopter for a few months at the end of the 1966, had no part at all in the counter-insurgency war.

Apart from attempting to strengthen U.S. policy by disarming the critics in this way, Thailand sought the same end by declaring strongly that the unilateral
withdrawal of the U.S. from Vietnam, or a U.S. deal with the DRV, would be opposed by all nations in the region and compromise the U.S. stature as a great power. When eventually confronted with a U.S. commitment to withdraw from Vietnam, Thai leaders emphasised that the withdrawal should provide opportunities for the RVN to gradually take over. The experience in South Korea (which still had a residual U.S. force of tens of thousands) was, Thanat suggested, an indication of the type of time-frame that might be envisaged. The war was, he reiterated, being won on the battle field and U.S. concessions (such as the limitations on bombing) only encouraged the DRV to believe it might be able to achieve politically that which it had failed to achieve militarily.

The international significance of Vietnam was heightened in May 1970 when the U.S.-RVN invasion of Cambodia broadened the Indochina war. Thailand’s initial response was to express strong support for this action. Shortly after, however, Thanat attended the Jakarta meeting on Cambodia, and endorsed a very moderate statement, calling for the withdrawal of all troops and efforts to solve Cambodia’s problems by diplomatic means. The rebuff which the eleven-nation conference received from the USSR, together with ongoing Thai-U.S. difficulties, appear to have convinced Thanat that solutions to problems in Indochina should be sought through the active involvement of several great powers, including Britain, France and China. This however foundered when China delayed in responding to Thai overtures.
The last year in office of long-running Foreign Minister Thanat saw no deviation from existing policy. Thailand sought, by the usual means, to support the Vietnam policy of the U.S., in spite of important conflicts with the U.S. on other bilateral issues. It continued to espouse the cause of regionalism in world affairs, but no more attempts were made to advocate a regional contribution towards an Indochina settlement. Thanat specifically ruled out the usefulness of Asian countries discussing this, noting that the Jakarta meeting on Cambodia was a complete failure.

The departure of Thanat led to a much reduced Thai diplomatic role. The U.S. build-up in Thailand in 1972 was the main focus of Thai actions towards the RVN and Indochina generally, and took place without a significant attempt to explain such actions before a world audience. The proclamation of a cease-fire in Vietnam on 24 January 1973 was cautiously welcomed by Thailand. An official government statement stressed that all countries involved in hostilities should take part in deliberations towards a permanent settlement, and promised to devise future policy on this issue in close consultation with ASEAN. Diplomatic efforts up till the communist victory in the RVN in April 1975 then focused on attempts, mainly through ASEAN, to establish a modus vivendi with the DRV, an issue that is discussed in the following section. The U.S. presence continued to be desired as a military back-up to ensure the cease-fire was effective, but little attention was given to this in Thai diplomatic moves.
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

Thai-DRV relations in the late 1950s centred on the refugee issue. In August 1958 Thailand decided to begin negotiations with the DRV through the auspices of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). The following March an ICRC representative came to Thailand and visited the refugees. He confirmed that an overwhelming majority wished to be repatriated to the DRV; some wanted to stay in Thailand, but none wanted to go to the RVN. After visiting Hanoi, the ICRC representative arranged for a meeting between the Red Cross societies of Thailand and Vietnam in Rangoon in June 1959. On 14 August an agreement was signed, providing that the Thai Red Cross arrange repatriation with the assistance of two DRV Red Cross advisers, and that costs be jointly borne by the two countries.98

In the aftermath of these successful negotiations, Thai-DRV relations in late 1959 and early 1960 were cordial if not warm. In July 1960 DRV Premier, Pham Van Dong, thanked Thailand for its constant care of Vietnamese residents while addressing the opening session of the second National Assembly.99 By the end of the year, however, the two sides were engaging in mutual recriminations over their respective activities in Laos. From the Thai perspective DRV support for the Pathet Lao, estimated to include 10,000 militia by the time of the 1962 Geneva Agreement, was but a preliminary to a Vietnamese drive into Thailand. DRV activities in Cambodia were also a matter of concern, particularly in
view of hostile relations between Sihanouk and Thailand, and Sihanouk's pro-communist neutrality. As early as January 1962 Thai spokesmen claimed the DRV was using Cambodia as a passage-way to the RVN. As the conflict in the RVN escalated the DRV was repeatedly criticised for wanting to "conquer" the RVN, and it was linked with Chinese and general communist ambitions for world conquest. Differences between the two countries grew in 1964 when Thailand extended economic and military aid to the RVN, and strongly backed U.S. bombing of the DRV following the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Nonetheless there was at least some practical cooperation between the two sides over repatriating Vietnamese refugees until the end of 1964, by which time around half the then 70,000 refugees had departed, and DRV Red Cross representatives remained in Bangkok throughout this period.

A major breach between Thailand and the DRV occurred in 1965, and a state of unremitting hostility was maintained until late 1968. The main factor was of course Thai willingness to allow the USAF use of its air bases for the bombing of the DRV, and DRV sanctuaries in Laos, from December 1964. This eventually brought a sharp rebuke from the DRV in late April. At the same time Foreign Minister Thanat began a search for an international solution to the Vietnam problem that would, in effect, guarantee the legitimacy of the RVN. In July 1965 Thailand advised DRV Red Cross representatives to leave Bangkok, after the DRV had cited inadequate safety following U.S. bombing as the reason for an indefinite
postponement of repatriation.101 The following month Thailand accused the DRV of waging direct aggression on the RVN through the 325th division of its regular army headquartered in Cambodia.102

The beginning of armed communist insurgency in Thailand in 1965 was initially linked with Chinese manipulation, but in July 1966 Thai leaders alleged that the DRV had become actively involved. On 10 July a press report, based on information provided by a DRV defector in Laos, referred to the existence of a special battalion composed of Vietnamese repatriated from Thailand and Black Thai tribesmen from Tonkin formed to commit aggression against Laos and Thailand.103 A few days later Deputy Prime Minister Praphat asserted that DRV soldiers had slipped into Thai territory in the northeast, and two had been killed.104 In December Thai leaders revealed the existence of a school for insurgency at Hoa Binh (30 miles from Hanoi), specifically for training members of the CPT. "This", the prime minister alleged, "is further evidence of North Vietnam's plan to destroy Thailand".105

Throughout 1967 there were several further references to direct DRV involvement in insurgency, particularly after the beginning of the communist-led hill tribes revolt late in the year. At a press conference in Washington on 10 May 1968 the prime minister lay almost the entire blame for the insurgency on the DRV. There were, he claimed, some 2,000 insurgents in the northeast, and 1,000 in the north, composed of North Vietnamese, their agents in the Pathet Lao, and former refugees. Elaborating further he observed that there were some
Chinese from the mainland, but most insurgents were from the DRV.\textsuperscript{106} While the statement ignored a substantial local participation in the insurgency, this does not detract from its significance in identifying the DRV rather than China as the main source of support for insurgency.

By late 1968 the government retreated slightly from its stance of total opposition to the DRV. In November, having failed in several attempts to repatriate Vietnamese refugees to the RVN, Thailand approached the ICRC to act once again as an intermediary with the DRV.\textsuperscript{107} The ICRC contacted the DRV in 1969, but it was not until early 1970 that the DRV agreed to resume negotiations. An apparent improvement in the atmosphere at this time may also have been linked to reports that the DRV had handed over most of its responsibility for assisting the Thai insurgency to China,\textsuperscript{108} though Thai officials have never acknowledged that such an event occurred.

Thai-DRV talks in Bangkok began in October 1970, and had broader implications than the immediate issue being discussed. Delegation members were "allowed considerable freedom of movement, the opportunity to see the country and to hear first hand what a Bangkok official once described as his country's 'desire for peace'."\textsuperscript{109} Thailand's hopes for improved relations appear to have been reciprocated: "The delegation ... made encouraging noises about the need for 'mutual understanding' and 'friendly relations between the two people's of Vietnam and Thailand'".\textsuperscript{110} A promising dialogue was, however, cut
short when the U.S. resumed the bombing of the DRV - from Thai bases - in late November. The head of the delegation returned immediately to Hanoi for "consultations" and remaining delegates left early in 1971. An apparent Thai effort to resume discussions a few months later appears to have made no headway. In September, in response to intensified U.S. bombing in Laos, Hanoi made its strongest criticism ever of "American use of Thailand as a springboard for operations in the neighbouring country", and threatened "punishment" if there were no change of policy.111

Relations with the DRV again came to the fore after the proclamation of a cease-fire in Vietnam in January 1973. A special ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting was convened to discuss the cease-fire on 14-15 February. Before departing for this Deputy Foreign Minister Chatichai, in a conciliatory gesture towards the DRV, revealed that Thailand would urge the holding of a conference of ten Southeast Asian countries (ASEAN plus the Indochina countries and Burma) to work out a program for permanent peace in the region. A similar scheme was also being advocated by the Philippines, and the meeting agreed to work towards such a conference (an "Asian forum"), and the expansion of ASEAN to include all countries in Southeast Asia. In addition the foreign ministers:112

took the view that the neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia should participate in whatever way possible towards the rehabilitation and reconstruction throughout Vietnam and the rest of Indochina.
Following this Thailand, as host of the regular ASEAN Foreign Ministers meeting in mid-April, invited non-members in Southeast Asia to attend as observers. In the event only Laos and Cambodia accepted, and the DRV issued a strongly worded rejection. The meeting went on to reiterate the proposal for an Asian forum, but dropped reference to a possible widening of ASEAN. As the prospects of a genuine cease-fire steadily receded, however, Thailand realised the futility of attempting to involve ASEAN in the problem, and the initiative lapsed.

Apart from efforts through ASEAN, Thailand also began its own dialogue with the DRV, focused largely on the refugee issue. From early February the Thai ambassador in Laos had a number of meetings with his DRV counterpart, and these were joined by Deputy Foreign Minister Chatichai in late March.\textsuperscript{113} Despite reports of a constructive atmosphere no breakthroughs were made, though an important precedent had been set for pursuing dialogue between missions in Laos. Similarly, a rather strange attempt in August-September to negotiate on refugees with the DRV mission in Paris, by a businessman close to Deputy Prime Minister Praphat, through the good offices of Pridi, also ended in failure.\textsuperscript{114}

After a promising start in 1973, the year closed with Thailand making strong criticisms of DRV actions in Cambodia. In August the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared:\textsuperscript{115}

All difficulties in Khmer (Cambodia) have stemmed from the North Vietnamese threat. North Vietnam has caused unrest by sending her forces into Khmer and supporting the Khmer Rouge, which is evidently an interference with the internal affairs of Khmer.
On 25 October Thailand joined six other Asian and Pacific countries in asking the UN to ensure that Cambodians were allowed to solve their own problems.

Under the Sanya government a new attempt to establish relations with the DRV was made. In April 1974 the prime minister announced that Thanat (then a foreign affairs Adviser) had been charged with contacting the DRV. Thanat sought French help, and subsequently held an inconclusive meeting in Paris with the DRV ambassador to France. In mid-May Foreign Minister Charununphan observed that the government was "keeping the doors wide open" for rapprochement with the DRV, and was "using several channels to establish a dialogue". Thailand also indicated willingness to reach a "deal" with the DRV, whereby it would negotiate a total withdrawal of U.S. forces and assist in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the DRV in return for recognition of Laos and Cambodia as a "neutral belt". Whether or not Thailand expected the DRV to be interested in a proposal requiring it to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia is not clear, but the offer to negotiate a total U.S. withdrawal did serve to highlight apparent Thai flexibility. There was, however, no indication of the DRV seeking to pursue the issue.

Initiatives were not confined to the Thai side. The DRV hosted a visit by a prominent Thai journalist Pansak Vinyarat (editor of the liberal-left wing political weekly Jaturat) in October 1974, and during this expressed a willingness to hold negotiations with Thailand before the establishment of diplomatic relations. (Pansak was, in
fact, one of the "channels" being used by the Thai government, and the only effective one.) In another development the Vietnamese ambassador in Laos, for the first time ever, was present when the Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs arrived and departed on an official visit to Vientiane, and also attended an official function at the Thai embassy.\textsuperscript{120}

Despite conciliatory gestures on both sides, a fundamental conflict of interest remained. This was reiterated in an official letter sent by the DRV foreign minister to his Thai counterpart on 27 November: "The only obstacle" to the normalisation of relations was, he observed, Thailand's "pursuance of a policy aimed at furthering the U.S. imperialists designs of aggression and intervention in Indochina".\textsuperscript{121} The DRV required nothing less than the expulsion of all U.S. troops. The Thai government, though moving towards a reduction of the U.S. presence, was at best ready to contemplate such a step only in exchange for DRV willingness to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia.

\textit{POST-APRIL 1975 DEVELOPMENTS}

April 1975 ushered in a new era in Thai-Vietnamese relations. At the beginning of the month, before the fall of Saigon, the DRV sent a telegram to Bangkok inviting representatives from Thailand for talks in Hanoi. This was treated cautiously by foreign ministry officials, who decided they would be in a better bargaining position if relations with China were established first.\textsuperscript{122} With the fall of Saigon at the end of the month Thailand extended
automatic recognition to the new Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), and later confirmed this through ASEAN.

Two events quickly occurred which greatly complicated the process of normalising relations. Just prior to the fall of Saigon many RVN citizens fled to Thailand by plane and ship. The most valuable of the planes were taken by the U.S. and quickly transferred out of the country; Thailand impounded those remaining subject to proof of ownership being established by one of the rival claimants, the U.S. or the PRG. The PRG and DRV were strongly critical of Thailand for allowing the U.S. to take possession of some of these aircraft, and for not immediately returning those remaining. The "Mayaguez incident" in mid May also attracted critical comment, though subsequent strong Thai protests to the U.S. may actually have improved the prospects for Thai-Vietnam relations.

In the last week of May, in a surprising move, the PRG followed by the DRV sent delegations to Bangkok. The significance of these visits was highlighted by the fact that for PRG leaders this was their first foreign trip. Talks were marred by anti-Vietnamese riots in the northeast, clearly staged by right-wing military elements to sabotage the visit. Subsequent statements on the talks were extremely vague, but make it clear that they stalled on the issue of planes' ownership. Agreement was reached on holding further negotiations, and later an official invitation was extended for the Thai foreign minister to visit Hanoi in July.124
After this relations quickly deteriorated, and no attempt was made to proceed with the July visit. The main reason was a number of serious border incidents on the Thai-Lao border. These prompted the DRV and PRG to resume strident criticisms of Thailand's failure to return the former RVN planes and ships, and Thai-U.S. military relations.125 Press reports of a new Thai-U.S. electronic intelligence station being built in the north of Thailand, and joint Thai-U.S. military exercises, provided convenient targets. A PRG naval attack on Thai fishing vessels (apparently in PRG territorial waters), created further tensions.126

One other important factor straining relations between Thailand and all the Indochina countries was a new outflow of refugees. Thailand viewed this development with some concern, fearing that it might be faced with another long-term refugee problem such as that created by the earlier Vietnamese, and that refugees might have been infiltrated by fifth columnists. The Indochina countries in turn feared the refugees might be used by Thailand for subversion against them. Prime Minister Kukrit declared a firm policy of allowing temporary asylum only during a time of critical danger. Refugees were, he warned, "a major problem for which we must make appropriate arrangements from the start to prevent it from getting out of control".127 In June the cabinet approved a new set of guidelines on refugee policy. The first priority noted was to remove refugees from the country as quickly as possible, with the foreign ministry given the task of contacting other countries to arrange resettlement or
repatriation. Until this occurred refugees would be held in strictly controlled centres, and arrivals after 4 August would by treated as illegal migrants rather than refugees - intended to deter refugees by making them potentially subject to Thai legal action, and decreasing the likelihood of international assistance. In August Thailand reached agreement with three international relief organisations - the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ICRC, and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration - gaining their assistance in financing and running refugee centres, and facilitating resettlement in third countries. At this time the new refugees included 1,500 Vietnamese, 8,000 Cambodians, 2,500 lowland Lao and 29,000 hill tribesmen (mostly Hmong) from Laos, and numbers increased rapidly in subsequent months.

Late in 1975 there were some signs of conciliation. In October the DRV hosted a visit by a Thai medical team, during which an official declared that his country wanted friendly relations with Thailand, "and the peoples of the two countries will make these relations possible". The following month a Thai parliamentary delegation went to Hanoi carrying a note from the prime minister emphasising Thailand's sincere intention to have good relations with the DRV. At the same time, however, the two sides traded insults. The DRV and PRG claimed that Thailand was cooking up "sensational stories" about DRV assistance to Thai insurgents and Lao infiltrations, while training commandos for clandestine activities against Laos. Right wing Thai leaders claimed that Vietnam had plans to
take over the 16 northeastern provinces,\textsuperscript{133} and instigated rioting against Vietnamese refugees. In mid-November a minor skirmish on the Mekong River between Thai and Laotian troops caused Thailand to close the border, and sent Thai-IndoChinese relations plummeting to a new low. This was further exacerbated by moves by former Foreign Minister Thanat, and some military leaders, to retain the U.S. presence as a negotiating point with the DRV.

Tense relations continued into the opening months of 1976. Early in February a joint communiqué issued after a meeting of DRV-Lao leaders included a commitment to supporting "independence" movements in Southeast Asia,\textsuperscript{134} and the DRV was also outspoken in its condemnation of the first ASEAN summit held at the end of February. Right wing Thai leaders, for their part, alleged in mid-February that a 122-man Thai-Vietnamese sapper unit had infiltrated Bangkok.\textsuperscript{135} In March criticisms of Vietnam's military participation in Laos followed, focused on 30,000 DRV troops in the country, many in close vicinity to the Thai border. A total of 1,040 DRV and Lao infiltrators were said to have slipped into the northeast. Foreign Minister Chatichai declared that Thailand would not negotiate on re-opening the Lao border until these soldiers were repatriated.\textsuperscript{136}

The new Seni government, elected in April, declared its primary foreign policy objective as the normalisation of diplomatic relations with Indochina, and provided an opportunity to look at Thai-Vietnam relations anew. The DRV was initially critical of the Seni victory, particularly as the government immediately announced it
would reconsider the decision to expel remaining U.S. forces in Thailand. However, confirmation of the U.S. withdrawal at the beginning of June removed a major obstacle to further contacts. By early July, with the U.S. exit almost complete, and Vietnamese reunification formally concluded on 2 July, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) was ready to respond to Thai overtures. On 5 July Vietnam unveiled four principles to be used as the basis of its relations with ASEAN countries: mutual respect for each others independence and sovereignty; non-interference in each others internal affairs; economic and cultural cooperation; and cooperation in building prosperity according to each country's specific conditions. The first three principle had been advanced previously, but the fourth was new, and somewhat conciliatory as it modified an earlier opposition to ASEAN by indirectly recognising it as an economic organisation. At the same time a letter was forwarded to Thailand offering to resume negotiations on the basis of these four principles. Later in the month SRV Deputy Foreign Minister, Phan Hien, stopped in transit at Bangkok airport, and in a brief meeting with Foreign Minister Bhichai expressed optimism about future bilateral relations, and gave specific assurances that Vietnam would not export arms or revolution.

However, not all Vietnamese actions at this time were conciliatory. The letter agreeing to further negotiations stated that some progress had been made the previous year, but blamed the suspension of talks on "the unscrupulous
attitude of the Thai side". Phan Hien's assurances on an end to aid for insurgency were counter-balanced by SRV media expressions of support for revolutionary movements throughout the world. Such ambiguities were seized on by those opposed to rapprochement with the SRV - particularly members of the military, but including even cabinet colleagues from Bichai's Democrat Party - who launched a concerted campaign to undermine this. Anti-Vietnamese riots were again instigated in the northeast, and a week before negotiations a major police crackdown on illegal Vietnamese refugees in Bangkok began, allegedly because of intelligence reports that a number of refugee "saboteurs" had sneaked into the city to create political unrest. Predictably, such incidents led to strong protests from Hanoi.

In spite of these difficulties, negotiations in Hanoi were held as scheduled from 3-6 August. The atmosphere immediately beforehand was improved by the release of most Thai fishermen held in Vietnamese jails, and successful Thai-Lao talks on normalising relations. A breakthrough did occur with the two sides agreeing to establish diplomatic relations on the basis of Vietnam's four principles. No agreement was reached on the return of planes and ships taken to Thailand immediately after the fall of Saigon, except that the two sides would continue to discuss the issue. Similarly, only a limited consensus was reached on the refugee question. Thailand assured Vietnam that refugees could continue to earn their livelihood and be accorded proper and just treatment in conformity with Thai law; in return Vietnam agreed to
continued discussion on the refugees, "including the modalities of repatriation". Thailand promised to contribute to "healing the war wounds in Vietnam" in such forms as aid and economic cooperation, and both sides agreed to develop economic, commercial and cultural relations, but all details were left for future discussion.141

Little progress was made towards implementing this agreement in the months up to 6 October. Further improvement of relations was inhibited by the sinking of two Thai fishing boats by a Vietnamese patrol boat in mid-August, and continuing incidents involving Vietnamese refugees in Thailand.

CONCLUSION

The main focus of Thai-Vietnamese relations in the period under review was on ways to support the RVN maintain itself as an independent state in the 1950s through to the late 1960s, and how to adjust to reduced U.S. support for the RVN from this period until the fall of the RVN in April 1975. Put another way, the concern was how to stop the DRV taking over the RVN (and expanding its influence in Cambodia and Laos), then how to reach an accommodation with the DRV that preserved Thai interests once the DRV began to gain the upper hand throughout Indochina.

On both these issues, systemic factors were clearly a major influence. The establishment of diplomatic relations in 1950, the provision of bases for bombing the DRV and DRV sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia, and even the
despatch of Thai troops to the RVN, were all at the request of the U.S. Further, Thai-RVN difficulties from 1969 due to Thai attempts to withdraw its troops from the RVN, and unwillingness to send its troops into Cambodia, both stemmed from Thai conflicts with the U.S. More generally, the shifting power alignments caused by the U.S. move to withdraw in the late 1960s, forced Thailand to reduce gradually its support for the RVN and seek detente with the DRV. At the same time Thailand took advantage of changes in the early 1970s to improve relations with China as a counterbalance to the DRV, a policy that found its clearest expression in the decision to postpone relations with the DRV until these had been established with China.

But it would be a mistake to see these developments purely in terms of systemic influences. Not all military and economic aid Thailand extended to the RVN was at the U.S. behest, and Thailand (through Foreign Minister Thanat) engaged in a major diplomatic effort on behalf of the RVN. Such actions cannot simply be dismissed as an elaborate charade to ensure U.S. support for Thailand, though this was not an unwelcome by-product. Rather, successive Thai leaders saw the RVN as an important buffer to communist and DRV national ambitions of expansion in Cambodia and Laos, areas that constituted Thailand’s main security concerns.

Were there any differences amongst foreign policy decision makers on this? None were apparent during the 1960s. The only issue on which there has been any debate
is whether or not Foreign Minister Thanat was involved (or even informed) in the decision to establish a large USAF presence in Thailand from late 1964.\textsuperscript{142} Whatever conclusion one draws, it is more significant that Thanat remained one of the strongest supporters— if not the strongest supporter— of the U.S. presence in Thailand during his term in office.

National and decision making influences were also relevant to Thai adaptation to changes from the late 1960s. Thailand’s long tradition of sensitivity to changes in foreign policy alignments was undoubtedly one important factor. In this respect it is relevant that attempts to establish detente with the DRV were under way during the period of military-led government before October 1973. However, it is also clear that changes in the decision-making process after October 1973 had important implications. With the MFA playing a more important role, together with democratically elected governments susceptible to public opinion, the process of accommodating the DRV, and its successor the SRV, advanced rapidly. Elements in the military resisted this, staging anti-Vietnamese riots during Thai-DRV/SRV negotiations, and exciting mass concern by warning of Vietnamese plans to take over the 16 provinces in the northeast, and engage in terrorism in Bangkok. Many were particularly opposed to removing U.S. forces from the country, which was a necessary element in any accommodation. Not all the military supported such views, but those who did made the process of accommodation much more difficult, and may have
prevented it altogether if the main decision making role had not been taken out of their hands at that time.

Thai-Vietnam relations were not confined to these issues. A common concern in relations with both the RVN and DRV was the question of refugees who fled to the northeast in the 1940s and early 1950s. Thai concern with refugees can be seen partly in terms of the broader strategic picture, as they were DRV supporters and sometimes communists. But the attention given to this group seemed out of proportion to the possible danger they posed. The number of times the issue was brought up with the RVN, despite clear evidence that the RVN was unwilling to receive them and the refugees were unwilling to go there, also defies any simple explanation. One can only surmise that Thai hostility towards the refugees was based largely on traditional ethnic prejudice, and that efforts to move them out of Thailand were at least partly an attempt to assert Thai importance in the context of traditional rivalry in mainland Southeast Asia.

Two other issues achieved prominence, the 1963 Buddhist problem in the RVN, and fishing disputes. The former arose because Diem's Buddhist policies were a deep affront to Thailand's predominantly Buddhist population. Fishing disputes, however, arose when Thai efforts to expand its fisheries brought its fleet into traditional fishing grounds of other countries - Vietnam was by no means alone in this respect. The dispute was basically an economic one, in which national influences played a dominant role.
FOOTNOTES

1. Thailand’s land area is 514,000 square kilometres, compared to 332,800 for Vietnam. In the mid 1970s Thailand’s population was 43.3 million, its GNP U.S.$18.4 billion (1977) and armed forces 210,000; Vietnam had a population of 46.4 million, GNP of U.S.$7.3 billion (1977) and armed forces of 615,000. (Far Eastern Economic Review [FEER], Asia Yearbook, various editions)


5. Loc. cit.

6. See the section on Thai-RVN bilateral relations for details.


10. Ibid., pp. 150-152.


21. Press reports at this time emphasise Thai concerns about maintaining Cambodia and Laos as "buffer states". (*Bangkok Post*, 2 and 24 July, 1954.) Pote Sarasin, ambassador to the United States, was almost sanguine when he observed: "We do not believe if the enemy receives northern Vietnam that we shall be an immediate target of aggression. We think the enemy will take some time to consolidate his position and to aim at the political control of southern Vietnam, after which he will concentrate on infiltrating Thailand and other South East Asian countries". (*Ibid.*, 14 July, 1954.)
34. Ibid., 14 October, 1963.


37. Loc. cit.

38. Ibid., 14 May, 1964.


44. Ibid., 23 August, 1965.


47. Ibid., 27 October, 1966.


49. Ibid., 30 December, 1966.

50. Ibid., 15 January, 1967. Khuang indeed suggested that sending a division would be more appropriate than a battalion.

51. Ibid., 2 September, 1967.


55. Ibid. 22 May, 1970.

56. Ibid., 20 June, 1970.

57. Ibid., 13 July, 1970.


60. See following chapter, pp. 311-313.


63. Ibid., 30 July, 1970.

64. Ibid., 1 August, 1970.


68. Ibid., 4 May, 1971.

69. Ibid., 5 May, 1971.

70. Age, 22 June, 1972.


73. Ibid., 1 May, 1974.

74. Ibid., 4 May, 1974.

75. Ibid., 3 December, 1964.

76. In making this proposal Thanat observed, "My country would not shirk its responsibilities in this matter", implying a willingness to send combat forces to the RVN. Two months later, however, perhaps after military opposition, Thanat himself denied making such a proposal. (Bangkok World, 9 February, 1965.)


78. Ibid., pp. 27-31.

79. Ibid., p. 33.


88. *Ibid., 26 June, 1966.*
92. See *Collect ed Interviews of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman (Col lect ed Interviews)*, Vol. 1, 1967.


114. Ibid., 30 August, 1, 2, 6 September and 13 October, 1973.


117. The meeting is acknowledged by Thanat in FEER, 20 June, 1975, p.34.


119. Ibid., 30 May, 1974.


121. FEER, 6 June, 1975, p.16.


123. An official Thai statement on talks with the PRG is devoted largely to setting out the issue, and was also the focus of a departure statement by the PRG delegation. (FAB, Vol. XV, No.2, April-June, 1975, pp.56-57 and 74) Reports on talks with the DRV delegation refer only to agreement on a number of issues, leaving "a few outstanding questions which need further discussion". (Ibid., pp. 58 and 77).


139. An item expressing support for the Thai insurgency is noted in *Straits Times*, 24 July, 1976.
142. See p.121.
CHAPTER 6
CAMBODIA: CONFRONTING SIHANOUK AND COMMUNISM

THE SETTING

Diplomatic relations between Thailand and Cambodia existed for only about half the period under review. They were established together with other Indochina countries on 28 February 1950, with the head of mission in Saigon accredited to Phnom Penh until a resident mission was established the following year.¹ In December 1958 Cambodia announced a provisional suspension of relations after a series of bilateral disputes. Relations were resumed in February 1959, following UN mediation, but were again broken by Cambodia in October 1961 and not resumed until May 1970, after the overthrow of Cambodian leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk. When the Khmer Rouge-led coalition assumed power in April 1975 it was quickly recognised by Thailand, but diplomatic relations were not established until November. Even then the agreed exchange of ambassadors never eventuated, and contact was limited to occasional official visits and meetings between liaison offices established on both sides of the border.

Thailand had a clear superiority over Cambodia in terms of all the major indices of national power. It was nearly three times as large in area, had over five times the population, a similar difference in terms of GNP, and
a larger as well as better trained and equipped military. There was a similar imbalance in Cambodia's relationship with Vietnam to the east, making it inevitable that the two large rivals would seek a pre- eminent influence in Cambodian affairs. In the process, conflict between Thailand and Cambodia was bound to occur.

A further geopolitical factor affecting relations between the two countries was the 800 kilometre border shared by the two countries. This bisected a sparsely populated and generally inhospitable mountainous area (the Dangrek range in the north, and Cardamoms in the south) far from the centres of political power and authority for both countries. There was, as a result, a very high incidence of border problems, such as smuggling and the use of neighboring territory as a refuge by criminal and political dissidents. Direct Thai support for opponents of governments in Phnom Penh was also a factor for most of the period under review. Finally, the complexity of border agreements between Thailand and France, when the colonial power, and in parts indistinct terrain, often led to conflict over the location of the border.

Ethnically, culturally and linguistically Thailand and Cambodia have much in common. Thais and Khmer are physically similar, and some 400,000 Khmers have been assimilated into Thai society with few social problems. Cultural similarities range from court rituals (which the Thais largely inherited from the Khmer) to folk traditions, and include most importantly a common adherence to Theravada Buddhism. The two languages have a
common origin, and there are many in the two countries conversant in both. Until recently there were close contacts, including intermarriage, between ruling dynasties and the aristocracy in both countries, and this frequently extended to all levels.

The border between the two countries is generally not an ethnolinguistic divide, with the exception of the extreme south and the northern end of the north-south sector. In the south and central region large pockets of Khmer extend across the frontier into the Thai provinces of Chantaburi and Prachinburi. The northern Dangrek area is inhabited by a Mon-Khmer race known as Kui, which has largely assimilated to Thai or Cambodian society, depending on which side of the border it is situated.

Socio-cultural similarities occasionally helped relations between the two countries, but because of the disparity in actual power between them more often contributed directly to bilateral difficulties. Thailand tended to view Cambodia as the international equivalent of a "younger brother", and accordingly expected Cambodia to defer to it on all issues of importance. Cambodia, for its part, constantly feared Thai irredentist claims to its territory, and suspected Thailand of formulating policies that took no account of Cambodia's particular national interests.

Economic ties contributed relatively little to bilateral ties. As detailed in Appendix III, trade was very small, partly because of the similarity of economic activities in the two countries, partly because of
conditions unfavourable to economic production and trade in the border region, and partly because of frequent political obstacles to trade. The railway line between Bangkok and Phnom Penh was once an important conduit for Cambodia's international trade, but the opening of a port at Sihanoukville in 1956 and the closing of the border in the 1960s greatly reduced its significance. Thai economic assistance to Cambodia was negligible.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Thai attitudes towards Cambodia in the period under review were shaped by relations between the two countries before the arrival of French colonialism, and relations during and in the immediate aftermath of French rule.

From around 1,000 AD, during the time of the Angkor Empire, Cambodia exercised a loose suzerainty over much of the area of present day Thailand. Nearly three centuries later an independent Thai state came into being with the establishment of Sukothai, and by the late fourteenth century its successor, Ayuthia, had established military pre-eminence and a loose suzerainty over Cambodia. Thai influence peaked during the Bangkok period, when Rama I (1782-1809) brought the provinces of Battambang and Siem Riep under direct rule, and the rest of Cambodia was regarded as a tributary state.

Thailand's right to such influence was eventually challenged by a newly united Vietnam, and following a series of military engagements a system of dual suzerainty was instituted in the mid-nineteenth century. The new Vietnamese challenge to Thai pre-eminence in mainland
Southeast Asia emphasised to Thailand the strategic importance of Cambodia as a buffer zone, and the necessity of exerting at least shared influence there. Joint suzerainty, however, ended following French intervention in Cambodia in 1863, though Thailand retained Battambang and Siem Riep until 1904 and 1907, and regained them briefly during World War II.

Thai-Cambodian relations in the pre-colonial period were often difficult, as different Cambodian groups competed with one another to gain Thai patronage, and once dominant sought to assert their independence from Bangkok. Links were maintained with different cliques, for it was never certain which would eventually dominate. When Thai influence was predominant firm control was maintained over Cambodian rulers - often bringing them up in the Bangkok court - but in other respects self government was permitted as long as nominal tribute was paid once a year. There were, however, always Cambodians anxious to enhance national independence, or their own interests, by coming to an arrangement with Vietnam. Their long exercise of suzerainty appears to have left the Thais convinced of their own superiority vis-a-vis the Khmer, while at the same time causing them to view the Khmers as untrustworthy and ungrateful.

During the period of French colonial rule, and its immediate aftermath, the nature of conflict between the two countries crystallized around four issues: border problems, the "Free Khmer", personalized conflicts with Cambodian leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk and ideological
conflicts. Even though diplomatic relations appeared to get off to a good start - Thailand was the first country to establish a resident mission in Phnom Penh, and immediately extended modest assistance in economic and social areas\(^5\) - this was soon overtaken by difficulties in the four areas referred to.

**Border Problems**

Most Thai border problems with Cambodia have their origins in the period of French colonial rule. Thailand accepted the French takeover reluctantly, and by the 1920s there was much talk of a "pan-Thai" concept in the Thai press, centred on the recovery of those areas in Indochina ceded to France.\(^6\) This sentiment gathered momentum in the late 1930s under the nationalistic policies promoted by Phibun Songkram. In 1936 Thailand proposed readjustment of the Indochina frontier (principally the Laos section) but this was rejected by France. Three years later it sought to link border readjustment to a Pact of Non-Aggression with France, but again its overtures were rejected. This, and fears of increased Japanese influence in Cambodia and Laos, led Thailand to invade the disputed areas in December 1940. It quickly gained control (winning the land battles, but losing naval encounters), and accepted a Japanese offer of mediation. A truce was declared on 3 February 1941, and a peace treaty signed in Tokyo on 9 May. Although this ceded the provinces fought over, Thailand was unhappy that it regained only 43,000 of some 300,000 square miles earlier lost to France, and in particular that it failed to regain Angkor.\(^7\)
Thailand retained control of Battambang and Siem Riep until November 1946. Though quick to return territory in Burma and Malaya given to it by Japan during World War II, Thailand argued that the Indochina territory had been legally ceded, and initially refused its surrender. It later relented in order to gain French backing for its membership in the UN.

Thai claims to Cambodian territory have not subsequently been a major issue between the two countries - except for Sihanouk's frequently expressed fears - with one important exception, the small border temple of Phra Viharn. Between February 1949 and July 1950 France sent four diplomatic notes to Thailand asserting Cambodian sovereignty over Phra Viharn, and requesting Thailand to withdraw four keepers it was maintaining there. Thailand did not respond to any of these. After obtaining full independence in 1953 Cambodia sent officials to take control of Phra Viharn, but withdrew them on finding Thai keepers in occupation. It then forwarded a series of diplomatic notes protesting the Thai presence, but received no more than an acknowledgement. In December 1954 Sihanouk made a six day visit to Bangkok in an attempt to try and break the deadlock. No progress was made, and after his return to Phnom Penh an intense campaign for the return of the temple was launched by the Cambodian media. As feelings intensified on both sides a number of small scale border clashes occurred, prompting protests and counter-protests.

Border incidents continued intermittently throughout 1955 and 1956, but there were no developments on the
diplomatic front. In May 1957 Cambodia protested Thailand's occupation to the International Control Commission appointed at the Geneva Conference, but members of the ICC could not agree on whether their jurisdiction extended to such an issue. In the same month Thailand counter-proposed a Joint Commission to examine the border alignment, and another to ensure peace in the border region. In addition, Thailand offered Cambodia port and transit facilities. Cambodia did not pursue any of these offers, but focused single-mindedly on the Phra Viharn issue, an approach that set the scene for a rapid deterioration of bilateral relations after Sarit took power.

The Free Khmer

The "Free Khmer", known first as the Khmer Issara (KI) then reconstituted in 1959 as the Khmer Serei, was initially established under Japanese sponsorship during World War II. It was in opposition to all Sihanouk led or dominated governments from the late 1940s, and operated as a violent underground movement from the early 1950s. Consequently, Thai contacts with it proved a major irritant in Thai-Cambodian relations.

Thai links with the KI began after the war, when it was permitted to establish an anti-French government in exile in Bangkok. While the provinces of Battambang and Siem Riep were under Thai control, the KI also used these areas as a refuge. Assistance continued after the provinces were returned to France, particularly in the period up to the Phibun coup in November 1947. The
new Phibun government reduced support, partly in an effort to appease France, and partly because it distrusted pro-communist elements in the KI, but covert contacts were maintained. General Phao was in charge of these activities, had meetings with KI leader Son Ngoc Than once or twice a year in Bangkok, and was a conduit for U.S. aid to the movement. Assistance was provided with essential provisions, and safe houses in Bangkok and the provinces for recruitment. There was also frequent liaison with the RVN over transferring groups between Khmer areas in that country and Thailand.  

Relations With Sihanouk

Although closely bound up with other aspects of bilateral relations, in particular Thai support for the Free Khmer, personalized antagonism between Sihanouk and Thai government leaders was in itself often an important factor in Thai-Cambodian relations. The origins of this lie largely in Sihanouk’s visit to Bangkok in June 1953, as part of his crusade for independence in Cambodia. Thailand, at that stage anxious not to antagonize France, treated Sihanouk with outward deference, but allowed him only refugee status and forbade any political activity. Feeling both frustrated and insulted, Sihanouk left one week later.  

Ideological Conflict

Thai concerns about a possible communist threat through Cambodia began in April 1954 when Vietminh forces moved into northern Cambodia, causing considerable alarm
in Thailand. The Geneva Conference two months later went some way towards overcoming Thai fears, when it declined legitimacy to Vietminh forces in Cambodia and established the country as a neutral buffer between Thailand and the communist DRV.

Nonetheless Thailand soon found much to be concerned about in the form of neutrality pursued by Sihanouk, particularly Cambodia’s refusal to cooperate with SEATO, and its gradual move towards normalising relations with communist countries. Both issues came to the fore in early 1956. In January Sihanouk began a state visit to Manila which Thailand, along with other SEATO partners hoped would lead to Cambodia declaring its support for SEATO. When Sihanouk refused to retreat from a neutralist stand Thailand, together with the RVN, heavy-handedly imposed an economic blockade on Cambodia, cutting off its two main arteries of communications with the outside world, the railway running through Thailand and the Mekong River. Thailand and its SEATO partners were further alarmed when Sihanouk’s visit to Peking from 13-21 February culminated in the signing of a Declaration of Friendship. Sihanouk moved to strengthen his hand by calling a Third National Congress of the ruling mass organisation, the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People’s Socialist Community), with an agenda which implicitly called into question Cambodian relations with neighbouring and Western states. The SEATO partners then shifted to a conciliatory approach, Thailand and the RVN opening their frontiers two days before the convening of the Sangkum.
In the event the meeting went on to approve movement towards establishing diplomatic and economic relations with communist countries, and rejected involvement with SEATO. Cambodia’s position was further entrenched at the beginning of 1957 when the Fourth National Congress passed a Neutrality Act.\textsuperscript{11}

**BREAKDOWN OF RELATIONS**

Thai-Cambodian relations deteriorated sharply after Sarit’s 1957 coup. Officially sponsored demonstrations in Phnom Penh during March 1958 opposing Thai policy on Phra Viharn were followed in April by a Thai note to Cambodia claiming that border agreements previously reached with France no longer applied, as they had been signed under duress.\textsuperscript{12} Two months later Cambodia alleged that Thailand had launched an armed raid into its territory, though it subsequently admitted it had made a mistake. In an attempt to break the impasse Sihanouk made a personal visit to Bangkok on 12 July. He stayed only a few hours, but arranged a later call by Deputy Prime Minister Son Sann.

The Son Sann delegation arrived in Bangkok on 14 August 1958, almost a month after Thai-Cambodian relations had been shaken by Cambodian recognition of the People’s Republic of China, and the same day Sihanouk arrived in Peking on a state visit. After such an inauspicious start, negotiations made little headway, and were brought to a close on 4 September after differences over Phra Viharn could not be resolved.\textsuperscript{13} Three days later an anti-Cambodian public demonstration (probably government-
inspired) took place in Bangkok, followed by the resumption of an intense media war between the two capitals. On 24 November the Cambodian embassy handed a note to Thai authorities informing them that diplomatic relations would be provisionally suspended from 1 December until further notice.

The suspension of relations was quickly followed by Thailand and Cambodia agreeing to accept UN mediation. Baron Beck-Friis, a personal envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG), quickly succeeded in restoring a degree of mutual trust, and on 6 February both sides announced their respective ambassadors would return to posts. In June 1959 Foreign Minister Thamrat Khoman visited Phnom Penh and signed a joint communique whereby the two countries committed themselves to non-interference in the other's internal affairs, and prohibition of activities harmful to the other's security. Relations did not, however, improve, and deteriorated sharply in October when Cambodia took the Phra Viharn dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In July 1960 Thailand and Cambodia again agreed to UN mediation of their various disputes. Official level talks began in New York in early October, with a UN observer present. Dispute over Phra Viharn dominated early meetings, but on 15 December a four point accord was arrived at by which both sides agreed to:¹⁴

- stop all press and radio attacks against each other and against each others Chief of State
- cooperation in the suppression of crimes in the border region
- extradition of criminals

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sanctuary for political refugees in accordance with international law, with an express prohibition against such refugees being allowed to carry out political activities.

The New York accords had barely been signed before the outbreak of a vitriolic press exchange between the two countries consigned them to irrelevance. This was followed by a particularly bitter personal exchange between Sihanouk and Sarit that culminated in Sihanouk breaking relations with Thailand on 23 October 1961. The Thai response included closure of the Thai-Cambodian border, an action that remained in force throughout the Sihanouk period.

The period from October 1961 till late 1966 was the lowest point in relations between the two countries. Some attempts to improve relations were made — for instance both sides agreed to mediation attempts by representatives of the UNSG in January 1963 (Niel Gussing) and August 1966-January 1967 (De Ribbing), and there were visits to Bangkok by two secret high level Cambodian emissaries in February and March 1966 — but none arrested the decline. In all other respects conflict between the two countries intensified, and from June 1965 included regular military clashes along the common border.

Further discussion of this period is most usefully conducted in the context of the four previously identified areas of primary concern in Thai-Cambodian relations.

**Border Problems**

When Cambodia took the Phra Viharn dispute to the ICJ in October 1959, Prime Minister Sarit declared he
would join with the nation to protect this piece of Thai
treasure with "blood, sweat and tears". He, and several
other ministers, also raised - but never seriously pursued
- the possibility of Thailand going before the ICJ to
assert rights over the four Indochina provinces (including
Battambang and Siem Riep in Cambodia) ceded to it in 1942
but given up after World War II.18

Thailand initially sought to challenge the court's
competence to consider the case, but in May 1961 this was
overruled. On 13 June 1962, by a nine to three majority,
the ICJ gave priority to maps annexed to the 1907 Franco-
Thai agreement over words in the agreement, and passed
judgement in favour of Cambodia.19 This decision was
conveyed in a brief communique issued by the Thai prime
minister's office on 16 June. An intensive behind the
scenes debate on an appropriate response then took place,
and a second communique, which merely set out Thailand's
reasons for disagreeing with the judgement, did not appear
until thirteen days later. On 3 July a third communique
observed that Thailand would accept the judgement
"under protest and with reservation of her intrinsic
rights". The following day the prime minister discussed
the issue in an emotional public address, making it clear
that the king had intervened in favour of accepting the
judgement. He nonetheless promised that "one day in the
future, the Temple of Phra Viharn shall return to the Thai
nation's fold".20

Thailand's qualified acceptance of the ICJ decision
was conveyed in a 6 July note to the UN. This indicated
that Thai acquiescence was with,21

an express reservation regarding whatever rights Thailand has, or may have in future, to recover the Temple of Phra Viharn by having recourse to any existing or subsequently applicable legal process, and to register a protest against the decision of the International Court of Justice awarding the Temple of Phra Viharn to Cambodia.

On 5 September the foreign ministry issued a detailed statement explaining why it believed the Court had erred, "both in its appreciation of the facts and in its application of the law".22

Thailand's refusal to accept the validity of the ICJ decision - other than in a narrow de jure sense - received a hostile reception in Cambodia, and proved the major obstacle to several subsequent attempts to improve bilateral relations during the Sihanouk era. It was also partly responsible for an intensive diplomatic campaign mounted by Sihanouk to obtain international acknowledgement of Cambodia's borders.

In mid August 1962 Sihanouk called for an international conference to guarantee the independence and neutrality of Cambodia, on similar lines to the 1961-62 Geneva conference on Laos.23 After what it perceived as an unsatisfactory outcome from the Geneva conference on Laos, Thailand was not anxious to endorse such a meeting, particularly as it felt that it would, in effect, place Thailand on trial. It was able to deflect consideration of the proposal by counter-proposing a mediating role by the UN24 - subsequently effected by the abortive Gussing mission.

In mid February 1964 Sihanouk renewed his April 1962 proposals, with the modification that only Thailand, the
RVN and the U.S. meet with Cambodia for this purpose. After receiving a formal invitation through the Indonesian embassy in Bangkok in early March, Thailand declined attendance, criticising the various ultimata attached to the proposals, and emphasising preference for bilateral consultations.

The issue then remained dormant for some twelve months, until Cambodia renewed its call at a March 1965 Indochinese People's Conference. This was then taken up by the Geneva Conference Co-chairmen USSR and Britain, and after initial reluctance the U.S. was persuaded to lend its support. These countries decided to widen the proposed conference to include participants in the 1961-62 Geneva conference on Laos. Thailand reacted cautiously, indicating that while it had no objections to such a conference, its own participation would have to be carefully considered. But when Cambodia tauntingly declared it would not allow Thailand to take part, Thai leaders bluntly asserted that they had no wish to participate. Cambodia, China and the DRV then began to have doubts of their own about the agenda and composition of the conference, and withdrew their support.

In place of an international conference Sihanouk mounted an intensive diplomatic campaign to obtain the signatures of all countries Cambodia had diplomatic relations with acknowledging that "they recognise and respect the territorial integrity of Cambodia within its present frontiers." The same formula was also
offered as a pre-condition for re-establishing diplomatic relations with Thailand from 1966. Thailand rejected all these requests on the grounds that it was not willing to abandon its express reservations on Phra Viharn.\textsuperscript{31}

Border problems of a different type began in June 1965 with an armed clash between Thai and Cambodian forces in which, according to the Thai press, fourteen Cambodians and one Thai were killed. Brief military clashes were not uncommon prior to this incident, but they were on a smaller scale. June 1965 marked the beginning of a regular series of clashes through much of the remaining period of Sihanouk rule, with a peak in the November-December 1965 period.

The clashes were a reflection of the acute deterioration of relations between the two countries. Their precise causes, however, were often difficult to establish because of the plethora of claims and counter-claims, most forwarded as official protests to the UNSG. Many incidents involved cross border shelling or small arms fire. A number of shallow incursions also occurred, most it would seem on the Thai side, and both sides accused the other of extensive laying of mines in their territory. In some cases the issue that sparked them was relatively trivial. That in June 1965, for instance, started following a misunderstanding between Thai and Cambodian officials trying to arrange a deal whereby the Thai side would prevent Cambodian refugees crossing over into Trad province.\textsuperscript{32} In other cases, however, the "Free Khmer" were involved.\textsuperscript{33}
The Free Khmer

The Free Khmer issue was a constant irritant in bilateral relations throughout this period. In January 1959, Sihanouk accused Thailand of conspiracy with members of the Khmer Serei (also the U.S. and RVN) in a major plot to overthrow him. Similar accusations were made in November 1959 when Sihanouk implicated Thailand in the sending of a mail bomb to the Cambodian king and queen. The November and December issues of the semi-official Cambodian Commentary accused Thailand of sheltering Sihanouk's exiled opponent, Sam Sary, and several Thai military and police officers of directly aiding "Free Khmer" rebels. A number of similar charges followed over the next few months.

All these accusations were spiritedly denied by Thailand. In July 1960 Thanat announced that Thailand would ask the UN to investigate allegations of its harbouring Cambodian rebels and allowing rebel activities to be directed from its territory. Cambodia, possibly fearing that any such investigation might not prove conclusive, suggested high level bilateral talks to resolve all problems, a proposal that eventually resulted in UN-mediated talks and the December 1960 four point accord.

In the following years Sihanouk made frequent allegations of Thai collusion with the Khmer Serei (KS), often in protests on border incidents to the UN. In late 1963 he criticised Thailand and the RVN for supporting secret Khmer Serei radio stations. U.S. intelligence
sources support the view that these stations were located in Thailand, however a Thai responsible for overseeing such activities claimed the transmitter was mobile and carried around in a truck inside Cambodia. Compared to other issues, however, the Free Khmer subsequently became less important, except for a period around December 1965, when Sihanouk’s claims were given some substance by reports that Thai leaders were considering recognising the organisation. This was argued in terms of giving support to "a substantial and growing number of Cambodians who oppose the pro-Communist China policy of Prince Sihanouk", but the government was said to be holding back in the hope that Cambodia would not go fully over to China.

There are some indications that the KS did carry out a more active campaign of military opposition to Sihanouk at this time. They formally declared war on Sihanouk on 31 December 1965, though it is unclear whether or not the timing was related to Thai expressions of support. One of the border incidents, in January 1966, was described by Deputy Prime Minister Praphat as following a KS assault on a Cambodian army camp at Khao Obeyam.

The actual extent of Thai support for the KS at this time is difficult to assess. A U.S. intelligence report in September 1964 refers to "numerous armed Khmer Serei" in Thailand. Le Monde in May 1967 claimed that the KS had 1,000 armed troops inside Thai territory at four camps along the Dangrek escarpment, where training was directed jointly by U.S. and Thai officers. An involved Thai official denied there were any camps on Thai soil or the provision of military training. Assistance, he claimed,
continued along the same lines as that extended a decade earlier, carried out with great secrecy by a small office within the Supreme Command.\textsuperscript{45} Successive foreign ministers who denied any Thai involvement with the KS may have had more than an inkling of them, but had no specific knowledge.

\textbf{Relations with Sihanouk}

The antagonistic nature of relations between Sihanouk and Thai leaders, while often difficult to separate from other issues during this period, did stand out on a number of occasions. On 29 December 1960 the Cambodian paper \textit{Pancha Sila} described Sarit as an enemy of Cambodia’s neutrality, and sharply criticised Thai policy on Phra Viharn along with "propaganda to lower the honour" of Sihanouk and the Cambodian government. A regular flow of such items, many written by or reporting Sihanouk, continued over the following months.\textsuperscript{46}

On 7 October 1961 Sihanouk gave a news conference in Tokyo where he reportedly said that his country had to fight not so much against communism as against "pro-Western neighbours".\textsuperscript{47} Sarit responded to this on 19 October (the third anniversary of his "revolution"), claiming that as Cambodia was not strong enough to fight Thailand, Sihanouk’s statement indicated a possible plan for using Cambodia as an intermediary or bridgehead for the communists to harm neighbouring countries. He then continued:\textsuperscript{48}

The Government has had to guard against danger on this front as well. At the same time, it has had to exercise restraint and condone (sic) such
arrogance by taking for consolation the old proverbial tale of a pig challenging a lion to a fight.

Sihanouk was deeply offended by this speech. A Cambodian note to the Thai embassy in Phnom Penh on 23 October described Sarit’s remarks as slanderous, and announced the breaking of diplomatic relations. On the same day Sihanouk bitterly denounced the speech before the National Assembly. When Sarit died in December 1963 Sihanouk welcomed the occasion by declaring a one week holiday for school children, and two hours leave every day for two weeks for all public servants.

Personal antagonism was particularly intense between Sarit and Sihanouk. The origins of this can only be speculated on, but may in some form be linked to the fact that Sarit’s father, also a military man, was fluent in the Khmer language and was once Thailand’s leading Cambodian expert. With Sarit’s departure it became more difficult to isolate personalized antagonism between Sihanouk and Thai leaders as a factor in the relationship. Prime Minister Thanom had a milder temperament, and refused to be drawn into public slanging matches. But the new Deputy Prime Minister, Praphat, was only marginally less outspoken than Sarit had been, resulting in little change overall.

**Ideological Conflict**

Ideology had less impact on Thai-Cambodian relations than other factors during the early years of Sarit’s rule. Nonetheless concern was felt at Cambodia’s establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC on 18 July 1958, 

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and frequent Sihanouk warnings that if necessary Cambodia would accept communism to protect itself from neighbouring countries.\textsuperscript{52} Ideology became more important after the October 1961 break in diplomatic relations, as Cambodia moved leftward, and both countries were caught up in the intensification of conflict between the DRV and RVN.

The first reflection of this came in a late January 1962 foreign ministry statement which sought to give more substance to earlier allegations that Cambodia might be used as a base for communist aggression. The statement observed that Sihanouk had repeatedly threatened to join or cooperate with communists. It also noted that a Cambodian Army communiqué of 6 September 1960 had referred to the destruction of a Viet Cong military camp, proving that the Viet Cong had penetrated the RVN through Cambodia.\textsuperscript{53} Both Sihanouk threats to cooperate with the communists, and actual Cambodian assistance to the Viet Cong, remained a constant source of tension between the two sides throughout the Sihanouk period.

In November 1963 Cambodia moved substantially to the left with the nationalisation of important sectors of the economy, and the ending of U.S. aid. These developments, together with a growing rapport between Cambodia and China, and Cambodia and the DRV, caused considerable nervousness in Bangkok. In September 1965 Foreign Minister Thanat, citing "reliable sources", made the unlikely claim that some 27,000 Cambodian Chinese were being trained, with aid from China, as guerrillas and formed into units to help the Viet Cong in the RVN. These, he warned, could be turned against Thailand.\textsuperscript{54}
Cambodian criticism of Thailand at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in October, and its decision to boycott all working committees of the UNGA, were seen as motivated by a desire to please China.\textsuperscript{55} Sihanouk, Deputy Prime Minister Praphat asserted, was one hundred per cent a slave of China.\textsuperscript{56}

Thanat took the conflict a stage further in November 1965 when he warned Cambodia it would have to accept the consequences of permitting communist troops to use its soil as a base to commit aggression against neighbouring countries. "Some day", he continued, "it might become necessary to destroy this nest of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese in Cambodian territory".\textsuperscript{57}

Sihanouk responded by warning that the U.S., Thailand and the RVN would be held entirely and jointly responsible for the very grave consequences that would follow any bombing of Cambodian territory.\textsuperscript{58} China, then hosting a Cambodian military delegation, announced its support for Cambodia and followed this by promising a large increase in military assistance.\textsuperscript{59} In mid-December Sihanouk admitted he had been giving the Viet Cong medicines, but denied other assistance. Thai officials were quick to note this, and assert that it vindicated their long-standing claims.\textsuperscript{60} A Sihanouk proposal for the ICC to inspect Cambodian borders and investigate charges of it supporting communist forces in the RVN was dismissed by Thai leaders as a gimmick that would not permit any genuine inspection.\textsuperscript{61}

Cambodian relations with the DRV and the southern NLF continued to improve in 1966. In April Cambodia allowed
the DRV to open an embassy in Phnom Penh, and Sihanouk announced his intention to sign a pact of coexistence with the DRV and NLF, and establish an Indochinese People’s Secretariat in Phnom Penh with representatives from Cambodia, the DRV and NLF. Thanat responded by claiming that China had finally forced Cambodia to formally declare its support for the NLF. In November Sihanouk threatened to call a conference attended by the leaders of Cambodia, the DRV and NLF, to highlight the cause of the "victims of aggression".

Thai criticisms of Cambodia at this time began to focus more specifically on claims of a "Sihanouk trail" assisting the DRV-NLF war effort. Its existence was first referred to in the Thai press in early April 1966. This was followed by a Thai protest to the UNSG in May, claiming that three DRV regiments were based in Cambodia, seven others were supplied from there, and at least 25,000 DRV troops had come south through Laos and Cambodia by the Ho Chi Minh and Sihanouk Trails. Such allegations were consistently denied by Sihanouk. With hindsight they appear to have been accurate, though Sihanouk sought to limit such activities as far as possible.

**HESITANT STEPS TOWARDS RECONCILIATION**

For the rest of the Sihanouk period there was a slow, though interrupted, trend towards improved relations. Phra Viharn, border incidents, and Thai uncertainty over Sihanouk’s relations with communist neighbours, continued to frustrate such developments. However increasing domestic pressures on Sihanouk, from local communists on
the one hand and right wing groups opposed to his cooperation with the DRV and NLF on the other, had a favourable impact on Thai-Cambodian relations.

At the beginning of 1967 Thailand took some comfort from Sihanouk’s criticism of communist support for insurgents in Cambodia. Sihanouk faced considerable problems from local communists throughout the year, including a rebellion in Battambang province and other disturbances created by China’s export of its cultural revolution. However, a series of border clashes in February prevented any significant improvement in Thai-Cambodian relations. Following this, Sihanouk’s intensification of efforts to ask all countries having diplomatic relations with Phnom Penh to recognise Cambodian borders provoked an angry Thai reaction. Thailand also remained critical of Cambodian cooperation with the DRV, and Thanat warned that it favoured hot pursuit of DRV forces into Cambodia if Cambodia were unable to close its borders to the communists.

The intensification of communist rebellion in Cambodia in early 1968, together with increased unauthorised use of Cambodian territory by the DRV and NLF, further contributed to improved Thai-Cambodian relations. In April a Cambodian embassy official in Singapore came to Bangkok to attend the Third Ministerial Conference on the Economic Development of Southeast Asia as an observer. Border conflicts continued, but appear to have eased slightly.

A brief skirmish between Thai and Cambodian patrol boats in early February 1969 was the first naval clash
between the two countries, but did not prove a serious impediment to the process of improving relations. Later in the month Thailand returned several Cambodians who had crossed the border, and Cambodia freed 100 Thai fishermen caught in Cambodian waters. On 2 April the first high ranking Cambodian official to receive a formal welcome in Thailand for seven years arrived in Bangkok to attend, as an observer, the Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Economic Development of Southeast Asia.

Relations went through a see-saw period in the middle months of 1969. In May a complicated border dispute arose in which Cambodia accused Thailand of sending seventy four people across the border and setting up an insurgent camp, while Thailand accused Cambodia of sending troops across the border and kidnapping this group. In the same month NLF representation in Phnom Penh was raised to embassy status, and diplomatic relations were resumed with the U.S. after Washington formally recognised Cambodia's borders. Sihanouk attended Ho Chi Minh's funeral in September, the only head of state to do so. Throughout this period, Sihanouk's continued insistence that Thailand recognise Cambodia's existing border before the resumption of normal relations prevented a breakthrough. Nonetheless in November Thailand announced that a ministerial-level delegation would visit Sihanouk in Phnom Penh in January 1970 - a visit that was first postponed and eventually cancelled after Sihanouk's overthrow.
THE LON NOL PERIOD

General Lon Nol's coup against Sihanouk on 18 March 1970 led to a radical change in Thai-Cambodian relations. The new government, besieged from the outset by Chinese and DRV supported local communists, by DRV troops, and by forces loyal to Sihanouk, had no option but to improve relations with Thailand. For its part Thailand reacted with hesitation then initial enthusiasm, but moved to a more cautious position as the survival prospects of the new regime became increasingly more doubtful, and ultimately sought ways of accommodating the anti-Phnom Penh coalition. Relations were particularly to the fore during three periods:

. May-September 1970, when there was strong disagreement between civilian and military policy makers, ultimately resolved in favour of the former, over plans for direct military intervention in Cambodia, and an unsuccessful diplomatic attempt to get the U.S. involved in a joint military intervention

. 1973, when Thailand sought to focus attention on Cambodia at a time when the Vietnam war was apparently winding down, and saw the need to take precautions against a communist victory, particularly through extending overtures to Sihanouk

. and early in 1975, when Thailand saw that communist victory was inevitable, and sought to accommodate this

Thai leaders were initially cautious in their response to Sihanouk's ouster, being uncertain how Cambodian politics might evolve, and concerned that they might provide opportunities for the USSR, China and the DRV. Over a month after Sihanouk's fall Thanat described the incident as an internal affair of Cambodia, and

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claimed - less than truthfully - that Thailand was "absolutely neutral", supporting neither Sihanouk nor the new government. Thailand's first public initiative was to support an Indonesian proposal for a regional conference to take up the issue.

The escalation of the Cambodian conflict brought about by the U.S.-RVN drive against Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia, launched on 1 May 1970, girded Thailand into expressing its support for the new government in Phnom Penh. Thanat praised the U.S.-RVN actions as an important step towards winning the Vietnam war. A few days later the new Cambodian Foreign Minister visited Bangkok, and on 13 May a joint communique was signed providing for the resumption of diplomatic relations and exchange of diplomatic representatives.

On 16-17 May Thailand joined ten other countries in Jakarta for discussion of the Cambodian problem. Thanat made a number of recommendations that were accepted by the conference, including proposals for alerting the custodians of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords, along with relevant UN bodies, to their responsibility for ensuring Cambodian neutrality, and the establishment of a standing body responsible for implementing proposals made by the conference. But Thai authorities, the military in particular, were not happy with the outcome of the conference, as its call for the ending of "all acts of hostilities" and withdrawal of "all foreign troops" failed to distinguish between the U.S. and RVN on the one hand, and the DRV on the other. Moreover the stipulation that Cambodia should be allowed to solve all problems "without
any external interference or pressure", imposed unwelcome restrictions on its own ability to intervene in Cambodian affairs.78

A few days after the Jakarta conference, on 27 and 28 May, a 30-man military-civilian mission, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Praphat, visited Phnom Penh. Following talks Praphat announced that Thailand would be supplying Cambodia with a variety of basic military provisions, and twenty locally-built patrol boats. Cambodia requested the despatch of at least one division of Thai troops, but Praphat declined to indicate whether or not Thai forces would be sent.79

After Praphat's return Prime Minister Thanom announced that the government was "considering" mounting a volunteer force for Cambodia, made up mostly of Army reservists. The force would be "as large as possible", be equipped and paid for by Cambodia, and be ready for deployment in less than two months. This policy was strongly opposed by Thanat, and apparently several other Thai leaders, who doubted the stability of the Phnom Penh government and were concerned that Thailand not be seen as acting unilaterally. Twenty four hours later cabinet dramatically rebuffed the prime minister by agreeing only that Thailand would "provide facilities" for Thais of Khmer origin to volunteer for service in Cambodia.80 Thanom visited Saigon in late June to negotiate the transfer of Thai troops in the RVN to Cambodia, but was surprised to find his hosts opposed to this.81 In what appeared to be a final compromise, Thanom announced a
modest aid package, concentrating on assistance with training and the provision of basic supplies, at the end of June.

Thailand's decision not to send troops to Cambodia unilaterally was, in the minds of opponents such as Thanat, premised on the expectation that the U.S. could be persuaded to lend its support to the venture. The U.S. administration was indeed anxious to secure Thai involvement, and talks on cooperative action began in June, but in the face of congressional opposition to military actions in Southeast Asia these made slow progress. At the annual SEATO Foreign Ministers meeting held in Manila from 2-3 July, Thanat warned that SEATO was facing its third crisis (following Laos and Vietnam in the early 1960s), and decisions to be taken would determine whether those assembled had come "to give it a new lease of life or to preside over its liquidation". The meeting's failure to agree on any concrete measures for assisting the Phnom Penh government led Thanat to denounce it as a "failure". At the seven nation conference of countries militarily involved in Vietnam, held two days later, Thailand failed in its attempt to gain a U.S. assurance of continued support for Thai troops then in the RVN if they were shifted to Cambodia.

U.S. caution over bankrolling Thai involvement in Cambodia led to great confusion and open conflict in Thai foreign policy making circles. In early July Deputy Prime Minister Praphat and Thanat participated in a panel discussion on "Thailand's attitude towards the Cambodian
conflict" before students and the press at Chulalongkorn University. Praphat declared that:

We have to send Thai troops into Cambodia...the Thai government - especially the military officers - feel very strongly that sending Thai troops into Cambodia will serve as a protective and self-helping measure.

Thanat, however, asserted that "We will continue to use peaceful means...Thailand will fight only when it is unavoidable".\(^{84}\) When the RVN's Vice-President Ky arrived in Bangkok in mid July and requested that Thailand take responsibility for the security of western Cambodia, Thanat's view held sway.

Prime Minister Thanom then sought to bridge the gap between Praphat and Thanat by airing RVN proposals for an alliance between Thailand, the RVN, Cambodia and Laos. This, it was felt, would ensure international sanction for any Thai involvement in Cambodia, and perhaps also facilitate the supply of U.S. military equipment to Thai troops there.\(^{85}\) For reasons that are not clear, this was rejected by both President Thieu, who was the first to propose such an alliance, and Cambodian Prime Minister Lon Nol. During his visit to Bangkok from 22-23 July, Lon Nol indicated a desire to see Thai troops in Cambodia, but the joint press release at the conclusion only stressed the need to continue with diplomatic and political efforts.\(^{86}\) After his departure, however, Thanom told the press that 3,000 Thai troops of Cambodian origin would be going to Cambodia around the end of August. Adding yet further confusion Thanat declared on 28 July that "the government will send Thai forces to Cambodia only as a last resort".\(^{87}\)
By early August Thai-U.S. talks on Cambodia finally began to progress. Thai military sources reported that agreement had almost been reached on financing 3,000 Thai "volunteers", who would leave for Cambodia at the end of the month. On 15 August the State Department confirmed that tentative agreement had been reached, though it refused to predict when final arrangements would be completed. Congressional opposition quickly organised, however, and before the end of the month the Senate had passed an amendment to a military procurement bill that had the effect of stopping U.S. aid for all volunteers sent to Cambodia.

The Senate action quickly resolved the dispute in Bangkok. In early September government ministers announced that Thailand had decided against sending any troops to Cambodia, including ethnic Cambodian volunteers. Thanat announced that priority would be given to diplomatic and political moves, though if the situation in Cambodia developed into a direct threat "we won't wait but will take measures to safeguard our security". Praphat rationalised the decision by stating that if Thailand sent volunteers communist countries might enlarge the war by despatching volunteers of their own.

While debate raged, however, the government acted on both military and political fronts. Training for some 10,000 troops was conducted at camps along the Thai-Cambodian border, a small number of Border Patrol Police were sent to the Phra Viharn area for an indefinite stay, and by September Thai planes were reportedly

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carrying out interdiction raids against DRV and Viet Cong forces on the perimeter of Phnom Penh. Politically, Thailand sought to help unite various conflicting Cambodian groups, in particular to bring together the forces of Lon Nol and the "Free Khmer". A press report in September implied a Thai role in the appointment of Son Ngoc Than as adviser to Lon Nol.

By September-October Thai officials seem to have concluded that the worst was over and that the Lon Nol government was beginning to stabilise. In any case there seems to have been a belief in an "unwritten agreement" that safeguarded Thai interests in the conflict. In the words of Bangkok Post editor Theh, this was that: "the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces do not come within any point of the Thai territory which Thailand would consider of direct bearing on its security while Thai forces are being held back until this point is reached". With this comforting thought, and the frenzied debate over military assistance resolved, Thailand and Cambodia spent the next two years on the more routine, non-controversial business of drawing up agreements and memoranda necessary for restoring normal relations between the two countries. The instability of governments in Phnom Penh, and the rapid advance of communist forces in the countryside - to within twelve miles of the capital by mid-1971 - dampened enthusiasm for an activist policy. Thailand nonetheless continued to provide military training for the Cambodian army, and facilitated the U.S. provision of armaments and other material supplies. Up to the end of March 1973, 5,796
Cambodian personnel had received military training in Thailand, most by the Royal Thai Army and Royal Thai Air Force, and a further 247 were then in training.\(^{100}\)

In early 1973, following the Paris Agreement and cease-fire in Vietnam, Cambodia assumed renewed importance within the broader context of a possible settlement for all of Indochina. The need for an early restoration of peace in Cambodia and Laos was emphasised by Deputy Foreign Minister Chatichai in a statement prior to departing for a special meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers in mid-February.\(^{101}\) In late March he followed this up with visits to Vientiane and then Phnom Penh. By mid-April Chatichai had focused specifically on Cambodia - which unlike Vietnam and Laos had no arrangements for a cease-fire - as the main problem area in Indochina.\(^{102}\)

Concerned about the political situation in Phnom Penh, Chatichai and other Thai leaders publicly advocated a coalition "government of national unity" to reduce intense factional rivalries, and expressed approval when this was formed in late April - though probably more as a result of U.S. rather than Thai pressure.\(^{103}\)

Thai diplomatic proposals at this time focused on urging the implementation of a cease-fire in Cambodia, the withdrawal of around 40,000 DRV troops, and allowing Cambodia to settle their own problems. Later in the year this was accompanied by calls for the U.S., USSR and PRC to guarantee Cambodian neutrality.\(^{104}\)

In June 1973 Thailand gazetted claims to its continental shelf, parts of which overlapped with
long-standing Cambodian claims. This reflected the failure of a joint committee on fisheries set up in January 1972 to deal with such issues, and was quickly followed by several fishing disputes. The Thai action probably also indicated concern that communists might soon seize power in Phnom Penh, making it urgent to establish legal claim to an important fishing ground, and an area where oil had recently been discovered.

By August 1973 Thai leaders were publicly admitting the possibility of a communist takeover. Their response to this was shown particularly in efforts to establish the basis for accommodation with a future communist government by seeking some form of reconciliation with Sihanouk. In early September a daughter and son-in-law of Sihanouk visited Bangkok and were looked after by Thai officials. Shortly after it was revealed in the press that Thailand had been giving "humanitarian assistance" to Sihanouk’s family left behind in Phnom Penh, including payment of medical and housing expenses for Sihanouk’s mother. Though there were different views on the usefulness of the "Sihanouk card", Thailand continued to provide assistance to Sihanouk’s relatives until the fall of the Lon Nol government. It refused, however, to recognise Sihanouk’s government in exile, a condition Sihanouk set as a prerequisite for friendly relations after his return to power.

The fall of the Thanom government in October 1973 improved bilateral relations, for a while at least. A spokesman for the Lon Nol government welcomed Thanom’s
ouster, claiming that under this government Thai businessmen had ruthlessly exploited forests along the Thai-Cambodian border, but could not be touched because of their close ties with government leaders. Furthermore, Narong Kittikachorn, Thanom’s son, had exploited Cambodia’s rice shortage by selling to them at exhorbitant prices.\textsuperscript{110}

The Sanya government gave a warm welcome to the Cambodian Foreign Minister when he called at Bangkok in March 1974. It promised to continue with recognition of the Phnom Penh government, and the provision of military training and humanitarian assistance. It also agreed to offer a venue for negotiations between the Lon Nol government and opposing Sihanoukists and communists.\textsuperscript{111} At the UNGA in October Thailand joined with other ASEAN countries in requesting that Cambodians be allowed to solve their own political problems peacefully, free from outside interference in any form.

On 1 January 1975 Phnom Penh came under rocket attack, and from this time few Thai officials were under any illusion that the Lon Nol regime could survive long. When the Kukrit government assumed office in March it sought to accommodate to the inevitable, in a manner as close as possible to Thai interests.

The new government pledged on its inauguration not to interfere in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries. After a meeting of the National Security Council on 21 March government leaders declared that the U.S. would not be allowed to carry out its airlift of
crucial logistic support to Lon Nol from Thai bases.\textsuperscript{112} It soon became apparent, however, that declaratory policy was not the same as the situation on the ground. Journalists pointed out that Thai authorities could not implement policy because sections of American bases were off-limits to them.\textsuperscript{113} In late March journalists observed thirty nine official Express Transport Organisation trucks, under Defence Ministry instructions, carrying weapons from the U.S. base at Korat to Sisophon and Battambang in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{114}

The Kukrit government continued with efforts to facilitate a negotiated settlement between all factions. In this context it welcomed the U.S.-inspired departure of President Lon Nol at the beginning of April. When Prime Minister Long Boret later passed through Bangkok the foreign ministry advised him to arrange the appointment of one of Sihanouk's sons as prime minister, arguing that such a person would be able to negotiate with both sides.\textsuperscript{115} Talks were also arranged in Bangkok between Long Beret and communist Khmer Rouge officials.\textsuperscript{116} At this late stage, however, such initiatives clearly had little chance of success. They were, in the event, rejected by Cambodian authorities after Long Boret's return to Phnom Penh.\textsuperscript{117}

By late March Thailand faced a new problem when refugees from Cambodia began to cross into Thailand. As previously noted, Thailand took strong steps to discourage the inflow, but was unable to prevent some thirteen thousand Khmer crossing the border in a few weeks around mid year. Thai policies may have helped slow the exodus,
but they did little to improve relations with the new Khmer Rouge (KR)-led Cambodian government. Both countries considered the presence of the refugees a security risk - the KR because they were overwhelmingly opponents of the new regime, and Thailand because it feared the presence of fifth columnists and KR incursions against the camps. The refugee issue thus remained a festering sore, occasionally causing public conflict, throughout the period under review.

THE KHMER ROUGE PERIOD

The non-communist government in Phnom Penh surrendered to the Khmer Rouge-led forces of the Royal Government of National Union on 17 April. Thailand announced its recognition of the new government, simultaneously with ASEAN as a whole, on 18 April. No acknowledgement was forthcoming from the new government in Phnom Penh. The Mayaguez incident that followed in mid-May was a major embarrassment to Thailand. Strong Thai protests against the U.S. action did not go unnoticed by the KR, but opportunities for detente were set back several weeks.

Phnom Penh authorities issued their first foreign policy statement on 19 May. This included a critical reference to Thai involvement in the Mayaguez incident, but also a strong affirmation of Cambodia's desire to pursue an independent and non-aligned foreign policy, and to live peacefully with all neighbouring countries. It concluded with the hope that "the two countries - Cambodia and Thailand - should live at peace forever as
neighbouring countries within their respective borders." A commentary on Phnom Penh radio a few days later reiterated such views. Thai authorities appear to have been encouraged, but remained wary. Any chance for improving relations was, however, negated by constant small-scale armed skirmishing along the border from late May till the end of June. In most instances these were apparently the result of incursions by KR soldiers in search of food.

The KR again indicated a desire to improve relations on the eve of Kukrit's trip to Beijing to formalise the establishment of Thai-China diplomatic relations. A Phnom Penh Radio broadcast on 28 June claimed that reports of Cambodian violations of Thai territory were an imperialist trick and stressed that the Cambodian and Thai peoples would defeat this and continue their resolute tradition of being good neighbours. Kukrit sought to follow this up in Beijing, asking Chou En-lai to inform Sihanouk of Thailand's wish to establish friendly relations and direct contact with Cambodia, and hope that he would soon return home. Chou agreed to intercede, and there is evidence of China doing so over subsequent months.

Phnom Penh radio responded by noting that friendly ties between the Cambodian and Thai peoples had improved daily. Kukrit's visit to the Philippines (21-24 July), during which he stressed a policy of friendship to all Indochina countries, and announced the phasing out of SEATO, led to further improvement. Phnom Penh Radio welcomed the pledges, and declared that "since last week
there had been the best atmosphere ever for prospects for good relations between Cambodia and Thailand.\textsuperscript{123}

In September Foreign Minister Chatichai and Thai officials held talks with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary at the UN. Sary accepted an invitation to visit Bangkok in October, and held preliminary discussions on purchasing fuel and oil from Thailand.\textsuperscript{124}

Ieng Sary visited Thailand from 28 October to 1 November. Negotiations proceeded smoothly, and the joint communique issued at the end of talks declared that:\textsuperscript{125}

- diplomatic relations would be established immediately, and ambassadors exchanged at a later date
- traditional links, cultural similarities and geographic proximity made it necessary to maintain amicable and good neighbourly relations
- bilateral relations would be based on the principles of Pancasila, with particular stress placed on recognising and mutually respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each on the basis of existing frontiers
- close cooperation would be developed in the area of economics and commerce, the modalities to be discussed at a later date.

The refugee issue was also discussed, and Sary noted that the two sides had agreed that those unwilling to be repatriated would not be allowed to engage in any kind of political activities. In addition, Thai spokesmen indicated that until the exchange of ambassadors liaison offices would be established at the border, Aranyaprathet on the Thai side, Poipet in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{126}

Foreign Minister Chatichai met with Ieng Sary for the first meeting between the respective border committees on 17 November. Mutual reassurances of peaceful intentions were again exchanged, and agreement was reached on a local
level joint border liaison committee. Cambodia asked Thailand to sell it fuel and salt, and expressed interest in selling timber and freshwater fish in return. Both sides sought maximum publicity for the meeting. Forty local journalists accompanied the Thai delegation, and received a luncheon hosted by Sary in their honour.127

These developments highlighted a greater willingness to normalise relations with Thailand on the part of the Khmer Rouge, compared to Vietnam and Laos, and was undoubtedly influenced by Khmer concerns to establish a counterbalance to Vietnam. However these concerns were not yet so powerful as to override all other considerations; nor was the extent of KR-Vietnamese differences yet apparent to analysts in Thailand or elsewhere. As a result, this promising start to relations was not sustained. Thai-Cambodian relations in fact rapidly deteriorated, and remained difficult for the rest of Kukrit's tenure in office. Border clashes and border demarcation questions were at the heart of these difficulties, but refugees and the remaining U.S. presence in Thailand also frustrated detente.

On 25 November KR soldiers crossed the border twice - apparently in search of food - near the village of Non Mak Mun, Prachinburi province, and clashed briefly with Thai Border Patrol Police.128 Over the next few weeks there were many similar incidents, including one on 12 December when seven Thais were injured following a 100-strong KR incursion at the village of Ang Sila, close to Non Mak Mun.129 At a meeting of the joint border liaison
committee held to discuss these incidents KR officials claimed that Ang Sila and several adjoining areas were in its territory. While debate over border demarcation went on the two sides agreed to a cease-fire on 15 December. Some skirmishing continued after this date, but there were no major clashes until late January.

Prime Minister Kukrit and Foreign Minister Chatichai sought to downplay these incidents in the face of strong media comment and murmurings from sections of the military. They ruled out the despatch of additional troops to the conflict area, and attributed the clashes to the activities of former Cambodian Prime Minister In Tam, who was then living near the border with Cambodian refugees. In Tam was brought to Bangkok on 17 December, and forced to leave the country five days later.

Relations nonetheless received a further setback when Cambodia and Laos issued a joint communiqué following a Foreign Ministers meeting in Phnom Penh on 19 December. The two countries pledged to "actively unite in supporting all peoples...of the world who are struggling against imperialism" - a phrase many Thais interpreted as meaning support for the Communist Party of Thailand - and strongly criticised both the retention of U.S. military bases in Thailand, and Thailand's policy of allowing Cambodian and Lao "traitors" to remain in the country. This caused Chatichai to postpone plans to meet with Ieng Sary.

Relations between the two countries in the last weeks of December and early weeks of January marked time. On the positive side, deliveries of 20,000 tons of Thai rice (sold at a "friendship price") crossed the border during
December and the first half of January. The new year opened with Cambodia formally adopting a new constitution that abolished the monarchy - an unwelcome if not unexpected development in Thailand - and renaming the country Democratic Kampuchea (DK). A border committee meeting on 29 January focused on improving commercial relations generally, and included Thai agreement to supply 30,000 additional tons of salt, this time at the market rate.\textsuperscript{132} But the atmosphere of the meeting was strained by the deaths of three police officers two days earlier, and the resulting Thai protest against KR soldiers planting booby traps on Thai soil.\textsuperscript{133}

With tensions on the border remaining high, Chatichai resumed efforts to meet with Ieng Sary. Agreement was reached on a 27 February meeting, but talks were again aborted due to a clash between DK naval and Thai fishing vessels a week beforehand.\textsuperscript{134} Shortly after DK authorities claimed that U.S. planes had bombed Siem Riep on 25 February and returned to Thailand. This was quickly denied by Kukrit, who reaffirmed that all U.S. combat aircraft had been withdrawn from Thailand.\textsuperscript{135} A week later the Governor of Sisaket province alleged that 30 Thais had begun a six month training course for a communist "Siam" organisation in Oddar Meanchey, and would later be sent back for sabotage\textsuperscript{136} - the first of many such claims over the next few years. The Kukrit government lasted just long enough to see the formal consolidation of communist control in Cambodia in early

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April, following elections and the inauguration of a new government. When the Seni government took power Foreign Minister Bhichai moved quickly to implement policy of normalising diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries in Indochina. By early May the border liaison committee, which had been inoperative for several months, was re-established as a first step towards normalising relations with Cambodia. This was followed on 16-17 June, by a meeting between Bhichai and Ieng Sary at Sisophon, unpublicised until after the event. Agreement was reached on taking "positive measures" to develop principles in the 31 October 1975 joint communiqué, erecting additional markers and when necessary surveying areas where the border was indistinct, and taking measures (unspecified) leading to the establishment of embassies in Phnom Penh and Bangkok. In addition Ieng Sary promised to give consideration to representations on the problems of Thai fishing boats detained by his government, and measures to reduce the Khmer refugee problem.\textsuperscript{137}

While the meeting was short on concrete agreements, it does seem to have improved the atmosphere between the two countries. Conflicts continued on the border, but these were not on the same scale and did not attract anything like the same publicity accorded disputes with Laos. Reflecting a slowly improving relationship Thailand opened the border for trade at the Aranyaprathet-Poipet crossing on 13 September. The short tenure of the Seni government, however, prevented any other moves towards détente.
CONCLUSION

Apart from the Lon Nol period, Thai-Cambodian relations were generally difficult. Systemic factors played an important part in this. Thai hostility towards Cambodia during the Sihanouk period was to a very considerable extent caused by Cambodia's close relations with China and the DRV. Similarly, support for Lon Nol, and U.S.-RVN actions in Cambodia at that time, reflected support for anti-communist policies pursued by Lon Nol. Also, the decision not to send troops to Cambodia in the 1970s was largely a response to U.S. inability to provide financial backing for such an operation. Finally, as was the case with Vietnam, the move towards detente with the communist led opposition from 1973 was caused by the changing balance of forces in Indochina as a whole - increasing communist strength and a decreasing U.S. role. The subsequent opening of relations with the new communist government was facilitated by improved Thai relations with China, as well as the Cambodian government's desire to maintain independence from Vietnam, though continuing Thai-U.S. cooperation remained an obstacle to rapprochement.

National influences, however, were as important, if not more important, as long as Sihanouk remained in power. Sihanouk was seen in traditional terms as a Cambodian who could not be trusted, and he reciprocated in his feelings towards Thailand. The most important dispute while he was in power centred on the seemingly minor but symbolic issue of the border temple of Phra Viharn. Thailand refused to
accept the ICJ decision against it without reserving the right to further action at a subsequent date; Sihanouk would not agree to reopen diplomatic relations while this reservation remained. Support for the "Free Khmer" was probably also seen in traditional terms as one of providing assistance to an opposition group who had some potential to exercise influence in the future. Frequent border clashes between the two countries were also partly related to the indistinct border, its distance from the seat of power in both Bangkok and Phnom Penh, and the rugged and inhospitable terrain of the surrounding region.

Finally, decision-making influences also helped chart Thai policy towards Cambodia. The importance of Sarit in formulating foreign policy, and his personal conflict with Sihanouk, accounted for a good deal of the mutual hostility. Conflict between the foreign ministry and military leaders in mid 1970 also had an important effect on Thai policy. Thanat’s reluctance to become involved without U.S. support forced the military to reconsider the issue, and eventually to pursue the same course. The move towards detente with Khmer communists, which began tentatively in 1973 and gathered momentum quickly in 1975, was facilitated by the growing importance of the foreign ministry in the overall policy making process.

2. Thailand's area of 514,000 square kilometres compares with 181,000 for Cambodia. Other statistics are distorted by armed conflict in the 1970s, but the following are illustrative: GNP in 1971 was U.S.$7 billion for Thailand, as against $1.5 billion for Cambodia; while in the mid 1970s Thailand's population was 42 million and armed forces 211,000 compared to 8 million and 90,000. (Far Eastern Economic Review [FEER], Asia Yearbook, various editions.)


5. Government of Thailand, "Relations Between Thailand and Cambodia", undated White Paper, p.1


9. In 1954, when Police Chief in Surin province, Police Major General Chana Samutvanija was ordered to establish contact with the Free Khmer by Police head General Phao. He maintained contact until the overthrow of the Phibun government in 1957, when his role was taken over by a section within the military Supreme Command. Interview with Police Major General Chana, Liberty Hotel, Bangkok, 22 March, 1978.


15. The Gussing mission resulted in an agreement that both sides cease media attacks on each other, but this was never implemented in practice. The De Ribbing mission came up with a nine-point proposal, based largely on the UN-sponsored 1960 agreement, which elicited little response in either country and was formally rejected by Bangkok. Cambodia vetoed a proposed six month extension of this mission.


19. The full case, and several Thai comments, are reproduced in FAB, Vol.1, No.6, June-July, 1962.

20. Ibid., pp.128-129.

21. Ibid., p.130.

22. Ibid., pp.131-142.


26. Sihanouk had initially warned that if the U.S. would not accept his proposal he would conclude a military alliance with China and the DRV. He also demanded that Thailand (and others) go to discuss the proposal in Phnom Penh; the proposal had to be accepted without substantial change; and a reply had to be given by the end of the month. Loc.cit. and FAB, Vol.III, No.4, February-March, 1964, pp.443-444.

27. See Recent Diplomatic Exchanges Concerning the Proposal for an International Conference on the Neutrality and Territorial Integrity of Cambodia.
Presented to the British Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by command of Her Majesty, June 1965, p.12.


29. Recent Diplomatic Exchanges..., p.4.


31. See for instance Bangkok World 5 April, 21 June, 11 and 17 September, and 2-3 November, 1966.


38. See Directorate of Intelligence report, dated 30 September 1964, as identified in Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalogue, Carrollton Press, Washington, 1979, p.23B.


40. Bangkok Post, 21 and 29 December, 1965.


42. Ibid., 10 February, 1966.

43. Directorate of Intelligence, op.cit.

44. Le Monde, 6 May, 1967.


49. Ibid., annex XXV, p.60. The note wrongly accused Sarit of having made his remarks in the presence of the diplomatic corps.

50. Ibid., p.25

51. A Thai White Paper makes the unlikely claim that, shortly after "communist infiltration into this country became very active". It goes on to state that "In the interest of national security, a state of emergency was proclaimed on August 5, 1958, in certain provinces bordering on the frontier, and police patrols had to be reinforced". Government of Thailand, "Relations Between Thailand and Cambodia", pp. 5-6.

52. Siam Rath Weekly Review, 14 January, 1960, reports the first of these threats.


55. Ibid., 4 and 15 September, 1965.

56. Ibid., 22 October, 1965.

57. Ibid., 21 November, 1965.

58. Loc.cit.


62. Ibid., 12 April, 1966.

63. Ibid., 25 and 27 April, 1966.

64. Bangkok Post, 5 November, 1966.

65. Bangkok World, 2 and 5 April, 1966.


69. FEER, Yearbook, 1968, p.337.

70. Bangkok World, 3 April, 1969.

72. Ibid., 3 April, 1969.
73. Ibid., 22 May, 1969.
76. Ibid., p.438-439.
77. Thanat's speech to the meeting is reproduced in Ibid., pp. 430-434. He failed, however, to obtain agreement that the Security Council be approached to send observers to Cambodia, and if it failed to do so the conference itself send observers.
84. Loc.cit.
85. Ibid., p.25.
89. Ibid., 16 August, 1970.
90. Ibid., 22 and 25 August, 1970.
92. FEER, Yearbook 1971, p.325.
96. Loc.cit.


100. See Lowenstein, J.G. and Moose, R.M., "Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam: April 1973", pp. 30-31. This congressional report records that: "between September 20, 1970 and March 30, 1973 a total of 5,790 Cambodian personnel had been trained in Thailand - 28 by the U.S. Army (at an Intelligence Staff Officer Course in Bangkok) 9 by the U.S. Air Force (all AU-24 pilots), 137 by the Royal Thai Army and U.S. Special Forces together (all in unconventional warfare) and the rest by the Thai Army and Air Force. As of March 30 there were 247 Cambodians in training in Thailand - 29 were being trained by the U.S. Army in Bangkok in POW interrogation, 68 AU-24 pilots, gunners and maintenance people being trained by a U.S. Air Force mobile Training Team at Taklhl, 143 were being trained in unconventional warfare by the Thai Army, 4 were in Thai Army ranger training and 3 student pilots were being trained by the Thai Air Force".


104. Ibid., 2 and 10 September, 1975.


108. This was pursued actively by the foreign ministry, but others were more sceptical. Views attributed to "policy planners" - presumably intelligence or military officials - ruled out the possibility of Sihanouk playing a significant role in any communist government. Bangkok Post, 21 September, 1973.


113. Loc.cit.

114. Ibid., 3 April, 1975.


116. USIS-CNCT, "Foreign Minister Chatichai Chunnawam’s News Conference (Erawan Hotel, 7 April, 1975)".


120. Ibid., FE/4946/A3/6.

121. In late August China informed Thailand that Sihanouk would be attending UNGA, and expressed the hope that he would be able to meet the Thai Foreign Minister there (Ibid., FE/4992/A3/2-3). An editorial in the Bangkok Post, 19 September, 1975, acknowledged Chinese assistance in improving Cambodian relations with Cambodia. China also provided a plane for Ieng Sary’s late October-early November visit to Bangkok.


124. See for instance reports in Prachachat, 10 September, 1975.


133. FBIS, 5 February, 1976, J 2.

134. For contrasting Thai and DK accounts of the incident see FBIS, 23 February, 1976, J 1 and FBIS, 26 February, 1976, H 1.


136. Ibid., FE/5167/A3/5.

CHAPTER 7
LAOS: THAILAND'S CORDON SANITAIRE

THE SETTING

Diplomatic relations between Thailand and Laos were established on 28 February 1950. Representation was accredited from Saigon until a resident mission was opened on 19 December 1953,\(^1\) shortly after Laos obtained full independence. Unlike Vietnam and Cambodia, diplomatic relations were maintained without any breaks in the period under review.

Thailand greatly exceeded Laos in all aspects of national power. It was over twice as large in area, had over ten times the population, and overwhelming economic and military superiority.\(^2\) As in the case of Cambodia, the strategic location of Laos between Thailand and Vietnam made it inevitable that these two larger countries would compete for influence there, and that Thai-Lao relations would be affected by this.

The 1500 kilometre border dividing Thailand and Laos was also an important factor in bilateral relations. Under a 1893 treaty with France the Mekong River was made the border between the two countries, with all islands in the river also going to Laos. The Mekong has remained the main dividing line, but in 1902 and 1907 the provinces of
Sayaboury west of the Mekong in the northern border region, and Bassac in the south, were also transferred to Laos. In 1926 a further Franco-Thai convention defined principles by which the Mekong boundary would be determined. This decreed that where only one channel existed the thalweg marked the boundary, but where there was more than one the thalweg nearest Thailand was the dividing line. A map was drawn up after a Franco-Thai commission delineated the river border in 1931, with eight "islands" designated as belonging to Thailand by virtue of being alluvial deposits connected to the Thai shore rather than islands proper. Such complicated provisions subsequently led to several disagreements over where the border was located, and repeated Thai attempts to shift the border to the thalweg of the main channel so that it could navigate the river all year round. There were similar complexities with the land border, but these only gave rise to conflicts after the period of this study.

Thais and Laotians share many socio-cultural similarities. The population of Laos is equally divided between several hill tribes - who have their counterparts in Thailand - and the politically dominant lowland Lao. The Lao are ethnically and culturally identical to inhabitants of Thailand’s northeast, and parts of the north. There are, in fact, over six times the number of Lao in Thailand as in Laos. The Lao language is a dialect of standard Thai, and the two are mutually intelligible. Buddhism, and many cultural traditions in the two countries, are identical. Family ties and social contacts extend freely across the border, facilitated by the Mekong
River, which is a traditional artery of communication. Such similarities led to many close friendships between political leaders in both countries - closer than those with any other country, until communist influence became predominant in Laos around the end of 1974.

Economic ties between the two countries were not of major significance to Thailand (see Appendix III), but were to Laos. A survey in the 1970s found that Thailand accounted for 65% of Lao exports, while in 1973 exports, re-exports and transit goods from and through Thailand accounted for 98% of Lao imports.4 As a landlocked country Laos depended heavily on communications through Thailand - rather than much less developed alternatives through Vietnam or Cambodia - and was constantly critical of freight charges by the Thai government’s Express Transport Organisation which had a monopoly on the route. In addition, Thais controlled many of the businesses operating in Laos, Thailand extended significant economic aid to Laos,5 and the main results from the ambitious UN-sponsored Mekong Project, started in 1957, came from Thai-Lao cooperation in this committee.6

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Prior to French intervention in the late nineteenth century the area of Laos was a region in which Thailand generally exerted a dominant influence, but often competed with Annam, and to a lesser extent Burma. Successive Laotian states differed little from neighbouring northern and northeastern principalities in their relations with Ayuthia and Bangkok.
Laos has no known independent history prior to the mid fourteenth century. Parts of it were probably incorporated in Funan from the first to the sixth century, most of it in Angkor from the ninth century, and parts under Sukhothai in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. The kingdom of Lan Chang established at Luang Prabang in the mid fourteenth century established influence over much of north and northeastern Thailand down to Cambodia. In the early sixteenth century its capital shifted to Vientiane. This kingdom maintained a precarious existence over the next century and a half, experiencing direct rule from Burma for over twenty years (1567-1591). Vientiane reached the height of its power under the reign of Souligna-Vangsa (1637-1692), following which Laos became a theatre of rivalry between Thailand and Annam.

In 1700 a Lao claimant to the throne who had spent all his life in Hue captured Vientiane with the assistance of a Vietnamese force. Seven years later the new king failed to capture Luang Prabang, and from that time two separate and mutually hostile states existed. In addition the smaller areas of Tran Ninh (in the region of the Plain of Jars, bordering Annam) and Bassac in the south also had a degree of independence, the former often under Annamese influence and the later Thai. The influence of Thailand became predominant in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when Thai armies defeated Vientiane on two occasions - 1778, in response to an alliance between Vientiane and Burma, and 1827 when the Vientiane
ruler, Chao Anou, sought to invade and capture Bangkok. Chao Anou obtained support from Annam to regain Vientiane, but was unsuccessful in his campaign, captured in Tran Ninh, and handed over to Thailand. Annam then seized and publicly executed the ruler of Tran Ninh, and for a time ruled this region directly. Thai influence nonetheless continued to grow, and in 1855 the Tran Ninh region, while continuing to pay tribute to Annam, resumed tribute to Thailand.

In the 1870s and 1880s Thailand pushed further into northern and eastern Laos with a series of campaigns against Chinese outlaw bands, but its progress was interrupted by the French move into the area. Thailand was forced to cede all territory on the east bank of the Mekong, in 1893, followed by the west bank areas of Sayaboury and Bassac in 1902 and 1907, areas which the French claimed fell to them as the inheritor of an area that traditionally belonged to Annam.

The growth of Thai irredentism in the 1920s and 1930s culminated in a campaign of virulent anti-French propaganda which in August 1940 included demands for the return of Laos to Thailand. Following military conflict with France in December 1940 Thailand resumed control of areas on the west bank of the Mekong, and gained French acceptance of the thalweg of the main channel as the frontier along the Mekong river. But these concessions, as with those relating to Cambodian provinces, lasted only until November 1946.

At the end of World War II French efforts to resume control were opposed by a section of the Lao community
organised as the Free Lao. France was quickly able to reassert its authority, and the Free Lao fled to Thailand. With Thai government support headquarters were established in Bangkok, and small groups using the Thai side of the Mekong as sanctuary conducted raids into Laos. However, by 1948 the movement had lost much of its momentum. A split between supporters of Prince Souphanouvong, who was in favour of cooperating with the Vietminh, and a majority strongly opposed to this, reduction in Thai support following the Phibun coup in October 1947, and limited French concessions on self-government in Laos, all contributed to this. The Franco-Laos convention in July 1949 granting a large measure of home rule to Laos was followed by the formal dissolution of the independence movement in Bangkok and return of nearly all the Free Lao to Vientiane.

In 1953 Thai attention was focused on Laos in response to Vietminh inroads. In April the Vietminh occupied the province of Sam Neua and parts of Phong Saly, advancing to within striking distance of the royal capital Luang Prabang. On 19 April a Pathet Lao resistance government was established in Sam Neua. More alarmingly, in December the Vietminh advanced right to the Mekong at Thakhek. Although they did not stay long - the action was intended to divert French forces from Dien Bien Phu - it greatly heightened Thai fears about the threat from Laos.

Thailand indicated its concern by requesting the UN to send an observation team to view the situation on the Lao border. This, however, was vetoed by the USSR at a
hearing of the Security Council on 16-18 June, 1954. It subsequently mooted the possibility of this being raised in the UNGA, and sought a UN guarantee against outside attack as part of the condition for a settlement in Geneva, but did not press such issues after the Geneva Conference. While less than reassured by the July Geneva Agreement, it appears to have accepted, as far as Laos was concerned, that it was probably the best it was likely to get. To reiterate, communist forces were not recognised as part of the government, though allowed to regroup in the provinces of Phong Saly and Sam Neua; and Laos was designated a neutral country, but French military advisers were allowed to remain.

Political developments in Laos were also of some concern in Thailand. Prince Souvanna Phouma inherited the mantle of government after independence in October 1953, and following the Geneva Conference sought to implement its provisions on neutrality, while domestically seeking reconciliation with the communist Pathet Lao. Progress was made, until a political crisis provoked by the assassination of the defence minister led to the replacement of Souvanna Phouma by Katay Don Sasorith in November 1954. Katay shared Thai concerns about the Pathet Lao, and broke off negotiations in April 1955. Earlier, during a state visit to Bangkok in February, Katay sought to develop relations in areas such as defence, communications and trade. A number of high-level visits to Bangkok took place, most notably one by the Lao crown prince, accompanied by the prime minister and a large delegation, in late July.
In early July, Thailand was concerned by Lao claims of an attack involving at least three battalions of Pathet Lao forces, reinforced by Vietminh, on government forces in Sam Neau province. The Lao Commerce and Industry Minister, visiting Bangkok at the time, warned that: "If Laos is attacked, Laos will expect Thailand, as its big brother, to help fight the aggressor". Thailand appears to have concluded that no major communist offensive was imminent, but took the precaution of alerting its army in the northeast to a possible emergency on the border, and called a special meeting of the SEATO Council of Representatives. This meeting, described by Thai officials as intended only for exchanging information and views, did not lead to further action, and the "attack" was not carried further by the Pathet Lao.

Elections in Laos in December 1955 led to the return of Prince Souvanna Phouma as prime minister. In spite of Thai disapproval he reopened talks on national reconciliation with the Pathet Lao and in August 1956, with a view to gaining assurance of non-intervention in the affairs of Laos, visited China and the DRV. A U.S.-sponsored military planning meeting in July saw the Thai side unwilling to go into "too much detail...because of the forthcoming visit of the Laotian Prime Minister to Communist China". In December agreement in principle was reached with the Pathet Lao on holding supplementary elections, giving them a chance of representation in the Assembly, and establishing an interim coalition government. Despite considerable domestic opposition,
forcing Souvanna Phouma to stand down as prime minister between May and August 1957, the Vientiane Agreements were concluded on 12 November and a coalition government established six days later. Thailand expressed its disapproval by briefly closing the border. The results of partial elections in May 1958, which saw 14 of 21 seats go to the Pathet Lao or its allies (though the Pathet Lao gained only 32% of the vote), heightened Thai concern.

THE ROAD BACK TO GENEVA

From 1958 to the end of the Second Geneva Conference in July 1962 politics in Laos underwent a period of exceptional turbulence, involving not only changes of government in Vientiane but also expanded military activity by the Pathet Lao and great power intervention on behalf of non-communist and communist allies. These developments need to be explained briefly before considering Thai-Lao relations during this period.

The growing influence of the Pathet Lao through 1957 and early 1958 produced a counter-reaction by forces on the Lao right, and the U.S. In August 1958, following a crisis precipitated by the U.S. withholding funds to the coalition government, Prince Souvanna Phouma was replaced by Phoumi Sananikone. The new cabinet excluded the Pathet Lao, and all left wing members. In December a Lao military patrol was fired on in a remote, disputed part of the border with the DRV. Phoumi claimed this was part of a Pathet Lao plan to seize power, and took over emergency powers for twelve months. A new cabinet formed on 24 January 1959 was well to the right, and included military
strongman Colonel Phoumi Nosavan, a relative\textsuperscript{16} and confidant of Thai Prime Minister Sarit. In February Phoumi declared that Laos could no longer be bound by limitations on the receipt of foreign military aid imposed at Geneva, an action quickly endorsed by the U.S. which increased its aid.

The move to the right in Laos had the consequence of forcing the Pathet Lao back on to a guerrilla footing, and it began small-scale, probing actions against government forces. One such attack, on a frontier post in the Pathet Lao stronghold Sam Neua, was given considerable publicity by the government, with alleged Vietminh assistance also being highlighted. Prince Souphanouvong and 15 Pathet Lao leaders were gaoloed (only to escape some ten months later), and on 4 August a complaint lodged with the UN. This was followed by a succession of wild claims about Pathet Lao-Vietminh attacks, giving the impression that the Vietminh advances in 1953-54 were being repeated. In actual fact only limited attacks took place, but government reports caused supporters to panic, and by mid-September the Pathet Lao controlled "considerable areas in half the provinces of Laos".\textsuperscript{17}

In the aftermath of the Sam Neua incident the Lao right advanced further demands for a tough policy, causing a split between Phoumi and the more moderate Phoumi, and in late December a coup led by Phoumi. In the following months Phoumi sought to further entrench his position by holding rigged elections in April 1960. This in turn set the stage for a counter-coup by the neutralist Captain Kong Le, on 9 August. Two governments were then
established, one under Souvanna Phouma in Vientiane, which began receiving support from the USSR, and one under Phoumi and Prince Boun Oum in Savannakhet, with U.S. and Thai support. Phoumi was able to retake Vientiane by mid-December, causing Souvanna Phouma to flee to Cambodia, and Kong Le neutralists to the Plain of Jars where they joined the Pathet Lao. These developments were followed by a brief moment of panic when the Boun Oum government claimed a Vietminh invasion was taking place, involving seven battalions, but it soon became apparent that no invasion had occurred.

The Boun Oum government nonetheless soon faced difficulties on the ground. The alliance with Kong Le, and the Soviet air lift, greatly enhanced the strength of the Pathet Lao. As Toye notes: 18

. ..troops (that) had not hitherto been fit for conventional war, could now pass to the offensive....Pathet Lao forces were gathered from many parts of the country into the Plain of Jars, formed into regular battalions, encadred with soldiers of a North Vietnamese regiment brought in for the purpose, and sometimes augmented with North Vietnamese mortar detachments.

An attempt by Phoumi to move against the Plain of Jars in February made no headway, and a limited counter-attack in early March saw a disorderly retreat by soldiers demoralised by their own government's claims of Vietminh involvement. The government's position continued to weaken, with communist forces advancing to within ten miles of the strategic Mekong river town, Thakhek, by April.

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In response to these developments external powers sought to halt the escalation of conflict by reconstituting the 1954 Geneva Conference. A new enlarged conference was convened on 16 May 1961, and complex negotiations proceeded through until July 1962.

From late January 1962 much of the focus on the Laotian conflict shifted to the northern provincial capital, Nam Tha. In violation of the cease-fire agreement reached at Geneva the Pathet Lao began mortaring the town, justifying their action by claiming that it was a base for deep probes into its territory. Phoumi sought to exploit this by provoking an incident that would lead to massive intervention of outside forces on his behalf. In April he built up the base at Nam Tha, and launched probes into neighbouring Pathet Lao-controlled areas. The communists retaliated, and by 6 May had taken over Nam Tha. Phoumi’s forces rapidly retreated towards the Thai border, crossing over on 11 May.19

When it became clear that the U.S. would not intervene, and that Thailand would not continue with its aid, Phoumi was forced to recognise that a coalition with neutralists and the Pathet Lao was inevitable. By 24 June this was established, meeting an important pre-condition for finalizing a settlement in Geneva. On 23 July participants completed the process by signing the Declaration of Neutrality and attached Protocol. This reaffirmed many of the provisions of the 1954 agreement, but recognised the Pathet Lao role in government - on an equal footing with the neutralists and right wing - and stipulated that Laos would have nothing to do with SEATO.
Thailand played a major role in these activities. Its policy, largely the personal preserve of Prime Minister Sarit, was initially directed at securing U.S./SEATO intervention in Laos, and supporting successive right wing governments. By early 1962 changes in U.S. policy forced it to cooperate with Laotian neutralists, but the main emphasis remained on strengthening the right wing.

The Lao move to the right in 1958, including the establishment of the Phoui Sananikone government, was welcomed in Bangkok. In May 1959 Foreign Minister Thanat visited Laos and signed a joint declaration advocating "extending and enlarging the measures of cooperation already existing between the two countries". The signing of several agreements in areas such as customs and immigration followed.

The Pathet Lao move to guerrilla warfare was, however, a matter of great concern. Thailand reinforced and placed on alert police on the Lao border in April, and in September issued a strong call for SEATO or UN action. SEATO action was in this case forthcoming. Its Council of Representatives, the highest body outside the annual Council of Foreign Ministers, met on three occasions in the first eleven days of September. The SEATO great powers (U.S., Britain and France) sponsored a UN Security Council resolution authorising the despatch of a committee of enquiry to Laos; this subsequently reported DRV support for the Pathet Lao, but no evidence of direct
DRV aggression. On 26 September the Council of Representatives issued an uncharacteristically tough statement: "In the event of its becoming necessary to defend the integrity of Laos against outside intervention, SEATO has made preparations so as to be able to act promptly within the framework of the Manila Treaty". Though partly reassured by such acts, Thailand failed to persuade SEATO to intervene immediately. Phoumi asked Sarit for unilateral Thai assistance, but was told by Sarit that nothing could be done without U.S. help.

If the rise of Pathet Lao insurgency caused concern, the Kong Le coup in August 1960 was viewed as disastrous. General Praphat claimed there was clear evidence that the Revolutionary Group was communist; Sarit noted that it stressed neutrality, which meant "leftism", and expressed fear that it might become communist and deprive Thailand of a buffer. The border with Vientiane was closed, and no recognition extended to a new government headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma formed on 17 August.

Thailand also took more direct action to try and protect Phoumi's dominant position. Phoumi was en route from Luang Prabang to Vientiane at the time of the coup, and diverted immediately to Thailand. After discussions with Sarit he went to Savannakhet, and there cooperated with Prince Boun Oum in establishing a base to oppose the coup. On 15 August he established a Committee Against the Coup d'Etat (CACE), proclaimed martial law, and was able to withhold documents required for investing the new government headed by Souvanna Phouma. The border with Thailand adjacent to Savannakhet remained unaffected by
the closure at Vientiane, and Thai/U.S. trade and aid were forwarded in large amounts. On 31 August yet another government headed by Souvanna Phouma was announced, this time with Phoumi as Vice-Premier. The CACE was then dissolved. But on 5 September Phoumi met with Sarit again, and following this opted out of the government and reactivated the CACE. New claims of Pathet Lao and Vietminh attacks soon followed, and on 10 September Phoumi's group claimed to have seized power.

In the weeks that followed Thailand, in conjunction with the U.S., continued to build up Phoumi's position, and endeavored to undermine the Souvanna Phouma-led government in Vientiane. But Sarit was upset by the equivocal U.S. support for Thailand's position. On 14 September he criticized the U.S. for opposing direct Thai intervention. We might, he declared, find it necessary to "take our own measures." On 19 September Sarit convened a special top-level meeting on Laos, during which defence officials assured him that the Vietminh was definitely involved. Sarit indicated that he would ask SEATO to see what it could do. At the subsequent SEATO Council of Representatives meeting France and Britain opposed joint action as no hard evidence of external intervention existed. Sarit then made a nation-wide broadcast on Laos in which he again mentioned the possibility of going to war there, and his hope of Free World (i.e. U.S.) assistance. U.S. attempts to assure Thailand of support at a bilateral level provided some reassurance, but the weakness of SEATO had been demonstrated; even more so, in
the Thai view, when on 27 September the U.S. joined Britain and France in stating support for the Prince Souvanna Phouma government.

From the Thai perspective, the situation in Vientiane continued to go from bad to worse, as Souvanna Phouma began negotiations for a coalition government with the Pathet Lao, and by early November had reached a number of agreements, including an accord on the receipt of aid from the USSR. Deliveries of USSR economic and military aid began on 4 December, mitigating some of the effects of Thailand's continuing blockade (which had, however, eased slightly from early October). Thailand's relationship with authorities in Vientiane also suffered because of alleged Lao mistreatment of Thai citizens in that city, including an embassy member,29 and the emergence there of a Thai Exiles Association. The objectives of this association were variously described as the liberation and separation of northeastern Thailand, or the undermining and if possible overthrow of the Bangkok government.30

By the end of November Phoumi was almost ready to march on Vientiane. Most of the Lao military had remained loyal to him, or had by then switched to his side. A secure line of communications had been established from Savannakhet to Nongkhai (the Thai town adjacent to Vientiane) across northeastern Thailand. On 9 December Phoumi forces began to cross the river from Nongkhai, aided by artillery support from Thailand. On the same day Prince Souvanna Phouma, and many in his cabinet, fled to Cambodia. The Lao king then announced recognition of the Boun Oum/Phoumi government on 12 December. One day later
the attack on Vientiane began, and after three days it was in Phoumi's hands. Thailand, together with the U.S., was quick to announce recognition of the Boun Oum government, and offered generous medical/relief aid.\textsuperscript{31} Kong Le and his forces fled to the Plain of Jars, where they joined up with the Pathet Lao and were supplied by the USSR airlift.

Following the Boun Oum government’s claims of a major Vietminh invasion the U.S. alerted its forces in the Pacific, and announced its intention to consult with SEATO allies. Thailand supported the SEATO initiative, but found the organisation deeply divided. While the U.S. and Thailand supported Boun Oum, France and Britain continued to recognise Prince Souvanna Phouma, and were sceptical of claims about a Vietminh invasion. The most that could be agreed on at a SEATO Council meeting on 4 January 1961 was an expression of concern over Soviet intervention, and a warning that member countries would "continue to develop and maintain their readiness to fulfill anywhere in the treaty area their obligations under the Manila Pact".\textsuperscript{32}

The U.S.-Thai position was gradually eroded by the lack of any evidence that a Vietminh invasion had occurred, and the Lao government’s admission on 26 January that it had been a propaganda ploy.\textsuperscript{33} These facts were also responsible for limited SEATO interest in a request that it send observers to Laos, made by the Lao ambassador to Thailand on 23 January.

But even if a Vietminh invasion had not taken place, the rapid erosion of the right wing position placed the
new Kennedy administration in a dilemma. As previously noted, Kennedy was committed, to reducing U.S. involvement, and supporting a neutral regime in Laos, but was also anxious that U.S. prestige be upheld. He acted to stabilise the military situation on the ground by providing logistic support to Phoumi's troops, threatening further intervention if necessary, and warning the USSR and China that a communist takeover of Laos would not be permitted. At the same time, however, Kennedy supported a Cambodian proposal for an international conference on Laos, already endorsed by the Soviets, once the communist side had agreed to a cease-fire.34 The conference eventually commenced in May, by which time three fifths of the country was in Pathet Lao-Neutralist hands.35

Thai policy throughout this period was aimed at securing U.S. support for the Boun Oum government. In January and February several articles in the Thai press strongly praised the U.S. role.36 Thai leaders denied they were opposed to "genuine neutrality", but claimed that Souvanna Phouma was too sympathetic to the communists to achieve this. A related concern - perhaps growing out of the division of Vietnam following the 1954 Geneva Conference - was to ensure that there was no acceptance of the status quo leading to a divided Laos. By March Thai leaders were concerned that British proposals for reconvening the Geneva Conference, which had U.S. support, could lead to such an outcome.37

Yet, despite the magnitude of changes in Laos, and some unease over U.S. support for negotiations, Thailand was generally confident, until the end of March, that

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strong U.S. and international support provided an effective guarantee of its own security. A communique issued after the SEATO meeting in late March was viewed as a clear warning, albeit in polite diplomatic language, that SEATO would intervene militarily if negotiations failed. However over the next two months further military deterioration, heightened concern over the security situation in the northeastern region bordering Laos, and the U.S. retreat from intervention following the Cuban Bay of Pigs debacle, led to a rapid erosion of confidence.

If Laos as a whole was regarded as of strategic importance for Thailand, the border towns along the Mekong were the areas of greatest concern. The Pathet Lao offensive to within ten miles of Thakhek during April, prompted Sarit to declare that Thai forces were prepared to go into action immediately if attacked. The Pathet Lao and its DRV allies appear to have been aware of Thai sensitivities, and on this occasion, and many subsequent occasions, halted operations some distance from the Mekong.

Thai concern about events in Laos was also heightened by discovery of a plot to detach the northeastern region from the rest of the country, and join forces with the Pathet Lao. Its leader, Krong Chandawong, a former member of parliament and a prominent regional figure, was arrested along with one hundred others in early May, and summarily executed at the end of the month. The discovery of such a plan in an area that was the most economically
backward of Thailand’s major regions, and had a tradition of resistance to Bangkok, preoccupied Thai leaders for some time. A series of further arrests, involving ninety one people, were carried out in December.

U.S. willingness to involve itself in the region suffered a setback with the Bay of Pigs incident in April. The failure of this operation strengthened the Kennedy administration’s reservations about direct intervention in Laos, and its commitment to a negotiated settlement. On 4 May U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Harriman sought to persuade Sarit to support a tripartite coalition headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma. Although there was a rare instance of disagreement on this issue - with the influential adviser Luang Vichit Vadamakarn supporting the inclusion of Prince Souphanouvong in government so he would not set up an independent administration - Sarit refused to change his position. Thai faith in the U.S. was partly restored on 16 May when Vice-President Johnson visited Bangkok, declared "The time for pussy footing around has passed", and promised additional military and economic aid. It appears that he also raised the possibility of sending U.S. forces to Thailand, but Sarit ruled this out. The goodwill created by this visit was, however, soon to be undermined by other U.S. actions.

Thailand participated in the Geneva Conference with considerable reluctance, delaying participation by a week over the absence of an effective cease-fire, and withdrawing between 12-27 June 1961 while right wing Lao parties were excluded. It pursued an isolated campaign,
without U.S. backing, on behalf of the Boun Oum government. Its main objectives both of which it failed to achieve were to secure recognition of this government as the sole legal government in Laos, and to ensure the effective implementation of the cease-fire there, mainly through strengthening the position of the ICC. Any hopes Thailand may have entertained of persuading the U.S. to change its position on Boun Oum must have been dashed by the U.S.-USSR summit in June, where both sides pledged support for a "neutral and independent Laos under a government chosen by the Laotians themselves". The clear message from this agreement was that Boun Oum would not be acceptable.

Apart from participating at Geneva, the remaining months of 1961 were taken up with strengthening the position of General Phoumi's forces on the ground, supporting the legitimacy of the Boun Oum government diplomatically, and pressing the U.S. to initiate the reform of SEATO and provide an even stronger bilateral guarantee of Thai security.

Thailand provided assistance for the expansion of right wing forces during the cease-fire, and continued to provide logistic support over the following months, even up to January-February 1962 when the U.S. withheld aid in an attempt to pressure Phoumi into agreeing to a coalition with neutralists and the Pathet Lao.

Diplomatically, Thailand also made its support for Boun Oum clear. Harriman again met with Sarit in late September, and again his efforts to gain backing for
Prince Souvanna Phouma were rebuffed.\(^49\) When Laotian groups in Geneva reached agreement in principle on the formation of a coalition in October 1961, Sarit described this as a "victory for the communists".\(^50\) In early January 1962 Sarit declared that if Souvanna Phouma became prime minister, Laos would turn communist,\(^51\) sentiments that were reiterated by Defence Minister Thanom later in the month.\(^52\)

At the same time Thailand increased diplomatic pressure on the U.S. in an attempt to get it to strengthen its commitment to Laos, and formalise a bilateral commitment to Thailand. On 19 July 1961 Thanat addressed the American Association of Thailand, and warned that unless a stand were made in Laos communists would use this as a jumping off point for the rest of Southeast Asia.\(^53\) In September Thailand turned its attention to the importance of reforming SEATO. Sarit criticised the lack of purposefulness shown by SEATO in a speech commemorating the seventh anniversary of the Manila Pact in September,\(^54\) and diplomatic attention was focused on changing its structure by doing away with the requirement of unanimity for all decision-making. This issue was raised by Thanat in discussions with the U.S. in October, along with a related request that the U.S. pledge its willingness to defend Thailand, irrespective of positions taken by other SEATO members, if the Pathet Lao re-opened its drive to the border.\(^55\) Admiral Felt, attending the SEATO Military Advisers semi-annual meeting on 3 October was reassuring, promising that the U.S. would give full support to Thailand if invaded by the communists, even if other SEATO
members did not.\textsuperscript{56}

Nonetheless, at the beginning of 1962 the Thai and U.S. positions on Laos appeared to be some distance apart. Thailand strongly supported the Boun Oum government, while criticising the roles played by Prince Souvanna Phouma and the U.S. Logistic support to Phoumi's forces was continued after U.S. aid had been suspended. To emphasise his disillusionment with the U.S. on this issue Sarit even entered into discussions with the USSR embassy, and sent officials on goodwill missions to Moscow.\textsuperscript{57}

The Thai position began to change, however, after the despatch of a confidential letter from Kennedy to Sarit on 20 January. This requested Thai support for a peaceful settlement in Laos, both at Geneva, and in the tripartite talks taking place between the three main Laotian factions, and indicated U.S. willingness to act against the Soviets should they violate Lao neutrality in the future. While this did not address Thailand's main fears, which were the DRV and China, Sarit appears to have been impressed by U.S. resolve, and urged Phoumi and Boun Oum to continue negotiations with the other factions in Genêva.\textsuperscript{58}

This change in Sarit's position, which the U.S. had worked long and hard to produce, was consolidated over the following weeks as the U.S. moved towards granting Thailand the bilateral assurance it had sought. A cable to the ambassador in Bangkok on 23 January indicated willingness to conclude an agreement guaranteeing U.S. readiness to act unilaterally if necessary under the SEATO
agreement. However the ambassador was authorised to inform Thailand only in proportion to Thai cooperation on Laos. In a meeting with the ambassador on 24 January Sarit remained concerned about the U.S. commitment to non-communists in Laos, but after assurances on the U.S. commitment to Thailand – formalised in the Rusk-Thanat communiqué on 6 March – agreed to advise Phoumi that it was necessary to be circumspect and moderate.

Phoumi, however, refused to heed Sarit’s advice, and may have believed that it was not meant to be taken seriously: as noted, Thailand continued with military aid to Phoumi during January and February after the U.S. had stopped; and Sarit refused to put further pressure on Phoumi when the U.S. declined to prepare written contingency plans against possible failure of a future Lao coalition government.

Events at Nam Tha from late January 1962 were viewed seriously by Thai leaders, who charged that thousands of Chinese and Vietnamese troops were involved in the attack. On 10 February the government strongly condemned the "flagrant violation of the cease-fire agreement", and criticised "pro-Communist elements" for seriously reducing the chances for success of negotiations on forming a neutral coalition government. Additional troops were alerted and moved to the border on 13 March, emphasising Thai determination to defend what they saw as their own interests, even without external assistance if necessary. It also held discussions with the U.S. on joint action. The U.S. argued strongly that its troops should be sent to Thailand, and as previously noted after
two days negotiating Thailand eventually agreed. 10,000 U.S. troops, along with smaller numbers from Britain, Australia and New Zealand, were soon in the country. This helped stabilize the situation, while also demonstrating to Phoumi that direct intervention in Laos could not be expected, thus facilitating formation of the tripartite coalition which signed the Geneva Agreement on 23 July.

Thailand, however, was a most reluctant signatory to the agreement. As late as 12 July Sarit indicated that Thailand remained undecided on whether or not it would sign. When it did so a foreign ministry spokesman expressly noted that Thailand did not approve of the compromises worked out, or have confidence in guarantees designed to assure neutrality; the text of the agreement was too weak and too ambiguous.

THE POST-GENEVA DECADE

After Geneva the tripartite coalition soon began to disintegrate, with neutralists and the right wing drawn together while communists were again isolated and forced onto a guerrilla footing. The first of these developments occurred as a consequence of fighting within neutralist ranks. Differences between Kong Le supporters and pro-Pathet Lao neutralists were apparent by November 1962, and fighting broke out on 31 March. With Pathet Lao-DRV support, left wing neutralists ousted Kong Le from his major base on the Plain of Jars. He was then forced to cooperate with troops loyal to Phoumi and accept U.S. aid. At the same time several neutralist leaders in Vientiane were assassinated, causing most Pathet Lao and neutralist
cabinet ministers to leave the capital. This effectively ended the coalition government agreed on in Geneva. These developments were reinforced by events following an abortive right wing coup in April 1964. Two Pathet Lao ministers remaining in Vientiane left for the jungle, and the Pathet Lao-DRV took the opportunity of pushing the remaining neutralists from the Plain of Jars.

The next four years, from 1965 through to 1968, represented a period of relative normalcy in Laos. Souvanna Phouma consolidated his position as Laotian leader, and Lao politics acquired a degree of stability - notwithstanding the expansion of U.S. activities in Laos as part of the escalation in Vietnam, and an increase in the DRV presence to over 30,000. The DRV made construction of routes along the Ho Chi Minh trial its main priority. Armed conflicts between the government and Pathet Lao-DRV forces occasionally caused frights in Thailand, but generally took the form of communist advances in the dry season (November-April) and government forces, particularly "irregular" hill tribe army led by Vang Pao, with U.S. aerial and logistic support, regaining ground in the wet. Phoumi led an abortive coup in February 1965, after which there was only one further attempt led by airforce General Thao Ma, which failed to attract significant support. Thailand provided no aid for this attempt, but some leaders were sympathetic to General Ma, and Lao attempts to extradite him were refused; this subsequently enabled him to use Thailand as a base for a second abortive coup attempt in August 1973. Another
important Lao figure, Kong Le, was eventually overwhelmed by the complexity and duplicity of his country's politics, and left for exile in France in October 1966.

The nature of the Laotian conflict began to change in 1968. At the beginning of the year the DRV launched a "tet offensive" in Laos as well as the RVN, and for the first time maintained pressure throughout the wet season. 66 DRV soldiers in Laos steadily expanded from around 30,000 to 70,000. At the same time when the U.S. declared a partial halt to the bombing of the DRV in March, and a complete halt in October, the aerial war was shifted to Laos. The number of sorties per day increased from 120 in 1967 to 400 by 1969, and the 454,998 tons of bombs dropped on Laos through to the end of 1968 was exceeded each year until the bombing stopped in 1973. (The U.S. ultimately dropped more bombs on Laos than the total expended during World War II.) 67 The conflict escalated further in 1970 when the change of government in Cambodia halted the movement of supplies through this country, and greatly increased the importance of the Ho Chi Minh trail through Laos. The trail was of course the main theatre of rivalry as far as the DRV and U.S. were concerned, but the DRV opened up other fronts as a diversionary tactic, and made frequent offers to end its offensive if Laos called an end to U.S. bombing of the trail. In most cases the Pathet Lao-DRV got the better of these exchanges, though for a while in 1969 a Vang Pao counter-offensive, backed by massive U.S. aerial support, pushed the communists off the Plain of Jars.
In the immediate aftermath of Geneva gains by the Pathet Lao were a cause of much concern, but Thailand welcomed the cooperation of the neutralists and the right wing, and seems to have regarded the overall trend as favourable. No attempts were made to seek international support, or to lobby the U.S., as occurred during preceding years. Quiet cooperation continued, with Thailand providing bases for the U.S. to re-supply neutralist and right wing troops throughout 1963, and for the escalation of the air war on Laos in 1964.68 The main focus of attention, however, was on strengthening cooperation between the neutralists and the right wing.

Thai leaders continued to see a major security threat eventuating from Laos. When the ICC counted out only forty DRV soldiers Thai leaders were quick to indicate disbelief that the DRV was complying with obligations, and charged that 10,000 Vietminh remained.69 On 4 July 1963 51 alleged communists were arrested in the northeastern region adjoining Laos, followed by a further 90 on 18 January. Government leaders also reported rumours that the "left" in Laos had distributed a map that included the northeast as Lao territory. Both these incidents were seen as efforts by the Pathet Lao to expand southwards.70 Armed conflicts between different factions in Laos also caused Thai leaders to send troops to the border in May 1963, and May 1964,71 along with the despatch of an artillery unit to Laos.72

The Thai attitude towards the neutralists changed with surprising rapidity after Geneva. Souvanna Phouma

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made a private visit to Bangkok in October 1962, followed by three visits in the following year, and was a regular visitor thereafter. On such occasions the Thai government provided hospitality — frequently at the government rest house in the seaside resort of Bangsaen — and Souvanna invariably had private talks with Thai leaders. Kong Le also came as a guest of the Royal Thai Army in October 1963, in what was billed as a visit to show he was not a communist. Thailand welcomed the growing trend towards cooperation between the neutralists and right wing, and consciously pursued a policy of trying "in every way possible to unite every faction of Laos who resists Communist infiltration and aggression".

Nonetheless, at this stage, the right wing in Laos remained an important group in Thai thinking. The media initially welcomed the right wing coup attempt in April 1964, and Foreign Minister Thanat indicated his sympathy by refusing to join international moves to condemn the action. Only when it became apparent that the incident was really a reflection of internal conflict within the right wing — with Phoumi as the target — did Thai enthusiasm notably dampen.

A further abortive right wing coup in February 1965, led by General Phoumi, marked a turning point in the Thai attitude to the right wing. The conflict forced 20,000 Lao across the border into Thailand, and the Thai embassy was caught in the cross fire and an official killed. Thai troops were immediately brought to the border, but this time made no attempt to support their erstwhile ally. Phoumi had now isolated himself from the mainstream of the
governing neutralist-right wing alliance, and his coup attempt was quickly defeated. He escaped to Thailand where he was granted asylum, but banished to the southern city of Songkla from September.⁷⁹ Some Thai links with members of the right wing were maintained after this, but as a precautionary action in case alignments in Laos should change, and did not involve any significant material support.

The 1965-68 period of "calm" in Laos saw bilateral efforts to develop cooperative relations in a large range of areas, particularly economic issues and border security. Much of the economic discussion focused on the handling of transit freight, and freight charges by the Thai government's Express Transport Organisation (ETO). In September 1965 the Lao minister of finance complained that ETO rates were "too high".⁸⁰ The Lao acting minister of economics came to Bangkok in March 1966 seeking a lowering of costs, and establishment of a joint company.⁸¹ Amidst contradictory claims over the issue negotiations were held in July and September, the latter including a ministerial-level meeting, following which both side declared themselves satisfied. A number of measures were agreed on to expedite the flow of transit goods, and transportation costs from Bangkok to Vientiane were also marginally reduced.⁸² Two months later, however, the Lao press was strongly critical of the ETO, and Lao officials returned to the issue repeatedly in subsequent years. Apart from this, the prime minister's visit to Vientiane at the end of March 1966 - the first
visit by a Thai prime minister to Laos - included an economic affairs minister in the 25-man party, and discussions included expansion of trade, economic and technical cooperation, and construction of the Nam Ngum dam.83

Cooperation over border security was an even more prominent part of Thai-Lao relations at that time, directed particularly at suppressing communism, but also concerned with criminal activities (especially smuggling) and immigration control. In November 1965 the Thai prime minister reached agreement with his Lao counterpart on Laos suppressing communists going into Thailand, and apprehending terrorists fleeing Thailand for Laos. Thanom explained that no committees like those established for Malaysia and Thailand were necessary, as Thai-Lao border officers were in constant communication.84 In March 1967 Deputy Prime Minister Praphat noted that Thailand was concluding an agreement with Laos on joint border defence.85 And in November a military official refused to deny or confirm a press report that Laos and Thailand had launched a joint border operation, but noted that the prime minister had said the two countries were cooperating closely in the maintenance of peace and order on both sides of the border.86 The border with Laos was also "closed" in seven provinces in mid-January 1966, with exemptions only to legitimate businessmen with valid passports, during daytime and at specified points; Laos agreed to introduce similar restrictions on its side.87 To assist with immigration control, a consulate was opened in the southern town Savannakhet in 1967.88 One further
indication of the type of cooperation involved can be seen from what a Vietnamese publication described as "unequal treaties":89

The three most recent ones (March 1966, March 1968 and August 1968) give the Thai government, under the pretext of aiding Laos to combat Communism, the right to control the "Communist infiltration routes" and pursue the "rebels" who cross the border to enter Laos, etc. Thai planes are allowed to fly reconnaissance missions along the Lao border and their gunboats are free to sail up and down the Mekong.

The escalation of the Laotian conflict after 1968 did not affect all aspects of the relationship. Bilateral cooperation increased in a number of areas, particularly those relating to economics. A Thai-Lao Economic Committee was established in 1969, organised at the level of the Director-General of the Economic Affairs Department in the foreign ministry, and met annually until 1972.90 Discussion was renewed on establishing a bridge over the Mekong,91 something Laos had been urging from the 1950s, and agreement reportedly reached in March 197292 (though there was no sign of subsequent movement on this till 1989). More generally, in March 1971 Thailand decided to facilitate border cooperation by establishing consulates in Pakse and Ban Houei Sai,93 a step that was finally implemented in early 1973.

Changes in the Laotian conflict nonetheless compelled Thailand to place greater attention on security aspects of the relationship. Thai leaders made frequent claims that the situation in Laos was critical, and a threat to the country's security.94 In March 1970 a foreign ministry statement accused the DRV of intervening "massively", and
called for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference to end such conflict.95 Thailand subsequently endorsed Japanese and Indonesian attempts to seek international respect for the Geneva Conventions on Laotian neutrality.96 The RVN incursions into Laos in March 1971 nonetheless gained enthusiastic Thai support.97 The most important steps, however, were the provision of covert military forces to assist the Vientiane government. These warrant separate consideration within the broader context of covert aid provided from the 1950s.

Covert Involvement

The attitude of the Thai military to Laos in the 1950s appears to have been marked by a surprisingly limited commitment to the idea of forward defence. U.S. officials talking to Sarit in 1955 found him interested in the concept, but without any specific plans for involvement.98 Events associated with Lao political turmoil in the late 1950s, and possibly U.S. encouragement, eventually, however, led to an organised response. Following the Phoumi-Boun Oum coup in 1960, Headquarters 333 (later renamed 917) was established at the northeastern town Udorn, to channel assistance to right wing forces. As already noted, considerable aid — mainly in the form of material and use of Thai territory — was provided to Phoumi until early 1962. There was also limited direct involvement by Thai personnel, in the form of artillery support for Phoumi's recapture of Vientiane in December 1960, and by July 1961, some 99 PARU (Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit, a U.S. trained special forces

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The PARU operated largely in a training capacity in Laos, and was presumably the main Thai input into building up Vang Pao’s army in the early 1960s. However although there were reports of Thai units fighting with Phoumi, Toye found “no evidence that they did so”. A Sarit offer to deploy two battalions of Thai volunteers in March 1961 was rejected by the U.S.

The PARU remained in Laos, eventually peaking at 230, and was joined by other Thai forces in 1964. In July the Lao communist radio accused the U.S. of introducing Thai troops into the war, and the following month Hanoi reported a Lao-based Thai T-28 pilot shot down over the DRV. American officials privately did not dispute such claims, and indeed Thai artillery and T-28s (which, however, also had U.S. and Lao pilots) were credited with being largely responsible for the few military gains made up to August 1964. But the number of Thais involved would appear to have been small, as by September U.S. officials were discussing plans to “gain” Thai participation in ground action in Laos. Major Vitoon Yasawat, who took over Headquarters 333 in 1964, claims that initially only 125 Thais were under his responsibility. Forces sent into Laos at this time, and much of the time subsequently, were regular Thai soldiers, but disguised as Lao during their service in that country. Concern to ensure that all activities in Laos could be “legally disavowed and plausibly denied” presumably also limited the number of forces sent at this stage.
Over the next few years there were repeated DRV and Chinese allegations of Thai military involvement in Laos. These were routinely denied by Thai leaders, apart from a possibly unguarded acknowledgment by Foreign Minister Thanat in November 1967.\footnote{106} By the late 1960s as Pathet Lao-DRV military pressures increased, Thai "irregular" infantrymen, possibly in response to a request by Souvanna Phouma,\footnote{107} began to fight as independent units. In 1969 various sources close to the government were reported as acknowledging that Thailand had "several thousand troops", "thousands of troops", "as many as 5,000 troops" in Laos.\footnote{108} Early in 1970 Thailand offered to send an artillery battalion to relieve the threatened headquarters of Vang Pao at Long Cheng. This was accepted by the U.S., troops went into action on 27 March, and played a major role in preventing the base from falling.\footnote{109} By early 1971 congressional investigators Lowenstein and Mose placed Thai strength in Laos at 4,800.

Responding to urgent Lao requests for greater support, Thai military involvement increased to 3,800 in Laos and 5,300 training in Thailand by early 1972, 14,028 in June and a peak of 21,413 in September.\footnote{110} Thai leaders declined a Lao request for intervention by regular Thai soldiers,\footnote{111} but decided, in late 1971 or early 1972, to increase numbers by recruiting those without previous military experience.\footnote{112} From this time only about 7 percent of the troops were regular military, the rest were volunteers.\footnote{113} The figure then declined to 17,330 in April 1973, 17 battalions (approximately 9,000) in July 1973, 4,000 early 1974, and all were out by 22 May
Until November 1973 Thai spokesmen never acknowledged that the forces had any official backing, but occasionally conceded that some Thais may have crossed the border and volunteered privately. Some 800 were killed in action, while 640 taken prisoner were gradually released after September 1974.

Thai forces in Laos were paid for by the CIA at a cost of around U.S.$100 million per year at its height, until the Defense Department took over funding in 1973. U.S. officials circumvented congressional laws which from 1970 prohibited the funding of third-country troops in Indochina, by defining them as "local forces" - a claim made possible by ethnic ties and the fact that technically all were volunteers. The Thais worked closely with the other CIA-financed "irregulars" in Laos, the hill tribe army led by General Vang Pao. A direct communications supply link existed between Udorn and Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Cheng. The extent of CIA control over both the Thais and Vang Pao remains controversial, though Thai leader Major General Vitoon has denied that the CIA had any significant training or supervisory role. Vang Pao, he noted, had one U.S. adviser, but five Thai advisers, and Thais in Laos received their orders directly from Souvanna Phouma. The latter also had Thai military "aides" attached to him, to facilitate direct communication with the Thai prime minister.

Military judgements about the Thai forces have tended to be rather critical, but with strong artillery and air support they did succeed in blunting Pathet Lao-DRV
offensive. Having fulfilled this role they then quickly withdrew. Ostensibly, this was in conformity with the requirements of cease-fire arrangements in Laos, though Major General Vitoon stated bluntly that the eventual end of U.S. assistance by June 1974 was the major consideration. Perhaps both factors were involved. The relative effectiveness of cease-fire arrangements in Laos after January 1973 left the Thai forces with only a limited role, and the prospect of the U.S. cutting its support would also have weighed heavily on Thai deliberations. In addition, however, from late 1973 there was considerable critical discussion about the forces in the Thai media, and a widespread view that all should be withdrawn. The changing strategic balance in Indochina as a whole also supported the logic of such a course.

Why, it might be asked, did such large scale Thai intervention occur in Laos when it was considered but rejected for Cambodia? The availability of U.S. funding was certainly an important factor, but there were others. Thailand had a much longer history of intervention in Laos, going back to the late 1950s, and had a few thousand troops there by the end of the 1960s. Thus in the early 1970s Thailand was not faced with a question of whether or not it should intervene, but the less complex one of increasing or not increasing its forces. These developments also point to the fact that for Thailand the close ethnic ties, and the long, easily penetrated border, made Laos an even greater security concern than Cambodia. It was, in the words of long-running Foreign Minister Thanat, Thailand’s "cordon sanitaire".
ACCOMMODATING THE TRANSITION TO COMMUNISM

Once the DRV and U.S. had almost reached agreement on a settlement in Vietnam, the Pathet Lao opened substantive negotiations with Vientiane in October 1972. Article 20 of the Paris Agreement of 28 January 1973 also touched on Laos, committing the signatories to respecting the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements, including an end to all military activities. On 21 February an Agreement on Restoring Peace and Reconciliation in Laos was signed in Vientiane. This provided for a cease-fire in place from 22 February, formation of a coalition government within thirty days based on equal representation from the Pathet Lao and Vientiane sides, and the withdrawal of all foreign forces within sixty days of forming a coalition government. Moves towards establishing a coalition then proceeded slowly, with a detailed protocol on arrangements signed on 14 September 1973, and eventual establishment of a new government on 5 April 1974.

By this time the U.S. and Thai withdrawals were almost complete but some 30,000 DRV troops remained, giving the Pathet Lao a decisive edge over the Souvanna Phouma side. This was strengthened over subsequent months by a combination of political manoeuvring in Vientiane, and armed clashes. In March 1975 the communists launched a massive attack on Vang Pao, and following this organised demonstrations against the Lao right. In May right wing members withdrew from cabinet, and several, together with Vang Pao and thousands of other Laotians, fled to Thailand. This was then followed by the Pathet Lao
takeover of several Laotian towns, the abdication of the monarch on 29 November, and establishment of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (LPDR) on 2 December.

The changes at the beginning of 1973 did not make any immediate impact on Thai-Lao relations. Souvanna Phouma hurried to Bangkok to consult on the Paris Agreement, and expressed confidence in his country’s future security.120 Much concern remained about the DRV presence in Laos,121 but while Souvanna Phouma remained in charge, and violations of the cease-fire were limited, Laos seems to have been viewed as a much smaller problem than Cambodia, where Lon Nol had only a tenuous hold on power and there was no cease-fire at all. General Ma’s attempted coup in August, launched from Thailand, did not have Thai support. The government expressed its regret, assured Laos that Thailand had no part, and instituted measures to monitor right wing Lao exiles in Thailand more closely.122

The foreign ministry welcomed the protocol on establishing a coalition government in early September,123 but suspicions between the two sides began to grow thereafter. Prime Minister Thanom expressed his concern about the foreign presence in Laos,124 and an editorial in the Bangkok Post later in the month warned about the threat of the DRV taking the country over.125 Moves towards establishing a coalition government were also seen as presenting potential problems for Thailand. In February 1974 Thailand sealed part of its border with Laos to prevent infiltration.126 By early March reports in Bangkok claimed that the coalition government would demand return of the Emerald Buddha, a highly revered statue
brought to Thailand from Vientiane in 1779. Some politicians were also said to have called for the "return" of the northeastern provinces to Laos.\textsuperscript{127} A Lao spokesperson was however quick to deny both charges.\textsuperscript{128}

Aided, perhaps, by the change to a civilian government in Bangkok, the establishment of a Lao coalition government was followed by an apparent Thai attempt to seek a cooperative relationship. A major article in the \textit{Bangkok Post}, presumably reflecting government views, expressed concern at DRV unwillingness to acknowledge any troops in Laos, but urged assistance to the new government, in such areas as rice aid and ETO costs, and acknowledged that double-dealing had occurred in such areas previously.\textsuperscript{129} At the end of April cabinet approved the opening of Lao consulates in Chiengmai and the northeastern towns of Khonkaen and Ubon.\textsuperscript{130} In July the National Security Council approved establishing a Thai-Lao foreign ministers committee - to replace the Thai-Lao Economic Committee which had not met for two years - with responsibilities for both bilateral issues and seeking support from big powers for the reconstruction and development of Laos.\textsuperscript{131} In early October Laos responded to these gestures by inviting the Thai foreign minister to visit Vientiane.

Foreign Minister Charunphan's visit to Vientiane marked a new phase in bilateral relations, when he was greeted at his hotel by student demonstrations denouncing Thai "imperialism", including specifically U.S. air bases in Thailand and overcharging by the ETO. The
demonstration emphasised the extent of Pathet Lao influence over the government, and provided advance warning of the type of issues that would increasingly hold centre stage. Nonetheless the meeting itself passed off smoothly, with Thailand listening sympathetically to Lao complaints and extending aid of U.S.$750,000.132 This cooperation was carried over into the first meeting of the ministerial-level Thai-Lao Joint Committee in January, where it was agreed to expand cooperation and establish ad hoc sub-committees covering four areas, namely, economics and technical, social and cultural, transit goods transportation, and border security.133 The goodwill carried through to the installation of the Kukrit government, with the Foreign Minister Phoumi Yongvichit (from the Pathet Lao) warmly welcoming Kukrit's foreign policy. Then, however, relations rapidly deteriorated.

The fallout began with the exit of right wing members from the Lao cabinet, and the departure of some 30,000 refugees, mainly from hill tribes, by early July. Changes introduced in June to hand refugees over to international agencies and prevent any political involvement,134 did not convince Laos, which repeatedly accused Thailand of supporting right wing leaders. On 10 July the Lao government asked Thailand to close its three consulates as a "temporary" measure, claiming they feared for the lives of Thai involved because of "The continuing existence in Thailand of former rightist leaders who..., are plotting against our country".135 Four days later the consulate in Savannakhet was ransacked by demonstrators.136 In what were seen as related developments Laos fired on Thai navy
Mekong patrol boats at the beginning of July,\textsuperscript{137} and in August arrested and mistreated two Thai military attaches for alleged espionage.\textsuperscript{138}

Thailand reacted to these developments with a mixture of firmness and conciliation. The patrol boat conflict in July incorporated both these reactions, starting with a strong protest then followed up by a proposal from Foreign Minister Chatichai for joint river patrols. Laos, however, ignored this proposal, and conflicts involving patrol boats intensified as the year progressed. The arrest of the attaches led to a strong protest by Thailand, expulsion of the Lao counsellor and third secretary in Bangkok, and recall of the Thai ambassador.\textsuperscript{139} In addition the stevedores union, and ETO workers, began a boycott of all cargo for Laos.\textsuperscript{140} The attaches were released on 15 August, though subsequent allegations of mistreatment kept the issue alive for a few more days.

With the attaché issue resolved Thailand then moved to a more conciliatory approach. In response to Lao demands for the expulsion of six former Lao right wing leaders the Thai ambassador returned to Vientiane at the end of August with the message that this would be done "as soon as possible". Other right wing leaders were also ordered to move inland away from the border region.\textsuperscript{141} The six rightists were all out of the country by the end of September, but not before over 2,000 demonstrators had marched in Vientiane - during a visit by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - demanding that
the Thai government stop housing former rightist leaders, and denouncing Kukrit and Chatichai as "double faced" on the issue.\textsuperscript{142}

In subsequent months the refugee issue continued to remain an obstacle to bilateral relations, but was overshadowed by a series of incidents involving patrol boats on the Mekong. In mid September two boats clashed briefly with Pathet Lao soldiers, but no damage or casualties were reported.\textsuperscript{143} One month later Thai and Lao boats clashed in a dispute arising out of conflicting views over the location of the border, and a Lao boat was sunk. Further clashes followed, along with Thai discovery of 10 anti-aircraft and artillery pieces deployed along the Mekong opposite Vientiane pointed at Thailand.\textsuperscript{144} In mid-November Laos forced a Thai boat aground on an island in the Mekong and killed a Thai crew member. Both sides claimed that the other initiated the action, and that the island was part of their territory. Thailand immediately closed its entire border with Laos, recalled its ambassador, and sent two battalions to the battle zone.\textsuperscript{145} Strong speeches by military leaders and anti-Lao demonstrations in Bangkok followed, until Thailand successfully retrieved the crippled boat late in the month.\textsuperscript{146} Effects of the conflict nonetheless continued to be felt for some time, with both Prime Minister Kukrit and Foreign Minister Chatichai expressing a desire to amend the 1926 treaty to achieve "justice".\textsuperscript{147}

At the beginning of December conflict was intensified by the abolition of monarchy and establishment of the LPDR, reports of Lao intrusions into Thailand, and a Lao-
Cambodia joint communiqué critical of U.S. bases in Thailand and Thai support of Indochina refugees. But efforts at reconciliation by the prime minister and foreign minister, which were present even at the height of the patrol boat crisis, also came to the fore, and were eventually reciprocated by Laos. The prime minister declared publicly that policy towards Laos would not be changed by abolition of the monarchy, and despite initial government reluctance the Thai ambassador eventually presented an official letter recognising the LPDR, as requested by Laos. Chatichai also forwarded a letter to his Lao counterpart calling for dialogue. Laos in turn reiterated its desire for close relations with Thailand, informally at a diplomatic function in Vientiane, in a letter from its deputy prime minister, and through agreement to participate in a Southeast Asian music and dance festival at Bangkok in January. Kukrit then ordered the re-opening of the border at two points from the beginning of January, ignoring opposition to this from the interior ministry. Continuing Lao commitment to conciliation was also evident in the prompt denial of a reported plan to take over Thailand’s northeast, and negotiations conducted by the deputy minister of information, culture and tourism who accompanied the Lao participants to the music and dance festival. Though not achieving the Lao objective of re-opening the whole border before settling border problems, agreement was reached on setting up a ministerial-level joint border committee to normalise relations.
The friendly atmosphere and goodwill however suddenly dissipated when Chatichai handed an aide memoir to the visiting deputy minister, protesting against a border incident in which a Thai had been killed. The deputy minister described the incident as "minor", and criticised Chatichai for "bad manners", which had devalued the achievements made. Kukrit angrily retorted that "the killing of a Thai citizen is always a major incident because we are not vegetables".\(^\text{157}\)

Over the next few months Thai-Lao relations remained tense, reinforced by several further border incidents.\(^\text{158}\) A conciliatory Lao gesture in sending a deputy foreign minister to Bangkok in early April produced no changes. When Seni took over government Vientiane radio commented that this was of no significance, as the CIA controlled Thailand.\(^\text{159}\)

The Lao leadership soon, however, reviewed its assessment of the Seni government. A visit to Vientiane by a sympathetic nine-man House Foreign Relations Committee in June - nearly prevented by hostile administration and military officials at the border - brought strong Lao professions of friendship, and a promise to hold a dialogue with Thailand over the Mekong boundary.\(^\text{160}\) A formal invitation to the foreign minister was extended the following month, and the trip took place at the beginning of August.

Despite obstacles placed in the way of the delegation by cabinet rejection of a foreign ministry proposal to open the border at two more points on the eve of its departure, and Thai radio broadcasts opposing border
openings on the day of its arrival in Vientiane, a major breakthrough in Thai-Lao relations was achieved. The main topic in the three day discussions was the Mekong boundary. Foreign Minister Bhichai, after gaining the support of his prime minister, promised that steps would be taken to reopen two or three more border points on his return. Laos then agreed that the Mekong be open to free navigation by both sides - implying a willingness to amend the 1926 treaty - and become "a river of genuine peace and friendship". Other important issues agreed on included Thai recognition of Lao transit rights for its international trade, a number of steps to increase trade, the establishment of committees at different levels to resolve any problems when these occurred, and a set of general principles pledging absolute respect for each other's sovereignty, and settlement of all disputes by peaceful means. Refugees were not mentioned in the accord, but Laos agreed to support the Thai policy of repatriation. A notable feature of the negotiations was inclusion of three members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the Thai negotiating team, in recognition of the important contribution made by their earlier visit to Vientiane.

After Bhichai's return two more border points were opened by mid September, and preparations were underway to open a third. Deeply entrenched suspicious remained on both sides - in late September Lao radio condemned Thai "militarists" for preventing the normalisation of
relations but generally ties remained correct until the October coup in Thailand.

CONCLUSION

Sarit seized power in Thailand at a time when Lao communists were growing in strength, and there was increasing polarisation between Lao communists and non-communists. In 1959, forced back to guerrilla warfare by repressive policies of the Phoui government, communist influence expanded rapidly, and the situation became even more complex with the coup by neutralist Kong Le in August 1960. In the course of these events, and others leading up to the second Geneva Conference, Thailand pursued a dual policy of support for the Lao right wing, while at the same time seeking to get an assurance of U.S. support in the event of aggression against it through Laos. To a large extent Thailand was responding to communist activities in Laos, and policies pursued by other powers, particularly the U.S. Because of U.S. influence Thailand was forced, against its wishes, to allow U.S. troops to Thailand, to support neutralists and a tripartite Lao coalition, and to sign the 1962 Geneva Agreement.

In the period between the Geneva Conference and the Laotian cease-fire in 1973 Thai actions were also greatly shaped by activities of the communist powers (particularly the DRV) in Laos, and the U.S. response to them. Thailand worked closely with the U.S. in providing bases for the aerial war over Laos, and cooperated in the provision of training and sending Thai forces into Laos. Even after this period, the activities of the DRV in Laos, and

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Thailand's military cooperation with the U.S., continued to have an important influence on Thai-Lao relations. The growing DRV influence over Lao events, together with the reduction of the U.S. presence, increased the Thai need for accommodation with the DRV, but this remained difficult as long as even a residual U.S. presence remained.

But Thai policy towards Laos was not simply swept along by external forces. For a time in the early 1960s Thailand provided aid to Lao right wing forces when this was opposed by the U.S., and it agreed to stop this only after the U.S. had consented to what was in effect a bilateral security pact under the Rusk-Thanat communiqué. These examples arose out of national influences on foreign policy, namely an historical perception of potential threats through Laos, shaped by earlier conflicts with Vietnam, and by groups within Laos with foreign backing. Critics of the Thai obsession with potential security threats through Laos have highlighted the disparity in power between the two countries, but have sometimes overlooked the fact that foreign intervention, rather than Laos itself, has always been the Thai concern. Moreover Thailand's self perception as a "big brother" of Laos is based on a long history of successful interventions in the affairs of its neighbour. Social and geographical factors - including extensive social links crossing the border, and the absence of any natural barrier to contact between the two sides - reinforced such historical lessons.

Decision-making factors also had an important
influence. Top military and government leaders, including Sarit, Thanom and Praphat, took a personal interest in Lao affairs. Close relations between Sarit and his relative Phoumi on the one hand, and Souvanna Phouma’s links with Thanom and Praphat, were important factors in tying the two countries together. Indeed the military in general saw Laos as a country of key strategic importance where they could exercise direct influence, and did so by covert means over a long period. There were not, however, clear differences between the military and civilians until the 1970s. Foreign Minister Thanat claimed that he was regularly briefed on covert military activities, and supported these. As noted, however, this changed after October 1973, when the military, supported to some extent by the ministry of interior, pursued a far less compromising policy towards Laos than the foreign ministry. This complicated and slowed the process of normalising relations after the communists gained a dominant position in the Lao government towards the end of 1974.
FOOTNOTES


2. Thailand’s area of 514,000 square kilometres and population of 42.8 million (1976) compares with an area of 236,804 square kilometres and population of 3.4 million for Laos. Other indices are distorted by conflicts in Indochina, but it is illustrative that in the mid 1970s Thailand had an armed forces of 211,000 and GNP of US$18.4 billion compared to figures of 48,550 and $0.4 billion respectively for Laos. (Far Eastern Economic Review [FEER], Asia Yearbook, various issues.)


5. According to Bunyaraks Ninsanunda et.al., “During 1967-75 Thailand provided Laos with 71 scholarships, 60 man/544 months of experts in various educational fields, and other technical equipments and services to promote Laotian economic development planning. Also, in 1974-75, Thailand provided a direct grant of 5 million bahts to Laos in addition to 3 million bahts worth of glutinous rice and 7 million baht worth of small pigs”. Ibid., p.6.

6. Several dams were constructed on Mekong tributaries, leading to both sides exchanging electricity from hydro projects. The most important was the Nam Ngum dam in Laos, the first stage of which was completed in 1971, which provides around 2% of Thai electricity requirements.


12. Prime Minister Katay appears to have felt some initial discomfort at Thailand's SEATO initiative, but after discussions with Prince Wan, who stressed the intervention of the Vietminh as the motive behind Thai actions, declared his understanding of the Thai move. Ibid., 22 July, 1955.

13. Ibid., 21 July, 1955. Nuechterlein (op.cit., p.141) claims that Thailand urged SEATO to declare its concern, and that its failure to do so - because of British and French reservations - imparted an early lesson in the "difficulties of bringing the SEATO machinery into action". There is no indication of this in the Thai press at the time.


16. Most accounts describe Sarit as a cousin of Phoumi, but Surachai Sirikrai ("Thai-American Relations in the Laotian Crisis of 1960-1962") refers to him as both a cousin and an uncle (pp. 83 and 97 respectively). It should be noted, however, that in the Thai context terms such as cousin and uncle are often loosely used to describe anyone with a distant relationship.


18. Ibid., p.166.

19. Ibid., p.182.


21. The UN report noted: "the hostile elements received support from the DRV consisting mainly of equipment, arms, ammunition, supplies and the help of political cadres". Surachai Sirikrai, op.cit., p.95.


26. The U.S. had been providing covert military aid to Phoumi for some time. This was legitimised by an agreement with Souvanna Phouma on 17 October 1960, in
return for U.S. assurances that it would resume cash
grants to the prince and ensure aid to Phoumi was
used only against the Pathet Lao. Toye, H.,
*op.cit.*, pp.147, and 152-153.


28. To reassure Thailand of its support the U.S. sent
General Palmer, Director of Military Assistance to
Thailand on 25 September 1960. This was reinforced
by an administration letter handed to Sarit on 3
November reaffirming U.S. support for SEATO, and a
similar personal letter from President Eisenhower,


34. See also p.149.


36. **Siam Rath Weekly Review**, 12 January and 2 February,
1961.


40. Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of
Despotic Paternalism*, pp.203-204.


43. Toye, H. *op.cit.*, p.173, and Surachai Sirikrai,
*op.cit.*, p.212.


45. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Thailand at the Geneva
Conference on Laos*, Bangkok, 1961, and references to
Thai delegates in Part Two of Modelski, G.,
*International Conference on the Settlement of the
Laotian Question 1961-1962*, Department of
International Relations, Australian National
University, 1962.
46. Thak Chaloemtiarana, op.cit., p.249.

47. See Toye, H., op.cit., p.179 for details. Thailand provided training for a large number of Lao soldiers, particularly from the hill tribes, and interpreters for U.S. Special Forces advisers to the Lao army.


49. Ibid., p.228.


52. Ibid., 21 January, 1962.


55. Ibid., p.230.

56. Ibid., p.235.

57. Ibid., p.238.


59. Ibid., p.245.

60. Ibid., pp.250-253.

61. Ibid., pp.254-255.


68. See pp. 164-169.


70. Ibid., 26 January, 1963.


72. See p.369.


78. Ibid., 7 May, 1964.


85. Ibid., 23 March, 1967.

86. Ibid., 26 November, 1967.

87. Ibid., 16 and 20 January, 1966.


97. See p.244.


107. Major General Vitoon, head of the Thai forces, claimed that all Thai actions were in response to requests from Souvanna Phouma. (*Prachachart*, 8 September, 1974) The large scale introduction of infantrymen may also have been linked to Souvanna Phouma's reported request for Thai assistance in controlling the border in June 1969. (*FEER*, *Yearbook*, 1970, p.180)


110. Burgess, J., *op.cit.*, p.65 and Lowenstein, J.G. and Moose, R.M., "Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam: April 1973", pp.14-15. On the statistics available it must, however, be doubted that there were ever 21,413 Thais in Laos. Lowenstein and Moose elsewhere make distinctions between forces in Laos, forces in training in Thailand, and others on leave, AWOL, wounded, or missing in action. Where such a distinction is made only about one third were in Laos and one quarter on leave or otherwise missing. Major General Vitoon has also mentioned a figure of 21,000, but in most cases refers only to 16,500. All agree that at peak 30 battalions were involved, which at 500-600 per battalion would give a maximum figure of around 18,000.

111. Randolph, R.S., *op.cit.*, pp. 150-151, footnote 58.
112. Lowenstein and Moose, *op.cit.*, state that a decision to increase troop was made in the fall of 1972, but this is inconsistent with their own data which shows numbers peaking in September 1972. In September 1974 Major General Vitoon mentioned that the program had been implemented three years earlier (*Prachachart*, 8 September, 1974.), dating its origins to around fall 1971.


116. This was revealed when two "Assistant Military Attaches" were arrested for allegedly spying, in August 1975. They were former aides to Souvanna Phouma. *Bangkok Post*, 16 August, 1975.


134. See pp. 266-267.
137. Ibid., 5 July, 1975.
139. Ibid., 8-10 August, 1975.
140. Ibid., 14-15 August, 1975.
141. Ibid., 28 August and 2 September, 1975.
142. Ibid., 7-8 September, 1975.
143. Ibid., 13 September, 1975.
144. Ibid., 15 October, 1975.
145. Ibid., 18-20 November, 1975.
146. The conflict is covered in detail in FAB, Vol. XV, No. 4, October-December, 1975, pp. 31-44.
148. See p.323.
149. The prime minister and members of the foreign ministry were notably cautious in their approach to the patrol boat incident, unlike the military. See Bangkok Post, 21 November, 1975.
150. Ibid., 5 December, 1975.
151. Ibid., 10 December, 1975.
152. Ibid., 11 December, 1975.
153. Ibid., 13, 19, and 27 December, 1975.
154. Ibid., 27 December, 1975.
158. Ibid., 31 January, 3 February, and 2 April, 1976.
159. Ibid., 29 April, 1976.
160. Ibid., 17 June, 1976.

161. Ibid., 4, 6, and 14 August, 1976.

162. Ibid., 26 September, 1976.

163. For an example of such a criticism see the report by T.D. Allman in Ibid., 22 September, 1975.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION AND POSTSCRIPT

The main focus of Thai foreign policy in the period under review was on security issues. From the late 1950s for RVN and Laos, and 1970 for Cambodia, through to communist victories in 1975, the primary aim of Thai policy towards Indochina was the support of anti-communist governments. It did this largely through seeking U.S. involvement in the conflict, providing a base for U.S. activities in the region, extending its own military aid (including large-scale covert involvement in the case of Laos), and mounting a major international diplomatic effort on behalf of the RVN.

Thai policies did, however, change from the late 1960s, when there were initial indications that the U.S. might not stay the course. Adopting a two-pronged approach Thai leaders sought to strengthen the U.S. will to persist - a course which most hoped and believed would succeed in the end - while at the same time taking precautions in case the U.S. position continued to erode. Precautions included strengthening regional ties, particularly through ASEAN, and slowly effecting rapprochement with the PRC. There were also moves, tentative at first but gaining momentum after the overthrow of military government in October 1973, to distance Thailand from the U.S. and establish the basis
for a modus vivendi with communist forces in Indochina countries. These were intensified from early 1975 when communist victories began to look increasingly inevitable. Thailand acted decisively to end most military ties with the U.S., establish diplomatic relations with China, and assure neighbouring communist movements that a basis for coexistence did exist. Attempts to implement this policy ran into obstacles that were both internal—opposition from right wing groups, particularly in the military—and external—lingering Indochinese suspicions of Thai motives, complexities caused by a massive outflow of Indochinese refugees, and several border incidents. Nonetheless by October 1976 considerable progress had been made.

Relations with the region were not, however, completely bound up with security issues. In the case of Vietnam, attempts to repatriate tens of thousands of refugees in the northeast provinces was a constant preoccupation, only partly linked to the pro-Vietminh orientation of most refugees. Other issues of importance were the Buddhist crisis in 1963, when Thai authorities were extremely critical of the policies pursued by the Diem government, and a number of clashes over fishing rights in the South China Sea with both the RVN and its successors. For Cambodia, concern over Sihanouk's pro-communist neutrality was an important issue, but possibly less so than border disputes, particularly over the Phra Viharn temple, Thai support for the Free Khmer, and personal conflicts between Sihanouk and Thai leaders.
After Lon Nol's coup against Sihanouk security cooperation became the main concern, but efforts were also made to develop cooperation in a wide range of areas. Similarly, for Laos, while security cooperation dominated, attempts were also made in other areas, particularly economic cooperation, though these made only limited headway. From the mid 1970s concern over border demarcation, while partly a security issue, also reflected a long-held Thai concern with the inequity of the 1926 Franco-Thai accord on the Mekong river boundary.

What do these developments reveal about the nature of Thai foreign policy? Most accounts dealing with the period from the late 1950s through to the end of military rule stress that "Thailand allowed its foreign policy to be led by Washington, D.C.; whatever actions the Thai leadership undertook was contingent upon this consideration".¹ Several examples have been noted that might appear to confirm this view - Thailand’s decision to withhold aid to Lao General Phoumi in 1959, the sending of U.S. troops to Thailand in 1962 and Thai troops to Vietnam in 1967, and the aborting of plans to send Thai troops to Cambodia in 1970. Notwithstanding these, and close military cooperation which saw up to 48,000 troops and 750 aircraft based in Thailand, it would be an exaggeration to see Thailand as completely subservient. Thai leaders were frequently critical of U.S. policies, particularly for not taking a strong enough stand against Indochinese communism, and for trading practices that did not pay sufficient attention to particular Thai needs (such as U.S. competition with major Thai exports of rice, rubber
and tin). On rare occasions, such as providing aid to the Laotian right wing in the early months of 1962, Thailand went against U.S. wishes, for a time at least. U.S. dependence on the air bases gave Thailand considerable bargaining power, which was normally used to extract military aid and security assurances. U.S. officials, it might be noted, were constantly concerned that Thailand might reduce its cooperation. Ultimately, after the period of military rule, Thailand reduced the U.S. military presence to a maximum of 270 advisors, despite U.S. wishes to retain a substantially larger force, and unilaterally abrogated two important agreements giving the U.S. access to communications facilities in Thailand.

It remains true that in the face of growing communist strength in Indochina in the 1950s and 1960s, and a perceived threat from the PRC, Thailand sought to influence developments in Indochina, and obtain a direct bilateral security guarantee, through alliance with the U.S. This remained an important consideration throughout the period of study, though continuing communist gains and the declining strength of the U.S. from the late 1960s, together with changes in PRC diplomacy and the slowly growing importance of ASEAN, led to adjustments in Thai-U.S. relations.

But systemic factors were not the only influence on Thai foreign policy. National influences - including the diplomatic importance of alignment with more powerful states, a tradition of rivalry with Vietnam and dominance over Cambodia and Laos, and a perception of the trans-
Mekong area as the greatest threat to Thai security - also helped determine Thai policy towards Indochina. The importance of these factors remained constant during the period under discussion, but the changing systemic influences, together with changes in the pattern of foreign policy decision making, affected the way in which Thailand responded to them.

Under Sarit, foreign policy decision making rested largely in the hands of the prime minister personally, and the military - acting through institutions such as the NSC and DCI - more generally. The foreign ministry, led by a skilled and activist foreign minister, Thanat Khoman, played an important role in implementing policy, and even had a part in formulating it outside important aspects of relations with the U.S. and Indochina, areas the military regarded as of key security interest. The two sides frequently did not get on well at a personal level, and professional relations were hindered by military determination to guard all areas they considered of security importance, but they did hold a number of important values in common: both were strongly anti-communist, pro-U.S., and opposed to opening the foreign policy process to public debate or participation. Mirroring the political system as a whole, foreign policy issues were confined to a small elite.

This picture remained broadly true during successive Thanom governments. U.S. forces moved into Thailand in large numbers from 1964, and several important Thai-U.S. military agreements were concluded without the foreign ministry playing any substantial role, and in some cases
without even their knowledge. By the late 1960s the military also played a major role in defining relations with Laos by its involvement in covert war in that country, with some 20,000 troops there by 1972. Thanat, however, became the main government spokesman on the U.S. alliance, and the ministry was slowly involved in U.S. matters in a subsidiary role. By 1966 it coordinated negotiations with the U.S. on a Status of Forces Agreement (never in fact concluded), and was subsequently involved in negotiations on issues such as the U.S. use of the air base for B-52s at Utapao, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from 1969. Relations between Thanat and military leaders were increasing strained, though in most cases personality rather than policy issues were involved. By the early 1970s, however, the MFA began to change, seeking a more independent foreign policy, and a more important role for the ministry in policy formulation. These were ideas the military was not willing to entertain at this time. After the coup of November 1971 they acted to strengthen ties with the U.S., and strengthen military dominance over the ministry through the appointment of Prime Minister Field Marshal Thanom as foreign minister and Major General Chatichai as deputy.

A major change in the decision making process was brought about by the overthrow of military government in October 1973. With the military excluded from a major role in government the foreign ministry became the main group involved in the formulation of foreign policy, and their views on the need for a more independent policy were
quickly put into effect. In addition, while the ministry did not welcome wider involvement in policy formulation, the introduction of a democratic political system meant that the government and political parties had to take into account rising popular resentment against close relations with the U.S. Important sections of the military reacted strongly against both their exclusion from policy making, and the move to distance Thailand from the U.S. alliance. Military-foreign ministry relations then changed from the previous cold relationship to one of tension and in some cases overt hostility. In the period up to October 1976 the military was able to complicate and slow down the process of rapprochement with communist states and the move towards a more independent foreign policy, but was not able to force any substantial changes.

From this study no simple conclusions can be reached about the relative importance of systemic as against national and decision making influences on foreign policy. All were important, and at particular times one or the other was clearly dominant - for instance, systemic factors in relation to Vietnam from late 1964 to 1973, and national together with decision making factors in the case of Cambodia prior to 1970. But no one factor stands out consistently, nor was there ever a case where one of these factors influenced policy to the exclusion of all others. Both systemic and decision making factors changed considerably during the period under review, but due to circumstances that were perhaps largely fortuitous, acted to reinforce each other: in the 1960s a growing communist threat and increasing U.S. involvement went together with
control of foreign policy making in the hands of a small military-led anti-communist, pro-U.S. elite; in the 1970s increasing communist strength and the decline of U.S. power coincided with the political dominance of an MFA less ideologically committed to anti-communism and the U.S. alliance, and the growing influence of an increasingly anti-U.S. public opinion.

Postscript

Since the October 1976 coup, Indochina has continued to remain very much at the forefront of Thai foreign policy concerns. The new government under Thanin Kraivichien adopted a policy of confrontation towards Indochina - a reflection of the strong ideological views of the prime minister and some of his military backers - overturning the policy of moderation and caution the foreign ministry had pursued for the preceding three years. Foreign Minister Upadit Pachariyangun was recruited from the foreign ministry, but viewed as somewhat of a loner by his colleagues. Although he had an important, and perhaps ultimately moderating influence on policy implementation, there are no indications that he sought a policy role for himself or the ministry as a whole. Morale in the MFA dropped to perhaps its lowest point ever, as officials who had become used to playing a role in policy formulation, and had welcomed the democratic interlude, accustomed themselves to quite different circumstances.

Eventually Thanin's extreme anti-communist policies proved unacceptable even to the military who had placed
him in power, and after a year in office he was ousted in another coup. The new prime minister, General Kriangsak Chamanan, retained the services of Upadit, but acted largely as his own foreign minister. The policies adopted were similar to those previously pursued by the foreign ministry, but were formulated by Kriangsak personally, drawing on his own quite extensive experience in international affairs, and a small group of advisers from the Supreme Command. A process of rapprochement with Indochina was pursued, marked by an exchange of visits with each of the three countries. To balance these initiatives Kriangsak also visited China in April 1978, and hosted a return visit by First Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping in November. The process was in fact facilitated by the developing conflict between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam, and the related dispute between China and Vietnam, with both China and Vietnam competing against one another to gain Thai support. This fortunate state of affairs for Thailand was dramatically upset by Vietnam’s 1978 Christmas day invasion of Democratic Kampuchea.

Thailand played a critical role in opposing Vietnam’s invasion. It supported armed resistance to the Vietnamese — concluding an agreement with China on resupply and support of the Khmer Rouge days after the fall of Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979, then moving later in the year to create and support a non-communist resistance — encouraged China to maintain military pressure on Vietnam’s northern border, helped organise an economic boycott of Vietnam, gained strong affirmations of U.S. support, and used ASEAN
to pursue diplomatic policies designed essentially to impose maximum pressure on Vietnam. The U.S. once more emerged as an important guarantor of Thai security, along with the PRC and ASEAN.

The Cambodian issue also had a significant impact on the decision making context of Thai foreign policy. Unlike previous foreign policy issues, Cambodia has received sustained public attention over a long period of time, and has been the subject of detailed comment and analysis. The critics have come from all walks of life, including the military, vernacular press, leading public figures, parliament, commercial interest groups, and academics. Arising out of these developments, and the reemergence of democratic institutions in Thailand, the foreign ministry regained much of the influence it had between 1973-1976, the "ivory tower" at the ministry was breached and foreign policy issues opened for public discussion, and a concerted effort was made to coordinate foreign ministry and military activities.

An important change for the foreign ministry came with the first government headed by General Prem Tinsulanond, in April 1980, and the appointment of ACM Siddhi Savetsila as foreign minister. Recently retired from a military career in international relations intelligence, as Secretary-General of the NSC from 1975, Siddhi combined a strong understanding of foreign affairs with excellent military links and a desire to enhance the role of the MFA. He also had the complete trust of Prime Minister Prem, whom he had attended school with, and was given a free hand. Ministry officials welcomed the
change, and improved morale immediately became evident by the more forceful manner in which Thai interests were defended.

In early 1982, Thai policy on Cambodia encountered difficulties over attempts to unite Cambodian resistance factions in a common front (eventually achieved with the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in July 1982). Several groups opposed these efforts - the vernacular press and parliamentarians because of hostility towards Sihanouk, and NSC Secretary-General Squadron Leader Prasong Soonsiri, because it detracted attention from the broader issues of Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia - causing the foreign ministry to react with what a noted columnist described as a "siege mentality". Thailand, he observed, had persuaded other countries that its policy was correct, but it had not convinced the local population. Instead, "the most talented at the ministry appear to be lost when it comes to addressing the Thai people about Thailand's policy in the Thai language - within the Thai context". Attempts by journalists to obtain information had prompted questions about their patriotism, notwithstanding the fact that "not many people are seriously against the policy". 5

The foreign ministry evidently recognised the validity of such charges, and gradually opened its doors in a way that significantly changed the nature of foreign policy debate in the country. The process started with Siddhi holding lengthy and frank discussions on Cambodia with the media in August 1982, 6 then was broadened when
the ministry held a forum on its role and major policies, participated in by around 100 journalists, academics and senior ministry staff, in February 1983. The Nation Review, which reported the forum in detail, found the exchange revealing, and commented that it was the first time the ministry had invited observers from the "outside world" to speak out on just how they thought it had been faring. Foreign ministry personnel thereafter continued to participate in academic seminars, and to engage in other exchanges with academics and journalists.

Siddhi also moved to reduce the rivalry and separation of the military and MFA. His own duel allegiance to military and civilian camps, and concern that uncoordinated statements by both sides put Thailand at a public relations' disadvantage vis-a-vis Vietnam, were the main motivating factors. One of the first important steps was the appointment, in October 1983, of Lt. General Charan Kullavanijaya - brother of well known General Pichit Kullavanijaya - as Military-Political Coordinator. General Charan, who works in the Foreign Ministry, reports directly to Siddhi, and accompanies him on virtually all his travels. He is respected by both the MFA and the military, and has proven himself adept at liaising between the two sides. Ad hoc committees involving senior MFA, military and NIA officials have also been set up occasionally, such as at the time of military conflict between Thailand and Laos over the sovereignty of three border villages in 1984. In February 1987, high-level weekly meetings were reported to have been instituted between the MFA, Army, NSC and NIA, and lower
level meetings have become even more frequent. The process was assisted by the increasing importance of civilians in the former bastions of military domination, the NSC and NIA, in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{11}

Coordination between the foreign ministry and military has never been perfect. During a dispute with Laos concerning sovereignty over three border villages in mid 1984, for example, then Army Commander-in-Chief General Arthit and the NSC made the initial running,\textsuperscript{12} but the return of Siddhi from overseas soon led to a more conciliatory approach, and eventual reversal of earlier pledges to garrison troops in the villages and construct a road through the area. In August 1986, Siddhi was reported to have ordered the revocation of restrictions imposed by the NSC on internal travel of diplomats from 10 socialist and Muslim countries, some two weeks after these came into effect.\textsuperscript{13} But an institutional framework for resolving conflict was put in place, and there was evidence of willingness to compromise on both sides.

Lately, however, the extent to which the decision making context is subject to fluctuations, depending on changing domestic politics and the personalities involved, has once again been illustrated by events under Chatichai Choonhavan's government, which came to power in August 1988. Chatichai has personally sought to stamp his own image on the foreign policy field, working in close coordination with his personal advisory committee, which includes Thailand's best known academic critic of the foreign ministry, M.R. Sukhumphand Paribatra. At the same
time Army Commander in Chief, and Supreme Commander, General Chawalit Yongchaiyut, has also intervened independently on matters affecting Indochina and Burma. The foreign ministry under Siddhi, has fought back vigorously to maintain its pre-eminence. In the process the institutions that have been established to coordinate foreign policy have been less than effective, and at the time of writing the Thai foreign policy decision making process is more divided than ever before.14
FOOTNOTES


3. I have examined diplomatic policies in "Thai and ASEAN Policy on Cambodia", seminar paper presented to the Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 21 June, 1988, pp.1-31.

4. Ibid., pp. 31-42.


6. Ibid., 11 August, 1982.


8. Seminars in which foreign ministry personnel participated are reported in Patinya, 27 February, 1984, pp.17-22; Wiwat, 8-15 April, 1985, pp.30-33 (Joint Publications Research Service, SEA-85-090-6 June, 1985); and Nation Review, 23 April, 1985 (reproduced in the booklet Thailand’s Policy Towards the Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict, Asian Studies Monograph No.032, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1985).

9. After spending most of his life in the military Siddhi’s civilian credentials have been demonstrated by his successful participation in elections in 1983, 1986 and 1988, and promotion to the leadership of the Social Action Party, one of Thailand’s largest parties, in late 1985.

10. There is a reference to such meetings in Bangkok Post, 21 February, 1987.
11. In the early 1980s Piya Chakkaphak became the first civilian head of the DCI. The NIA, which replaced the DCI in late 1985, was clearly identified as a civilian organisation (Nation Review, 4 September, 1985), though Piya's successor in 1988 was a retired military officer. In the case of the NSC, when Squadron Leader Prasong retired in August 1986 he was replaced by a civilian.


14. See for instance statements by Siddhi implicitly critical of the prime minister and his advisers in Bangkok Post, 14 December, 1988 and Nation, 25 December, 1988. For an argument that foreign policy decision making has essentially been handed over to the military see Weatherbee, D.E., "ASEAN the Big Looser in Thai Race for Profit in Indochina", Straits Times, 5 May, 1989 (originally in International Herald Tribune).
APPENDIX I

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THAILAND (1971)

MINISTER

Office of the Secretary
to the Minister

UNDERSECRETARY

DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY

Central Division
Personnel and Training Division
Finance Division
Supply and Maintenance Division
Foreign Services Section

Archives and Library Division
Policy and Planning Division
Passport Division
Radio and Telegraph Division

POLITICAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

Office of the Secretary
Americas Division
Southeast Asia Division
Africa and Arab World Division

Europe Division
East Asia Division
South and West Asia Division

PROTOCOL DEPARTMENT

Office of the Secretary
Diplomatic Privileges Division

Protocol Division
Reception Division
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

Economic and Commercial Information Division

International Economics Division

ASEAN National Secretariat (Thailand)

TREATY AND LEGAL DEPARTMENT

Legal Division

Translation Division

National Boundaries Section

Treaty Division

INFORMATION DEPARTMENT

Office of the Secretary

News Analysis Division

Broadcasting Division

Press Division

Information and Cultural Division

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS DEPARTMENT

International Conference Division

Political Division

Social Division

SEATO Division

SOURCE: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prawat Lae Rabobngarn Kong Krasuang Garn Tang Prathet (History and Organisation of the Foreign Ministry), Bangkok, 1975, p.27.
APPENDIX II
THAI FOREIGN MINISTERS, 1875-1976

1. 1875-1885 ChaoPraya Panuwongse Maha Gosatipbordi (Tuam Bunnag)
2. 1885-1923 Somdej Prachaobarammawongsethur Krompraya Devawongsevaropragarn
3. 1923-1932 Pravorawongsethur Krommameun Devawongsevarothai
4. 1932-1933 Praya Srivisarnvja (Tienlieng Hoontrakul)
5. 1933-1934 Praya Apibarnrajamaitri (Tom Bunnag)
6. 1934-1935 Praya Paholpolpayuhasena (Pot Paholyotin)
7. 1935 Praya Srisena (Ha Sombatsiri)
8. 1935-1938 Luang Pradit Manootham (Pridi Phanomyong)
9. 1938-1939 Chaopraya Srithammatibeth (Chitre Na Songkla)
10. 1939-1941 Major General Luang Phibun Songkram (Plaek Kitasangka)
11. 1941 Direk Jayanama
12. 1941-1942 Field Marshal P. Pibun Songkram
13. 1942-1943 Wichit Wathakan (Luang Wichit Wathakan)
14. 1943-1944 Direk Jayanama
15. 1944-1946 Srisena Sombatsiri (Praya Srisena)
16. 1946 Momrajawongse Seni Pramoj
17. 1946-1947 Direk Jayanama
18. 1947 Rear Admiral Tawal Thamrongnavasawasdi (Luang Thamrong)
19. 1947 Attakij Phanomyong (Luang Attakijtikamjorn)
20. 1947-1948 Praya Srivisarnvaja (Tienlieng Hoontrakul)

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21. 1948-1949 Major General Momchao Pridithepyapongse Devakul
22. 1949 Field Marshal P. Phibun Songkram
23. 1949-1950 Pote Sarasin
24. 1950-1952 Vorakarnbancha (Boonkerd Sutantanonda)
25. 1952-1958 Prachaovorawongsethur Krommamun Narathipphongphraphan (Prince Wan)
26. 1959-1971 Thanat Khoman
27. 1971-1972 Charunphan Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya
28. 1972-1973 Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn
29. 1973-1975 Charunphan Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya
30. 1975 Bhichai Rattakul
31. 1975-1976 Major General Chatichai Choonhavan
32. 1976 Bhichai Rattakul

## APPENDIX III

### THAI TRADE WITH INDOCHINA

### Thailand Exports to Indochina, 1964-1976.

($US '000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Laos</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>DRV</th>
<th>RVN</th>
<th>Total Exports to Indochina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>7025</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4146</td>
<td>11187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>9138</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>8774</td>
<td>17915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>8509</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>11688</td>
<td>20199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>6944</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>10362</td>
<td>17307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>6826</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>7708</td>
<td>14537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>8057</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>3646</td>
<td>11727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>13005</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>10348</td>
<td>23686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>11763</td>
<td>3044</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>8881</td>
<td>23688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>18300</td>
<td>13288</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>12264</td>
<td>43852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>22279</td>
<td>19180</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>16353</td>
<td>57812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>19708</td>
<td>11524</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>3946</td>
<td>35178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>10628</td>
<td>2987</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>2605</td>
<td>16220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>17693</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>1007</td>
<td>19242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Thailand Imports from Indochina, 1964-1976.

($US '000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Laos</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>DRV</th>
<th>RVN</th>
<th>Total Imports from Indochina</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>1268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1303</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1457</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1535</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1544</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2205</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>3857</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>4191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>5139</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1634</td>
<td>7382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>7689</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>2113</td>
<td>10722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>5022</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>6315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2292</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>3372</td>
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</table>

414
**Indochina As Percentage of Thai Total Exports and Imports, 1964-1976.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>As % of Thai Exports</th>
<th>As % of Thai Imports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<td>0.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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