REALISM AND THAILAND'S FOREIGN POLICY
AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Declaration

This sub-thesis is my own original work. All sources used have been cited.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is too intricate a topic to suffer any total taboo.¹

George F. Kennan

Realism influences foreign policy of all states. Nations declare themselves for high-sounding ideals and profess their adherence to lofty moral and legal principles. However, as history has shown, for survival or advantage, all nations have learned to adjust their actions to realities and in that process disregarded ideals, morality and international law. A realistic foreign policy must, of necessity, (and by definition) be flexible and able to adapt to changing conditions.

Among Asian nations, Thailand has a reputation for its realistic traditional diplomacy.² In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Thailand (at the time Siam) was the only country in Southeast Asia which managed to escape colonization. While the other Southeast Asian nations were struggling in vain against the predatory European colonial nations, Siam sought an accommodation with Britain, the dominant power. Siam then endeavoured to use Britain to counterbalance France's intimidation. This balance-of-power strategy was not always effective since

¹ George F.Kennan, "Morality and Foreign Policy." Foreign Affairs 64, no.2 (Winter 1985-1986),214.
the British wanted to avoid confrontation with the French. For this reason, Siam accommodated itself to France.

Siam's policy of accommodation involved considerable territorial concessions to both the French and the British; but it was partly because of this policy that Siam was able to maintain its independence and thus minimize external interference in its domestic system. This policy of accommodation was based on a realistic view of Siam's position vis-à-vis the great powers: it is imprudent to fight overwhelming superior enemies. Survival of a small country like Siam depended upon the ability to make the necessary adjustments to outside pressures.

Has Thailand's foreign policy after the Second World War been as realistic as its traditional diplomacy? Or has it been an excessively realistic policy—merely a cynical response to the external environment? The purpose of this sub-thesis is to determine whether Thailand's foreign policy after the Second World War has been faithful to the realist view of foreign policy or not. The sub-thesis is divided into three chapters.

The first chapter will discuss in detail the realist view of foreign policy: its basic assumptions, its suggested methods by which foreign policy should be conducted, its moral justifications and its distinctive features.

3 Siam's geographical position played an equally important role in preserving the country's independence. It was in the interests of both the French and the British to keep Siam as a buffer zone between their spheres of influence. Ibid., p. 78. and Astri Suhkre, "Smaller-Nation Diplomacy: Thailand's Current Dilemmas." Asian Survey XI, no.5 (1971), 429.
The second chapter will provide an account of Thailand's foreign policy after the Second World War. It does not purport to represent the whole picture of the policy; but the focus will be on how Thailand has perceived and reacted to its security threats. The chapter will also describe some aspects of Thai foreign policy which clarify Thailand's attitudes toward power, morality, idealism and international law.

The third chapter will trace which aspects of Thai foreign policy have been compatible with the realist view of foreign policy and which aspects have not and give the reasons why. This chapter will also estimate the effectiveness of its policy and point out its outstanding characteristics during the last forty years.
CHAPTER I

THE REALIST VIEW OF FOREIGN POLICY

"God is with the powerful; beat or be beaten; might makes right." The worldly wisdom implicit in these phrases is often thought to represent the realist view of foreign policy; in fact, there is a common tendency to place a stigma of utter ruthlessness and immorality on realism in the context of international relations. This, however, is a blatant misreading of realism and its view of foreign policy. Realism is a bird of different feather. The purpose of this chapter is to describe accurately the realist view of foreign policy: its rationale, its guiding principles, its moral dimension and its character. This will be done by inferring from the writings of four primary exponents of realism in the field of international relations; namely; Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, E.H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau.¹

The realist view of foreign policy starts from the assumption that "there is no good other than the acceptance and understanding of reality."² Repeatedly, these four Realist thinkers warn that reality misinterpreted - or worse still ignored or scorned - will lead to national ruin and

¹ It is important to stress at the outset that there are differences of opinions among these four writers. However, their approaches to international relations do belong to the same family of view. See Hedley Bull, "Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations." British Journal of International Studies, 2, no. 2 (1976), 101-116.

even the collapse of international systems. Whatever the
goals, wishes, or dreams of foreign-policy makers, they must
be brought into line with reality.

What is "reality"? The Realists assert that
international relations take place in a state of
international anarchy— a main theme to which they return
time and again. International anarchy is a situation marked
with an absence of common government and social solidarity
among states. In international anarchy, sovereign states
co-exist without stable expectations regarding the use of
power with respect to one another. Desire to limit damages
of power-behaviour and fear of uncertainties might induce
states to agree to some rules to regulate their interactions
e.g. conventions of war and the non-intervention principle. However, these rules will not always be effective since

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3 This point is fully developed in Hedley Bull, "Society
and Anarchy in International Relations," in *Diplomatic
Investigations*, eds. Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight
also Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan

4 Hobbes called these rules "the laws of nature". Thomas
Books Ltd., 1984), chapter XIV, pp.189-190. See also Hedley
48, No.4 (1981), p.728. As regards the works of Hobbes, it
must be mentioned that most of them do not deal with
international relations, but with the life of individual men
in the state of nature. However, as Bull pointed out, we
are justified to draw an analogy between the domestic
situation of individuals in a Hobbesian state of nature and
the external situation of nations in the state of
international anarchy. The state of nature and the state of
international anarchy are similar in the sense that both
are marked with an absence of government. See Bull, *Ibid.*, 720-721. Nonetheless, there are limitations of this
analogy — Hobbes himself mentioned them. See Bull, "Society
and Anarchy in International Relations," pp.44-48 and R. John
Vincent, "The Hobbesian Tradition in Twentieth Century
International Thought," *Millennium Journal of International
there is no supreme authority to enforce them. In addition, states will not obey the rules out of a sense of social consciousness: lacking in affinities and bond of community, they have no natural desire to contribute to an integrated and peaceful society. Like drivers in poorly-controlled traffic, states in international anarchy find themselves in a precarious and perilous circumstance.

As the concept of international anarchy is central to the realist view of foreign policy, it is necessary to be more specific about the consequences of an absence of common government and social solidarity in international anarchy. According to the Realists, there are three major consequences. In the first place, all nations are inextricably locked in the struggle for power. This phenomenon is closely connected with human nature. In Morgenthau's view, all men are driven by the *animus dominandi*: the insatiable lust for power; so are nations, which are composed of men; and in fact the *animus dominandi* becomes magnified when transferred from individuals to nations. Despite their social, political and economic differences, all nations strive for power. "Power, however limited and qualified," Morgenthau commented, "is the value

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which international politics recognized as supreme." Considerations of power being the primary objective of all nations, the struggle for power ensues and goes on relentlessly. Neither ethics nor laws nor other institutions can restrain its dynamics - this is the main thrust of Carr's argument in his *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919–1939*. The implication of power struggle in international anarchy is that small, weak and unarmed nations will be "in a danger of becoming a passive object, a hunting ground, a region of low political pressure, into which the winds of power may blow from neighbouring territories and cause a storm to get up." 

In the second place, nations in international anarchy are confronted with the security dilemma. They are aware that they may be imperilled at any moment as there is no central agency to provide absolute security for them.

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9 Ibid, p.91.


This realization will create fear and a sense of security; which in turn compel nations to seek more power for the sake of security. This is Hobbes' explanation of the struggle for power, which contrasts with Morgenthau's animus dominandi theory.\(^{13}\) Inevitably, the quest for power—though driven by an instinct of self-preservation—will appear to the others as a menace to their existence, thereby provoke them to follow suit. The result is pervasive competition and rivalry, which ultimately leads to the greater insecurity of all. Hence, ironically and tragically, the more security states seek by contending for more power, the less security they will have; and yet the fear inherent in international anarchy will commit them to "a perpetuall and restlesse desire after power that ceaseth onely in Death."\(^{14}\)

In the third place, nations in international anarchy live in the constant expectation of war.\(^{15}\) Famous for his conception of international anarchy as the state of war, Hobbes provided a vivid account of how nations behave in international anarchy:

...in all times, Kings and Persons of Soveraigne authority, because of their Independency, are in

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continuall jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is Forts, Garrison and Guns upon the Frontiers of their Kingdoms; and continuall Spyes upon their neighbours; which is a posture of war.  

Morgenthau restated Hobbes' opinion when he wrote:

All history shows that nations active in international politics are continuously preparing for, actually involved in, or recovering from organized violence in the form of war.

To the Realists, there can be periods of peace in international anarchy; but peace is no more than an armed armistice, a condition of stalemate or truce. War is immanent because it is structurally-determined: granted diversity in purpose of heterogeneous states, conflicts are bound to occur; they are likely to escalate into war since there is no supreme power to settle disputes peacefully. To be more precise, Hobbes attributed the origin of war to three causes: rivalry for material possessions, fear of insecurity (this fear is not caused by misperception or paranoia; but as mentioned above it is a rational fear resulting from an absence of common government), and a drive to promote doctrines. In this condition of universal war, life in international anarchy will be intolerably dangerous, for war will always threaten the survival of states.

17 Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p.40.
In sum, the reality of the Realists — the picture of the way in which states and international systems function — is primarily characterized by the perennial struggle for power, the irresolvable security dilemma and ubiquitous war. This is not the scene of the Armageddon between the evil and the virtuous; from which a happy world would emerge after the destruction of the evil. But the hostile atmosphere and tension are a necessary concomitant of the structure of international anarchy. That is to say, they arise from a social condition. It is the Realists' contention that nations will not be able to escape this predicament precisely because men, who form nations, are not perfectible. Though the Realists do not hold that men are exclusively selfish, egotistical or bellicose, they are convinced that these vicious qualities are inherent in men. Never can men transcend these traits; and these will forever operate as a counterforce against the achievement of

20 Morgenthau, for example, wrote: "For the light-hearted assumption that what one's own nation aims at and does is morally good and that those who oppose that nation's policies are evil is morally indefensible and intellectually untenable...." Hans Morgenthau, "Another "Great Debate": The National Interest of the United States," The American Political Science Review XLVI, No.4 (Dec.1952), p.984.

21 For Hobbes' view, see Gauthier, op.cit., p.208; for Marchiavelli's; John Plamenatz, Man and Society (London: Longman, 1963), I, p.6; for Carr's; Carr, op.cit., pp.95-97; and for Morgenthau's; Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p.34.

22 For Machiavelli's view, see Machiavelli, op.cit., chap.I, p.207 and chap.IX, p.139; for Hobbes's; Hobbes, op.cit., chap.VI, pp.118-130; for Carr's; Carr, op.cit., p.95; and for Morgenthau's; Morgenthau, Scientific Man VS Power Politics, pp.163-168.
the "community of mankind" or the "perpetual peace" concepts in the idealist tradition which the Realists would regard as unrealistic to the point of fantasy. They believe that nations might learn to cooperate with one another to improve the situation in international anarchy; but this will not lead to the establishment of international society, in which ethics and laws could circumscribe sovereign states' behaviour e.g. the struggle for power. Carr, for instance, considered the so-called "international harmony of interests doctrine" as a fraud, pointing out that "a recrudescence of disintegrative forces" will prevent nations from setting up comprehensive supra-national communities. In short, the Realists' conclusion is that nations are doomed to live dangerously with the struggle for power, security dilemma and war in international anarchy.

This being so, the Realists advocated three basic guidelines for foreign policy: raison d'état, policy of national interests and the balance of power principle. By conforming to these concepts, nations will not only be able to safeguard their survival but also to provide a modicum of order in the situation of international anarchy. Narrowly defined, raison d'état, simply means justification of immoral acts undertaken on behalf of states. However, in a broader sense, it could expand to represent the highest norm governing national conduct - most cogently expounded by

23 Concepts of Immanuel Kant, the major figure in the idealist school. See Bull, "Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations" pp.104-105. For the Realists' attacks on the idealist doctrines see for example Morgenthau, Scientific Man VS Power Politics, pp.22-23.

Machiavelli. Raison d'état can be understood through a correct appreciation of the nature of the state itself and its environment, that is, a calculation based on interests and necessities of the state. While formulating raison d'état, every nation will take into account the dangers in the situation of international anarchy. For this reason, the raison d'état of all states encourages the pursuit of the interests of states by all necessary means, if need be even the immoral means. (Machiavelli's raison d'état is very similar to Hobbes' natural right theory, which postulates that in the state of war "every Commonwealth ... has an absolute Libertie to doe what it shall judge ... most conducing to their benefit"). In other words, at the heart of the raison d'état of all nations lies the powerful desire of self-preservation (the Supremacy of States — another component of raison d'état — will be discussed later on). Nevertheless, the character of the raison d'état of each nation will be unique for it is imprinted with a particular nature of state and environment. The character of the raison d'état must also be very adaptable as the structure of states and their external environments are subject to constant changes, although some aspects of the structure of states i.e. geographical position will of

26 Ibid., p.2.
27 Hobbes, op.cit., chap.XXI, p.266. See also chap.XIV, p.189.
28 Meinecke, op.cit.,p.2.
29 Ibid., p.1.
course remain fixed. And naturally, raison d’état, which is supposed to reflect reality, will dictate that states acquire sufficient power to protect their interests since power is an indispensable means to achieve goals in international anarchy.\textsuperscript{31}

Parallel with raison d’état is Morgenthau’s policy of national interests. Having criticized the American foreign policy for its legalistic - moralistic approach, Morgenthau suggested that the one and only "guiding star" of foreign policy must be national interests;\textsuperscript{32} other interests - subnational, other-national or supranational - must not be allowed to usurp those of the nation.\textsuperscript{33} According to Morgenthau, national interests can be determined through objective analysis, comparable to a scientific discovery.\textsuperscript{34} The rational core of national interests is discernible with reference to the physical, political and cultural aspects of a nation.\textsuperscript{35} National interests provide the spring of action for a nation: do whatever they require. The legitimacy of the primary of national interests derives from the fact that there is no other power to protect them.\textsuperscript{36} Morgenthau also claimed that a policy of national interests - if adopted by

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., pp.2-3.
\textsuperscript{32} Hans Morgenthau, American Foreign Policy: A Critical Examination (London: Methuen, 1952), p.272 (In an American edition, this book is titled "In Defense of the National Interest")
\textsuperscript{33} Morgenthau, "Another "Great Debate":..., pp.973-977.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.977.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p.972.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
most states - will be conducive to moderation in international relations because national interests - unlike morals or ideology - can be the objects of bargaining; thus, nations will be amenable to reason and compromise.37 Similar to raison d'état, a policy of national interests requires states to obtain power; for power is a means necessary to the pursuit of national interests. As Morgenthau wrote, "statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power,..."38

Morgenthau is also an important authority on the Realists' third guideline for foreign policy: the balance of power principle. He saw the balance of power as a "necessary" and "inevitable" outgrowth of the struggle for power, when he explained:

The aspiration for power on the part of several nations, each trying either to maintain or overthrow the status quo, leads of necessity to a configuration that is called the balance of power and policies that aim at preservation of it.39

With an emphasis on the reign of power struggle in the state of international anarchy, the balance of power principle (or policy in Morgenthau's words) calls on nations to be very sensitive to their power situation: always maintain or enhance one's power vis-à-vis that of others with all necessary measures. In an anarchic system, the emergence of a preponderant state will be mortally dangerous to the others; without impunity, it will be in a position to harm the interests of weaker states and break diplomatic rules

37 Ibid., p.978.
38 Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p.5.
39 Ibid., p.167.
and international law freely and fully. This scenario can only be deterred by the balance of power principle: the presence of the balance of power will represent a signal to the potential aggressors in advance that their expansion of power will meet immediate and effective counterviolence. Among the measures to uphold the balance of power will be building-up of one's own forces, aligning oneself with any others irrespective of political, economic, social or ideological differences - the level of their power is the dominant consideration, resorting to intervention, or if need be, going to war. Although these methods will involve the violation of moral and legal rules, they could be justified on the ground that the existence of the balance of power guarantees the independence of states and sustains the international order.40

Judging from the Realists' guiding principles of foreign policy - raison d'état, policy of national interests and the balance of power principle - , it is obvious that idealism, morals and laws have been subordinated to the instinct of self-preservation and power. The Realists reject universalist doctrines, moral absolutes and international law as a primary criteria of foreign policy. From their point of view, leaders who are excessively concerned with idealism, morals and laws tend to depreciate or, even worse, eliminate power from international politics, and then naively believe that idealism, morals and laws alone can serve as an effective instrument of foreign policy; the extreme of this position is absolute pacifism. 40

For the Realists, this mistaken attitude is fatal. Machiavelli, for instance, warned a prince "who wishes to make a profession of goodness in every thing ... among so many who are not good..." that he would not only fail to achieve anything significant but would also be ravaged. Carr pointed out that the consequence could be much graver: according to him, this kind of idealistic-moralistic thinking was typical of the utopians such as Norman Angell, Arnold Toynbee and Alfred Zimmerr during the interwar years; it had led to policies which failed to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War - a global disaster. Hobbes would have agreed with Carr, for he wrote: "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of not strength...." At the other extreme, the pitfall of idealistic-moralistic influence is when it inspires foreign policy with


42 Carr, op.cit., pp.38-40. Yet in the first edition of the Twenty Years' Crisis in 1939, Carr advocated concessions to the Nazi Germany. He wrote:

If the power relations of Europe in 1938 made it inevitable that Czecho-Slovakia should lose part of her territory, and eventually her independence, it was preferable (quite apart from any question of justice or injustice) that this should come about as the result of discussion round a table in Munich rather than as the result either of a war between the Great Powers or of a local war between Germany and Czecho-Slovakia.


This line of thinking only served Hitler's aggressive policies. Realizing this error of judgement, Carr deleted this passage from the second edition of the Twenty Year's Crisis. See Ibid.

fanaticism; the notion of ultimate right and wrong will make a nation oblivious of prudence and restraint. Such a nation will become a formidable threat to peace and international order, as Morgenthau noted:

What is good for the crusading country is by definition good for all mankind, and if the rest of mankind refuses to accept such claims to universal recognition, it must be converted with fire and sword.\(^4^4\)

In any case, the Realists argue that there are no such things as moral absolutes or universalist doctrines in international relations; if they exist, they are of a relative character, socially and historically conditioned. For example, Car exposed the allegedly universalist doctrine of harmony of interests as "merely a moral device invoked by the privileged group to justify and maintain their dominant position."\(^4^5\) This relativity of morals and laws argument rests on the assumption that morals and laws presuppose the presence of a society in which there is a central authority to issue and enforce laws and a social consensus to define common ethical standards.\(^4^6\) As discussed earlier, in the eyes of the Realists, the international society does not exist or at best is barely emergent; therefore, it is logically unsound to expect states to be morally bound like human beings in a civilized society.

\(^4^4\) Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy*, p.37.

\(^4^5\) Carr, *op.cit.*, p.80 (2nd edition)

\(^4^6\) In Hobbes' opinion:"...before the names of Just, and Unjust can have place, there must be coercive Power, to compell men equally to the Performance of their covenants,..." Hobbes, *op.cit.*, chap.XV,p.202. See also Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy*, p.34.
The dire consequences of being idealistic, moralistic and law-abiding in the situation of international anarchy, the extremities of the idealistic-moralistic approach to foreign policy and the relativity of idealism, morals and laws - all these help the Realists justify their disregard of idealism, morals and laws. Their coup de grâce, however, lies in the theory of the Supremacy of States. This idea is akin to the conception of states attributed to Hegel; which stipulates that states are the ultimate source of morality.\textsuperscript{47} The value of states is unsurpassed: they make it possible for a group of men to live their lives according to their wishes and to maintain their own cultural uniqueness. States being a moral end in themselves, policies to preserve states - raison d'État, policy of national interests and the balance of power principle - are ipso facto morally worthy enterprises.\textsuperscript{48} Putting it differently, the Realists have created another set of moralities which might be termed "public" or "social" morality; the ultimate evaluative standard is the degree of success in promoting the good of states. So as to realize the greatness and glory of Florence or of Italy, Machiavelli advised a prince to adopt public morality, although this might contradict private or Christian moralities. The prince will be able to purify his soul if he insists on being charitable, merciful, sacrificial and


\textsuperscript{48} See for example Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, p.10.
religious; but a powerful and radiant state will be beyond his reach."\(^49\) For the sake of the Fatherland, one must learn to be ruthless, assertive and cruel; these types of behaviour are not to be perceived as morally abhorrent for they are inspired and directed by an end as sacred as the purifications of an individual soul: the existence of states.\(^50\)

The Supremacy of states, notwithstanding, the Realists do not deny the place of morals, laws and idealism in the conduct of foreign policy. Their message is not "anything is permissible — anywhere, anytime." Even Machiavelli, the most trenchant spokesman of realism, in his most sinful and scandalous chapter of the Prince (chapter 18) which advises a prince to "act as a beast," still stressed that he should "not deviate from what is good, if possible, but be able to do evil if constrained."\(^51\) Why is this so, after all? The principal reason is that the Realists want to ameliorate the terrible situation of international anarchy; none of them relish instability and the practice of violence for its own sake.\(^52\) They acknowledge that morals and laws — though fragile and relative — can contribute to a degree of predictability, and thus give a semblance of order to international


\(^{50}\) Machiavelli, The Discourse, chap.XLI, pp.527-528.

\(^{51}\) Machiavelli, The Prince, chap.XVIII, p.65.

\(^{52}\) For Hobbes' position, see Bull, Hobbes and International Anarchy; p.729; for Machiavelli's; The Prince, chap.VIII, pp.31-35.
If states ignore all moral constraints as the cynics advocate (i.e. eat or be eaten), they will suffer to the full the consequences of uncertainties that constantly threaten their existence. The Realists also recognize that expediency—a conspicuous ingredient of *raison d'etat*, policy of national interests and the balance of power principles—cannot justify all sorts of foreign policy at all times: when defending their interests other than national survival, foreign-policy makers are expected to base their decisions on some ethical standards more objective than that of success. A reputation for moral integrity is complementary both to a sense of national identity and self-respect and to the political status and influence of a nation. Machiavelli was well aware of this point when he reminded a prince that it is essential to "seem merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, religious...;" because as Carr rightly observed: "mankind will in the long run revolt against naked power." With regard to idealism, it will benefit foreign-policy making by tempering cynical acceptance of the status quo, by resisting defeatist tendencies, and by initiating an animating idea. Carr appreciated this role of idealism; for he recognized that "pure" or "consistent" realism lacks "a finite goal", "an emotional approach", "the right of moral judgement", and "


56 Carr, op.cit., p.235-236.
ground of action”, all of which are necessary for any effective thinking about policy. In brief, the Realists realize that their view of foreign policy would in fact be unrealistic if it tried to ignore the pulls and constraints of moralistic-idealistic forces.

Nonetheless, the Realists make it abundantly clear that morals, laws and idealism must take a second place to national survival. Such considerations are not applicable to a situation where the existence of states is at stake. Nations must not follow morals, laws and idealism without considering consequences (as mentioned above); rationality and prudence must serve as the basis of political decisions.

Having discussed the Realists’ position on self-preservation and power on the one hand and their opinion on morals, laws and idealism on the other, we are now able to summarize the characteristics of their foreign policy. Its first feature is of course a preoccupation with power, security concerns and national survival. To the Realists, foreign policy is in a sense an instrument to manage the problem of power in international anarchy for the sake of the existence of states. Power alone can restrain power effectively. In Morgenthau’s word, "a foreign policy, to be successful, must be commensurate with power to carry it out." As shown above, the Realists’ three guiding principles of foreign policy — raison d’état, policy of

57 Ibid., p.89.
59 Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy*, p.117.
national interests and the balance of power—all unashamedly manifest the triumph of power and survival over morals, laws and idealism.

As regards the second feature, the Realists assert the freedom of action in their foreign policy. Their ideal foreign policy must be continually in a process of weighing, choosing, balancing and blending, so that policy will always reflect reality; it is imperative to adjust national aims to limitations of national power; to be willing to accept a second-best choice if necessary; and most importantly, to adapt oneself to changing environments. In other words, nations must avoid rigid positions and the application of fixed solutions to widely different contexts. Carr, for example, emphasized that in the conduct of foreign policy all nations must recognize the need of the "process of give-and-take," analogous to that of bargaining in domestic industry. In the same vein, Machiavelli advised foreign policy-makers to be malleable, when he wrote:

Let no state believe that it always follows a safe policy, rather let it think that all are doubtful. This is found in the nature of things that one never tries to avoid one difficulty without running into another, but prudence consists in being able to know the nature of the difficulties, and taking the least harmful as good.

In conclusion, the realist view of foreign policy is grounded in the Realists' estimate of what situation states actually find themselves in. Their description of international relations is the picture of international anarchy where states are left alone to face the elemental

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60 Carr, op.cit., p.169 and pp.236-237.
forces of the struggle for power, the security dilemma and war. With this conception of international anarchy in mind, the Realists indicate the methods by which foreign policy should be conducted and provide justifications for them. 

Raison d'état, policy of national interests and the balance of power principle are effective policies because they deal with tangible facts and the forces which actually move international relations. Basically, these guidelines allow whatever measures that are rationally judged necessary to achieve the objective of self-preservation. Nevertheless, this by no means suggests that the realist view of foreign policy is amoral and pessimistic. The Realists do understand both social and spiritual values of morals, laws and idealism; but they insist that states must not act according to morals, laws and idealism regardless of consequences: moral decisions in foreign policy must of necessity involve self-preservation. In view of the corruption of human nature and the imperfect world, a nation has to accept less than the ideal in the conduct of foreign policy. The realist view of foreign policy does not promise an international utopia: the cost of realizing such a millennium world would be exceedingly high. Yet, the realist view of foreign policy is not without goals and a vision of a better future: it strives not only to protect the survival of states but also to provide a semblance of order in international anarchy. Its character is distinguished by clarity, rationality, flexibility, prudence and a sense of proportion.
We know that our Siamese neighbours are the champions of the world in the business of political tacking and of changing alliances and that they are absolutely unbeatable in the art of making their ship sail in the direction of the prevailing wind.¹

Prince Norodom Sihanouk

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the course of Thailand’s foreign policy after the Second World War. The account will concentrate on how Thailand has viewed and responded to external events, especially those which might threaten its security and some aspects of foreign policy that throw light on Thailand’s position on power, morality, idealism and international law. This account will serve as the basis for the critique and analysis to be made in the following chapter.

Beacon of Asian Independence VS Bastion of Western Defense

By 1950, the Thai military leaders saw many challenges threatening the security of their country. The military-dominated government led by Marshal Pibul Songkram (1948-1957) was certain that Communist China -- strong and revolutionary -- was bent on expanding its influence in Southeast Asia.² The growing, communist-led insurrections in Thailand’s neighbouring areas of Burma, Malaya and


Indochina heightened the government's sense of insecurity. In particular, Pibul feared that China would exert its communist influence through a substantial ethnic Chinese community in Thailand - a minority group which Pibul had tried to repress.3

However, though his anti-communist inclination was evident, Pibul was careful not to antagonize China and the communist Viet-Minh in Indochina. In 1949, when the Philippines government approached Thailand to form an anti-communist alliance along with South Korea and Taiwan, Pibul declined. In his view, it was unwise for Thailand to participate in an anti-communist alliance, at least until the United States - the dominant power in Asia after the defeat of imperial Japan - made its view known.4 Pibul did not have to wait long. In 1950, the United States expressed its concern over the repercussions of the Chinese communist victory on the future of Southeast Asia. To deal with the prospect of the spread of communism in Asia, the United States called a conference of all American ambassadors in the Far East in February in 1950 in Bangkok. Concurrently, the Truman administration deemed it essential that "all practical measure be taken to prevent further communist expansion in Southeast Asia."5 The Cold War had come to

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4 Nuechterlein, op. cit., pp.103-105.

dominate the American outlook in Asia. Only after the United States gave every indication that it resolved to defend Southeast Asia against Chinese imperialism did Pibul make a decisive commitment to an anti-communist alignment. Thailand then recognized the Bao Dai government in Vietnam, dispatched 4,000 Thai soldiers to serve in the Korean war and concluded military and economic agreements with the United States.

Pibul's American-oriented policy produced a Chinese response. China started operating a clandestine radio station beaming broadcast hostile to the Pibul regime. And in 1953, Peking announced the establishment of a Thai autonomous government in Yunnan; this plan unnerved Pibul as it represented a direct threat to the legitimacy of his government. At the same time, Thailand was alarmed when the Viet-Minh forces succeeded in penetrating into Laos and Cambodia during 1953–54. The growth of communist movements in Indochina increasingly became a vital concern to Thailand. It was feared that the communist domination of Indochina would rob Thailand of a buffer zone against a combined threat from North Vietnam and China. From the Thai


7 Peking also implied that the alternative government would be under the leadership of Pridi Phanomyond. (Pridi was the first Thai civilian Prime minister after the end of the Second World war; he was forced into exile in Peking when the military staged a coup in 1947). This even made the threat more real to the Thai military leaders. Nuechterlein, op. cit., pp.112-113, and Morrison, op. cit., p.114 and p.312.

8 Nuechterlein, op. cit., p.113.
standpoint, a common border with communist neighbours would be a major geopolitical disaster.

As a reaction to the perception of increased uncertainty and communist danger in the region, Pibul sought successfully to secure a stronger commitment from the United States. In the aftermath of the Korean War and the French defeat in Indochina, Washington believed that it was urgent to contain communism in Southeast Asia through a defensive alliance, as it had done in Western Europe by setting up the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Hence in September 1954, the Manila Pact was signed and under its aegis the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) was established. Signatories to the Manila Pact were Thailand, the United States, Britain, France, the Philippines and Pakistan. In the Thai view, SEATO would serve to deter external aggression against Thailand and prevent the spread of communism in Indochina.9

It was apparent that Thailand's fear of communism was intense and its security needs were made a priority. For example, in negotiating with the United States over the nature of SEATO commitment to Thailand, Pibul's foreign Minister, Prince Wan Waitayakorn demanded "as strong a pact as possible" and "a commitment which in substance, is as near as possible to that of NATO"10 — that is a spontaneous, collective and immediate response to an aggressor in the event of an attack on Thailand. Prince Wan

9 Ibid., p.114.

also pressed for the establishment of a SEATO military command in Thailand and the deployment of SEATO forces in the treaty area. Thailand was not able to obtain this type of commitment because the United States at the time was not prepared to station its troops in mainland Southeast Asia and it wanted to keep its option of intervention in Southeast Asia open. The United States would only offer Thailand the headquarters of SEATO, not a command in Bangkok; a periodic military exercise in the treaty area; and a treaty clause that obligates member states to act "to meet a common danger in accordance with each member's constitutional processes." Despite this evident unwillingness of the United States to fully commit itself to Thailand's defense, the Pibul government decided that an unequivocal alignment with SEATO would be the most effective instrument to provide for Thailand's security in the face of serious external menaces.

In light of the uncertainties in Indochina and an acute perception of threat, the Pibul government did not believe that a neutral foreign policy would be a viable choice for Thailand. In a crisis situation, Thailand was not prepared to stand the test and application of India's Pancha Shila (the five principles of peaceful co-existence: (1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (2) non-aggression; (3) non-interference in each other's internal affairs; (4) equality and mutual

13 Ibid., pp.118-119.
benefits; and (5) peaceful co-existence). Following India's neutral foreign policy meant that Thailand's security would depend on the Communists' assurance of their peaceful intentions. While many new independent states after World War II praised India for its prestigious concept of non-alignment in the Cold War, Thailand regarded India as a nation too weak and too poor to contribute anything to Thailand. By contrast, though SEATO did not match the formal context of NATO as Thailand had desired, it represented a commitment of sufficient substance to create a Thai-American special friendship. Apart from satisfying security needs, the close association with the United States would also provide economic and military assistance to the country. For these reasons, Thailand was not receptive to the idea of fashioning itself as a beacon of Asian independence by staying neutral in the Cold War. Hence when backed by the United States - the nation endowed with economic, military and political power beyond others - the Pibul government chose to become "the bastion of Western defense in Southeast Asia."

Naturally, the international orientation of Thailand under Pibun did not produce a warm response from communist and non-aligned countries. The communist nations branded the Pibun government as a the puppet regime of the Americans; and the aligned nature of Thai foreign policy made it difficult for Thailand to be welcomed in the non-aligned movement at peak of its post-colonial nationalism.

15 Ibid., p.88.
These adverse reactions may have worried the Pibun government, but they did not cause the Thai military leaders to change their mind about membership in SEATO. These leaders had a clear order of priorities for national security and, in their opinion, only the alliance with the United States—not the lofty principles of neutralism—could meet these requirements. In fact, the Thais seemed to have committed themselves to the belief that the more Thailand demonstrated its allegiance to the Western alliance and to SEATO, the more ready the United States would be to protect Thai interests.

**Thailand’s Policy toward the Laotian Crisis 1960-1962**

Like the decision to join SEATO, Thailand’s policy toward the Laotian civil war during 1960-1962 reflected the country’s great fear of communism. Since the end of the Geneva conference in Indochina in 1962, Bangkok had been apprehensive about the prospect of a communist seizure of power in Laos. In Thailand’s view, Laos under communist rule would become a seed-bed for communist subversion. It was feared that a communist Laos could easily exploit ethnic affinities between the peoples of northeast Thailand and Laos.

During the Laotian civil war period of 1961-62, the Thai military regime led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1958-63) was extremely concerned that Laos was about to fall into the hands of the communist movement, the Pathet

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16 Ibid., p.128.
17 Neuchterlein, op.cit., p.119.
18 For this subject, see details in ibid., chap.5, 6 and 7.
Lao. Sarit gave strong support to the rightwing, pro-Thai, government under the leadership of General Phoumi Nosavan - the only group which Sarit believed to be capable of protecting Thailand's national interests from the communist threat. The Laotian neutralist leader Prince Souvannaphouma won no sympathy from Thailand. Though Souvannaphouma was committed to a non-aligned foreign policy while he was in power and showed no intention to move Laos into the communist camp, Sarit strongly disapproved of his dealings with the Pathet Lao and his visits to Hanoi and Peking. These overtures of friendship to communist powers were seen as a threat to Thailand's security; and as Nuechterlein noted, "to the pragmatic Thai mind, friendship with both communist and anti-communist neighbours was basically dishonest." Sarit indicated his displeasure with Souvannaphouma's policy by imposing an economic blockade of Vientiane when the neutralists controlled the city in 1960; this led Souvannaphouma to seek material assistance from the USSR.

From the onset of the Laotian crisis, Sarit made several impassioned but unproductive pleas for SEATO's strong and concerted action against the communist Pathet Lao. The British and the French were against SEATO intervention in Lao, arguing that the establishment of a coalition government between the rightists, the communists and the neutralists would be a more feasible solution. Sarit was extremely exasperated at the British and the French stand: their opposition to intervention in effect

19 Ibid., p.139.
blocked SEATO action, and in his view, their suggestion of
colation government including the Pathet Lao would surely
move Laos along the road of communication.

Still, Sarit expected that the United States, given its determination to resist communism, might choose to intervene in Laos. To pressure the US into such action, Sarit threatened to intervene unilaterally to save the crumbling military position of the rightists. Sarit urged the Thai public to act with resolution and make a sacrifice for the defense of Thai national interests in Laos:

To regard ourselves as having little power, so that, if there is no one to help us, we
would...leave the nation in danger, is impossible, because if we do not fight against the danger that comes to our country, we shall have to die in the end. Let us die fighting; let us die like a man.20

As it turned out, the Thai public had no chance to prove their "heroism". In March, 1961, the Kennedy administration announced that the United States would not send its troops into Laos but would seek a negotiated solution to the Laotian problem with the USSR, who had been supporting the neutralists and the Pathet Lao. Fear of risky confrontation with the USSR and preoccupation with issues of more immediate concern - the Berlin and Cuban crises - accounted for the United States' decision not to intervene in Laos.

In the absence of American encouragement, Sarit, despite his rhetoric and sabre-rattling, chose not to carry out his threat. Eventually, at the Geneva Conference on Laos in June 1961, Thailand reluctantly agreed to accept the

20 Sarit's speech, quoted in ibid., p.169.
Laotian tripartite coalition with the communist representation. The Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, explained that Thailand had no choice but to defer to the wishes of powerful nations - the United States and the USSR - to support the coalition government: "we were ... compelled to acquiesce ... because we are a small country. We can hardly withstand the pressure from the great powers."  

The United States' decision not to take strong action against the communists in Laos dealt a great psychological blow to Thailand. As the United States showed itself unwilling to halt the communist advance in Laos, there were serious doubts about the degree of backing Thailand could expect from the United States in the event of a communist attack. The Thai leaders began to feel that the "special" relationship with the United States was unrewarding; this disillusionment led to discussions on a reappraisal of Thai foreign policy in the direction of non-alignment. However, the United States, aware of Thailand's strategic value to its containment policy in Asia, was quick to reassure the Thai leaders of its commitment to Thai defense. In 1962 the United States and Thailand signed the Thanat-Rusk communiqué, which in essence affirmed that the United States would defend Thailand individually, without necessarily awaiting the agreement of other SEATO allies, as its SEATO obligations were individual as well as collective. The United States' straightforward recognition of its individual obligations effectively resolved Thailand's

crisis of confidence in the credibility of SEATO; it meant that Thailand would no longer have to worry about the use of the unanimity rule by other SEATO members to block American intervention in case of communist aggression against Thailand. Obviously pleased with the American demonstration of political will to protect Thailand, Sarit commented: "... it is not so easy to find such a sincere friend who is concerned about our own being as the United States." Having received this substantial reassurance from its powerful patron, Thailand regained confidence to act as a free-world bastion in the Cold War.

The Temple of Pra Vihear Case

In the early 1960's, Thailand's troubles with neighbouring countries were not confined to Laos. Mutual distrust between Thailand and Cambodia under Prince Norodom Sihanouk was deep, based on a long history of animosity and contrasting responses to the Cold War. Sihanouk had been intensely suspicious of Thailand's desire to assert hegemony over Cambodia, as evidenced by Thailand's annexation of the Cambodian northwestern provinces in 1941. Sihanouk also accused Thailand of colluding with the United States in interfering in Cambodian internal affairs in order to destroy Cambodia's neutrality. From the Thai side, Sihanouk's practice of a non-aligned foreign policy, particularly his overtures to Peking, could only serve communist interests in Indochina and thus endangered Thailand's security.

23 See details in Leifer, op.cit., pp.94-93.
Relations between the two countries reached a breaking point as a consequence of a dispute over the ruins of the Temple of Preah Vihear. This temple was on a contested Thai-Cambodian border in the Dongrek mountains. In the Thai view, the Temple site was on the Thai side of the common border as determined by Thai-French border treaties in 1904 and 1907. However, since Cambodian independence from France, Sihanouk had contended that the Temple belonged to Cambodia and protested the presence of Thai troops in the area. After futile negotiations with Thailand, Sihanouk brought the matter to the International Court of Justice in 1959. Sihanouk's initiative and the subsequent charges and countercharges between the two countries led to a break in diplomatic relations in October 1961.

In June 1962, the Court ruled that Cambodia, not Thailand, had sovereignty over the Temple of Preah Vihear. Thai nationalism was aroused in an unprecedented way because of the great sentimental value the Thai public had attached to the Temple, and so the Court decision caused a widespread uproar. Anti-Cambodian feelings ran so high that some Thai leaders advocated the disregard of the Court's ruling and a resort to military protection of the Temple. However, Sarit was aware that Thailand's failure to respect international law could have grave consequences for its international standing. He therefore decided to accept the Court's order and referred to the advice of the Monarchy to urge restraint on the Thai public.24

Thailand’s Role in the Vietnam War: The Domino Theory

In the early 1960’s, while Thailand was fighting a legal battle with Cambodia, the armed conflict between the South Vietnam government and communist insurgency intensified and the United States’ involvement in Vietnam became more extensive. When the United States started bombing North Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, Thanat Khoman, Thailand’s Foreign Minister, commented that his country was “heartened” by the strong retaliatory American action against North Vietnam; he went on to describe the state of Bangkok-Washington ties as “better than any time in history.” From this time on, Thailand actively involved itself in the massive American intervention in Indochina. The Thamom-Prapat military regime allowed the United States to develop and use a "war infrastructure" in Thailand - "airfields, logistical camps, communication system and intelligence operation." In addition, Thailand sent a division - financed by the United States - to fight in Vietnam and permitted the United States to recruit "Thai volunteers" for its military-backed clandestine operations against the communists in Laos.

The American intervention in Indochina was inspired by its determination to keep communism in check in an ongoing worldwide contest. In the Thai view, the American intervention served Thailand’s security interests because the communist takeover of South Vietnam would lead inevitably to the communist domination of the rest of

Southeast Asia. Thailand's security depended on the success of the United States' efforts to prevent the spread of communism in Indochina and, thus, the Americans deserved Thailand's support. In other words, Thailand subscribed to the American domino theory which was expounded by the National Security Council (NSC) in these terms:

> The loss of any of the countries of Southeast Asia to communist aggression ... would have critical psychological, political and economic consequences. In the absence of effective and timely counteraction, the loss of any single country would probably lead to swift submission to or an alignment with communism by remaining countries of this group.  

> Although reluctant to suggest that Thailand might become a domino, Thanat shared the United States' view of the prospect of advancing communism. He even stated that if Thailand and the United States "give in to them (the Communists) in South Vietnam, we shall have to give in to them in Laos, in Cambodia and perhaps in the whole of Southeast Asia."

Thailand's support for the United States intervention in Indochina drew a strong reaction from North Vietnam and China. In the middle of 1960's, Hanoi and Peking declared their increased support for domestic insurgency in Thailand. The Thai leaders themselves were also aware that Thailand's permission for the United States to use the air bases for bombing raids in Indochina could provoke an enemy air action. These threats and the risk of

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retaliation alarmed the Thai leaders; but instead of altering their policy toward the American intervention in Vietnam, they attempted to minimize the danger by consolidating military cooperation with the United States and pressed Washington to take a stronger action against North Vietnam. The Thai Foreign Minister, Thanat, proved to be one of the most ardent advocates of continued American escalation in Vietnam. He drew a parallel between the communists in Asia with the Nazi Germans in the late 1930's, arguing that "the only cause that is worthwhile and valid is to stand up, resist and repel the aggressors" because the lessons from Munich make it plain that "appeasement is still the surest way of losing peace."

The United States emphasis on its vital interests in the outcome of the conflict in Vietnam, underpinned by the massive scale of its involvement, encouraged the Thai military leaders to involve Thailand more deeply in the Vietnam War. So sure was Thailand of the American determination to win the Vietnam war that it scarcely considered the possibility that the United States might lose its political will to continue fighting. Therefore, when the United States announced the plan to negotiate an end to the Indochina War in 1968, Thailand was caught off guard.

At the very first significant sign of a weakening in American resolve, the realistic Thanat recognized the

29 Morrison, op.cit., pp.120-121.
30 Ibid., p.11.
need to modify the defiant anti-communism of Thailand's foreign policy. Hence, Thanat, who had consistently urged the Thai nation to fight against the communist threat "manly", and if need be "singly", now asserted that Thailand was not "anti-communist" and he even sought to open a dialogue with Peking. Thanat now emphasized that the presence of American troops in Thailand was "temporary" and that the "main principle of the foreign policy of Thailand" was "a policy of independence." However, Thanat did not plan to change the course of Thailand's foreign policy too drastically. He was well aware that the United States would continue to be Thailand's main source of economic and military assistance, even though Thailand could no longer rely on the United States for protection. Ideally, Thanat wanted to seek some sort of reconciliation with Asian communists while retaining American military assistance and promoting closer ties with Southeast Asian nations.

Thanat's attempt to increase Thailand's diplomatic flexibility met opposition from the Thai military leaders. They agreed that Thailand had to reduce tension with China; but they argued for a limited response. The military leaders feared that Thanat's policy would undermine the alliance with the United States, which in their eyes remained vital to Thailand's security. The Thai military were also concerned that Thanat's hasty overtures to Peking

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34 Morrison, op.cit., p.125.
could incite pro-Chinese feelings among the Chinese minority. As a result of disagreements over Thailand's future relations with China, Thanat lost his job, when the cabinet was reshuffled in November, 1971, and the process of readjustment in Thailand's foreign policy was delayed until the Thanom - Prapat regime was overthrown in October 1973.

Regional Cooperation

Thanat saw regional cooperation as of practical value in the development of closer ties among non-communist Southeast Asian nations. A common stance with these neighbouring countries, which Thanat termed "collective political defense", could enable Thailand to avoid the danger of being isolated from other Asian countries because of its involvement in Vietnam; and also the danger of being undervalued by its friends. 35

Hence, despite his preoccupation with the turmoil in Indochina and the alliance with the United States, Thanat played a prominent role in promoting regional cooperation. In 1961, Thanat endorsed the proposal of Malaysia and the Philippines to establish the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA); this organization, however, suffered a serious setback as a consequence of the Malaysian-Philippines dispute over Sabah during 1963-1966. Thanat found himself a peace-maker between the two countries and he also mediated between Malaysia and Indonesia during the Konfrontasi in the same period. His services were well-appreciated and, it was

to his credit that, Malaysia and Indonesia came to trust
Thailand's neutrality and impartiality.\textsuperscript{36}

After the lessening of tension in the region, Thanat was instrumental in transforming ASA into the
Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in August
1967; at the outset this organization comprised Indonesia,
Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. (with
Brunei joining in 1984.) In the ASEAN or Bangkok Declaration
of August 8, 1967, the five original members stated the aims
and purposes of the organization as follows:

To accelerate the economic growth, social progress
and cultural development in the region through
joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and
partnership in order to strengthen the foundation
for a prosperous and peaceful community of South
East Asian nations ... and ... to promote regional
peace and stability through abiding respect for
justice and the rule of law in the relationship
among countries of the region and adherence to the
principles of the United Nations Charter.\textsuperscript{37}

The ASEAN countries also specified fields of their active
collaborations: greater utilization of agriculture and
industry expansion of trade, improvement of transportation
and communication facilities, and of living standards.\textsuperscript{38}
Thanat also expected that ASEAN would improve the bargaining
position of member states with the great powers.\textsuperscript{39}

However, despite his keen interest in regional
cooperation, Thanat realized that Thailand could not count
on ASEAN as a reliable source of protection. He was quite
cognizant that the forces of disintegration still existed

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review: ASIA Yearbook 1965}, p.287.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Morrison, op.cit., p.269.
among the ASEAN countries - latent territorial disputes, mutual suspicion, and considerable cultural and racial differences. Even if ASEAN solidarity were a reality, these nations were militarily too weak to come to Thailand's aid in time of danger. Thanat saw that peace and stability in Southeast Asia still depended to a large extent on the attitudes of the great powers and Thailand had no choice but to accept this reality.40

After Thanat's dismissal, Thailand became less enthusiastic about ASEAN. Although in 1971 Thailand had signed the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, which aimed at the realization of the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), the Thai military leaders never made any secret that they were not ready to accept the neutralization of Southeast Asia. They feared that the ZOPFAN plan might hasten Western withdrawal from the region while China would continue to support insurgencies in Thailand.41

Policies of Accommodation and Equidistance

The American debacle in Indochina in 1975 heralded an era when Thailand had to rely on its own resources for its security. The decline of American influence in mainland Southeast Asia and the communist conquest of Indochina had been critical moments in Thailand's foreign policy: Thailand had lost both superpower protection and the protecting shield of buffer states to insulate it from communist pressure. The Thai civilian government led by M.R. Kukrit

40 J.L.S. Girling, "Thailand's New Course" Pacific Affairs XLII, No.3 (Fall 1969), 349--350.

Pramoij viewed Thailand's position in this entirely new situation with extreme concern. This reaction was reflected in the government's speedy adjustment to the new realities.

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, it became apparent to the Kukrit government that Thailand must now make realistic adjustments in policies both in relation to the Indochinese communist countries and to the great powers. The prospect for ensuring Thai security lay in seeking an accommodation with North Vietnam. Hanoi had insisted that the chief obstacle to the establishment of diplomatic relations between North Vietnam and Thailand was the presence of American forces in Thailand. To make a positive gesture to North Vietnam, Kukrit set 20 July 1976 as the date for the withdrawal of American troops from Thailand. At the beginning, Hanoi responded quite favourably to Kukrit's move. In May 1975 the North Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Phan Hien visited Bangkok and showed willingness to normalize relations with Thailand. This interest was derived in part from the worsening relations between Vietnam and China and also the Vietnamese priority of reconstruction.42 However, Thai-Vietnamese relations did not progress very far as Vietnam doubted the reality of the American withdrawal from Thailand, and Thailand's fears of Vietnamese expansionism and Hanoi's influence in supporting communist insurgency still lingered on particularly among the military. Kukrit also moved to develop relations with

42 Leszek Buszyunski, "SEATO: Why It Survived until 1977 and Why It was Abolished" Journal of Southeast Asian Studies XII, No.2, (September 1981), 293.
the communist Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and attempted to mend relations with communist-ruled Laos.

Concurrently, Kukrit sought to maintain a balance of association with the great powers, a strategy which Foreign Minister Chartchai Chunhawan called the "equidistant policy." On 19 March 1978, Kukrit enunciated his foreign policy in relation to China, the great power with the most immediate impact on Thailand, as follows:

...in order to create a balance in the relations with the big powers, this government will take steps for the recognition and establishment of normal diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China ...43

Kukrit's overtures to China met a positive response from the Chinese leaders who were already concerned with the growth of Russian influence in Vietnam. Thus, a watershed in Thailand's foreign policy was reached when the Kukrit government established diplomatic relations with China in 1976, ending nearly three decades of enmity between the two nations. However, in normalizing relations with China, Thailand had to make a significant concession to the Chinese leaders. Peking refused to renounce its support for the Communist party of Thailand, insisting that Thailand had to accept the distinctions between party-to-party and government-to-government relations. Thailand gave way to China on this issue for the sake of a larger national interest - friendship with China could induce it to act as a countervailing power against a resurgent Vietnam.44

As far as relations with the United States were concerned, though Kukrit attempted to lessen Thailand's attachment to the Americans so as to facilitate the development of broader relations with the communist countries, he in no way wanted to initiate a total break in relations with the United States. As Kukrit stated:

With the United States we have shared many objectives and embarked upon many ventures together in the past. The security posture of Thailand during the past 25 years—and even into the present—has been clearly tied to the United States. And cooperation in the past will continue into the future, of this I have no doubt. But our common interests need no longer be dominated by one type of activities alone.45

Thus, though Thailand along with the Philippines agreed to phase out SEATO— the symbol of anti-communism in Southeast Asia—"to make it accord with the new realities in the region"46, Kukrit still preserved the Manila Pact with the United States.

There was also a move to improve relations with the USSR who in Kukrit's view had "a great potential" to "play a significant role that would be consonant with the interests of the regional powers"47—meaning in practice that Thailand would like to see Moscow restrain the communist Vietnamese. Kukrit's overtures toward the USSR were also intended to balance the new relationship with China.

Kukrit's successor, Seni Pramoj, continued Thailand's policies of accommodation and equidistance. The

45 FAB Vol.XV, No.3 (July - September 1975), p.43.
46 Ibid., p.73.
47 Loc,cit.
Semi government completed the process of the withdrawal of American troops from Thailand. Foreign Minister Bhichai Rattakul encouraged Thailand’s policy of conciliation as the most effective way of coping with the communist regimes of Indochina and he announced that Thailand would "do everything possible" to improve relations with these countries. In August 1976, Bhichai achieved a notable diplomatic success by establishing Thai-Vietnamese diplomatic relations.

During both the Kukrit and Semi governments, Thailand, as well as other ASEAN countries apparently stimulated by the communist success in Indochina, became much more interested in promoting regional cooperation, particularly the coordination of policies toward Indochina. Uncertain about the impact of the decline in American influence on the region, the ASEAN countries now recognized the necessity to strengthen their unity and expand their cooperation. In February 1976, the first ASEAN summit conference was held in Bali; and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation was signed. According to Article 2 of this treaty, the five members states agreed that in order to promote peaceful co-existence in Southeast Asia every regional nation should conduct its policy toward each other according to the following principles: (1) mutual respect for the independence, sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations; (2) the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion and coercion; (3) non-interference in

the internal affairs of one another; (4) settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means; (5) renunciation of the threat or use of force and effective cooperation among themselves. They also called for the implementation of ZOPFAN. Thailand now placed greater importance on ASEAN and publicly endorsed the idea of ZOPFAN. However, Thai Prime Minister Seni still regarded the presence of great powers in the region as "unavoidable" and thus emphasized Thailand's need to maintain the policy of equidistance with great powers.

Thailand's conciliatory attitude toward the Indochinese communist countries was disrupted when the military staged a coup and installed the staunchly anti-communist Thanin Kraivichien as Prime Minister in October 1976. Taking an alarmist view of Vietnam's intentions, Thanin accused Hanoi of instigating unrest in Bangkok and harbouring expansionist desires. To combat the menace of communism, Thanin looked to the revival of Thai-American alliance and regional solidarity. However, the Thanin government lasted only one year, it was toppled by General Kriangsak Chamanand in a coup in October 1977. Even so, Thanin's violent anti-communist campaign at home and his uncompromising attitudes toward communist countries caused a strain in Sino-Thai relations and exacerbated Thailand's relations with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.


Under these circumstances, the Kriangsak government sought to reduce tension with the Indochinese states. Thailand lifted its blockade on imports in Laos and reached an agreement to exchange ambassadors with Vietnam and Cambodia. Kriangsak also moved to improve relations with China. During his visit to China in March 1978, the Chinese leaders, who were hoping to entice ASEAN countries to join its efforts to forestall the growth of Soviet influence in Southeast Asia, commended ASEAN cooperation and showed their approval of the neutralization proposal.51

Kriangsak's policies toward Indochinese countries and China indicated that he was prepared to come to terms with the realities of the post-Vietnam war: Thailand could no longer count on the protection of the United States and China had an important role to play in stabilizing the situation in Southeast Asia.52 Kriangsak, therefore, wanted to restore Thailand's policy of equidistance with the great powers. He stated in his foreign policy address of 1 December 1977 that his government would "pursue an independent foreign policy."53

Prior to late 1978, Thailand under Kriangsak seemed to have regained confidence in mastering its external environment after the traumatic period of the communist takeover in Indochina. Evidently, the situation which had always been Thailand's greatest fear - a monolithic
communist Indochina backed by China - did not materialize. Instead, there were confrontation between China and Cambodia on the one hand and Vietnam on the other. Rivalry among these communist countries stemmed from clashes of national interests, territorial disputes, historical fear and fierce nationalism.\textsuperscript{54} China and Vietnam had each been trying to cultivate relations with Thailand in order to draw the Thais to its side or ensure Bangkok's neutrality in the conflict. Under these conditions, Thailand's security benefited from divisions in the communist camp as long as it could manage to remain neutral and avoid becoming entangled in any intensified conflict. During this period, Thailand had been optimistic about peaceful co-existence in Southeast Asia\textsuperscript{55} and the Kriangsak government promised to contribute actively to the establishment of ZOPFAN.\textsuperscript{56}

**Confrontation with Vietnam: The Frontline State 1978-1986**

Subsequent events in late 1978 and 1979 made it impossible for Thailand to isolate itself from the Sino-Vietnamese-Kampuchean conflicts and many policies Thailand adopted from this time on still hold true today, eight years later. In January 1979, Vietnam - with Soviet connivance and assistance - invaded Kampuchea and set up the pro-Hanoi

\textsuperscript{54} For the background to these conflicts see J.L.S. Girling, "Indochina", in *Conflict and Intervention in the Third World*, ed. Mohammed Ayoob (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980) pp.12-37.


Heng Samrin government in Phnom Pehn. A month later China launched an attack on the Vietnamese border and strongly backed the ousted Khmer Rouge regime in a guerrilla war against the Vietnamese troops.

This new upheaval in Indochina brought about a drastic deterioration of security condition in Southeast Asia and, as a result, caused a fundamental change in Thailand's external outlook. The Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea has entrenched Sino-Soviet rivalry in Southeast Asia and spoiled the prospect of stable balance of power in the region. Most threatening to the Thai was the emergence of the Vietnamese preponderance in Indochina. This has revived Thailand's traditional fear of the Vietnamese expansionist desire. The Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea brought the Thai troops face to face with the Vietnamese forces. The danger for Thailand has been that the fighting in Kampuchea has frequently spilled over into Thailand and the consequent influx of refugees has been a considerable burden. Even more ominous has been the possibility of escalation, creating a high tension along the border. As a consequence, Thailand now thinks of itself as a "frontline" state. This stance reflects Thailand's

57 Hanoi signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Moscow in November 1978. The ASEAN nations interpreted this as a move to neutralize the danger of Chinese retaliation and so made possible a Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. K.K. Nair, ASEAN-Indochina Relations Since 1975: The Politics of Accommodation, Canberra papers on Strategy and Defense No.30 (Canberra: The Strategic and Defense Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 1984) p.129.

vulnerability to the Vietnamese threat. Bangkok's principal aim since 1978 has been to pressure Vietnam to withdraw its troops from Kampuchea and to restore this war-torn country as an independent buffer state between Thailand and Vietnam.

Thailand's response to the Kampuchean crisis has included a variety of tactics. The main strategy has been to coordinate its policy with China—the only great power that is willing and able to put pressure on Hanoi effectively. Specifically, Thailand—despite public denial—has allowed China to supply arms to the Khmer Rouge through Thai territory. In return, the Chinese have pledged to retaliate against Vietnam in the event of an attack on Thailand. Thailand thus counts on China as a strategic deterrent against Vietnam, and in effect Bangkok's policy of equidistance with great powers has been terminated. However, despite close association with China, Thailand has been anxious to avoid direct involvement in the fighting.

In addition, the Kriangsak government requested the United States to reaffirm its commitment to Thai defense under the Manila Pact in the event that Thailand's security was threatened. Thailand has also encouraged the United States to uphold the balance of power with the USSR in the region by maintaining a naval presence. The United States itself, particularly the Reagan Administration, has

59 See FEER, 16 February 1979, p.29.
responded quite favourably to Thailand's request for increased military assistance and cooperation—notably the American decision to sell high-performance F-16A aircraft to Thailand\(^\text{62}\) and Washington's willingness to discuss the plan to set up a war ammunition reserve in Thailand.\(^\text{63}\)

Thailand has also worked closely with ASEAN in denying international recognition to the Vietnamese subjugation of Kampuchea. Over the past eight years, ASEAN has won support in the U.N. Assembly for the retention of the credentials of the Democratic Kampuchea. Moreover, ASEAN has devised and proposed solutions to end the Kampuchean problem. Basically, ASEAN demands the withdrawal of foreign troops from Kampuchea, a UN-supervised free election and Kampuchea's neutrality. It is hoped that an independent and neutral Kampuchea would not threaten the security of other countries. Nevertheless, the demands have not so far met with positive response from Vietnam, who is still determined to consolidate its hold on Kampuchea. In this regard, despite differences among ASEAN countries on the approach to the Kampuchean crisis, the opinions of Thailand—the frontline state—has been given priority in the ASEAN decision-making process.\(^\text{64}\)

In following China's policy of supporting the Khmer Rouge regime, Thailand has found itself in both


\(^{63}\) See details in *FEER*, 24 April 1986, pp.44-46.

\(^{64}\) Malaysia and Indonesia want to keep Vietnam stable and strong so that it could act as a counterweight to China. Thus, they showed more conciliatory attitudes toward Vietnam than does Thailand. On this point, see an analysis by Sukhumbhand Paribatra, *FEER* May 10, 1984, pp.32-34.
political and moral dilemmas. For one thing, while Thailand and ASEAN seek the Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea, they do not want to see the Khmer Rouge return to power; as this would enable China to secure a strong foothold in Southeast Asia. Thailand’s close association with China also contributes to the polarisation in the region: Thailand, ASEAN and China stand on one side and Vietnam and the USSR on the other. This development will only serve to preclude the neutralization of the whole region, which is in Thailand’s long-term interests. Furthermore, the Khmer Rouge, which is widely believed to be responsible for the death of more than a million Kampucheaans during its reign, cannot be promoted as a promising and palatable alternative to the pro-Hanoi Heng Samrin regime.

Despite these long-term implications, Thailand has chosen to support the Khmer Rouge both diplomatically and militarily because it is the most powerful group to resist the Vietnamese troops. But Hanoi was quick to exploit Thailand’s dilemma. The Vietnamese argued that their intervention in Kampuchea has done a great service for the Kampuchean people by eliminating the murderous Khmer Rouge regime; therefore, its action was justified and the Heng Samrin government should be granted international

Thailand and ASEAN rejected the Vietnamese proposition, pointing out that their support for the Khmer Rouge was based on the principle of non-intervention and to recognize the Vietnam-backed Heng Samrin government would be tantamount to rewarding the Vietnamese act of aggression.

To improve its diplomatic position on this issue, ASEAN had been instrumental in incorporating the Khmer Rouge in a military coalition with non-communist leaders - Prince Norodom Sihanouk and Son Sann - in 1982. This formula has allowed ASEAN to demonstrate to the world that the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops does not necessarily mean the restoration of the Khmer Rouge. Nonetheless, to Thailand's disappointment, some Western countries, including Britain, France and Australia, refused to grant diplomatic recognition to the Khmer coalition government because of their repugnance against the Khmer Rouge. Thai Foreign


67 At the annual meeting of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers in Manila in June 1981, the ASEAN countries emphasized that:

...the grounds for their support for the credentials of Democratic Kampuchea were based on the fundamental principles that foreign intervention must be opposed and that any change in the recognition of Democratic Kampuchea's credentials would be tantamount to condoning Vietnam's military invasion and occupation of Kampuchea. They saw absolutely no justification for other states to overthrow the legitimate government of another state as such action violated the internationally recognized principles governing interstate relations as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. (italics mine)

The ASEAN Joint Communique, Manila, June 1981, cited in ibid, p.57.
Minister Siddhi Savetsila complained that these Western countries were unduly moralistic in their judgement of the Khmer Rouge and in that process overlooked the evil consequences of the Vietnamese action:

Unfortunately, when some people talk about the Kampuchean problem, they talk a lot about how bad Pol Pot (the Khmer Rouge's leader) was. They want the elimination of Pol Pot as the solution of Kampuchean issue. They don't talk about much about military occupation of Kampuchea and rapid Vietnamization of Kampuchea.

At the time of this writing, the situation in Kampuchea is still in an impasse. Hanoi has launched many offensives against the Khmer resistance groups but has failed to wipe them out. The Khmer guerillas themselves are not powerful enough to force Hanoi to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict, let alone to drive the Vietnamese troops out. Any future settlement will depend very much on the outcome of the fighting and the attitude of China and the USSR. In the meantime, Thailand in an effort to repair its security environment continues to oppose the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea by supporting China's policy of pressuring Vietnam, by strengthening military cooperation with the United States, and by relying on ASEAN moral and political solidarity.

68 Foreign Affairs Newsletter (Thailand) 5 (May 1985), pp. 7-8.
CHAPTER III
CRITIQUE AND CONCLUSION

Thailand’s traditional diplomacy has been remarkable for its pragmatism and flexibility. If Machiavelli, Hobbes, Morgenthau, and Carr were to choose an Asian example to illustrate their view of foreign policy, Thailand’s traditional diplomacy could very well serve their purpose. But would the Realists approve of Thailand’s foreign policy after the Second World War? To answer this question, this chapter will select major components of Thailand’s foreign policy from the account in chapter II and examine whether they have corresponded to the realist view of foreign policy or not. The chapter will also discuss their performances and generalize the characteristics of Thailand’s foreign policy during the last forty years.

Alliance with the United States 1950-1975

For more than two decades, as we have seen, Thai foreign policy had been geared toward consolidating a special relationship with the United States. The successive military regimes of Pibul, Sarit and Thanom-Prapat regarded the alliance with the United States as the most effective instrument to ensure Thailand’s security. The Thai military leaders did discuss the option of pursuing a neutral policy after Washington hesitated to respond to Thailand’s security needs in the Laotian crisis of 1961-1963. Nonetheless, in general, the confidence of the Thai military in the will and ability of the United States to provide for Thailand’s

1 See details in Dhiraveguin, Siam and Colonialism (1855-1909), (footnote no. 1 in Introduction)
security remained at a very high level. This was evident from the pattern of Thailand's reaction to the perceived threat. Confronted with unfavourable changes in the security environment, the Thai military always pressed for a stronger commitment from their powerful ally. Thailand's membership in SEATO, the Rusk-Thanat communique and other military assistance agreements concluded during the American intervention in Indochina were vivid examples.

At one level, it could be argued that Thailand's decision to make alliance with the United States was in accordance with the Realists' policy of the balance of power. In the Thai military's view, China and North Vietnam were expansionist by nature and inherently ideologically hostile to Thailand. The preponderance of their influence in Southeast Asia would be detrimental to Thailand's security; therefore, Thailand had to rely on the great power of the United States as a counterbalance to potential aggressors. Without allies, Thailand understood well the Realists' emphasis on the danger of a small and weak country facing an overwhelming enemy. \(^2\) In fact, Thailand had just suffered this danger during the Second World War when it had to succumb to the invading Japanese army in 1941 after several unsuccessful appeals for help from the British and the Americans. This traumatic experience influenced the thinking of the Thai military and caused them to seek security through a close alliance with the United States. \(^3\)

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2 chapter I, p.4.

Initially, Thailand had benefited considerably from this strategic connection. Prior to the mid-1960's, Thailand hardly paid any price for American protection, while the United States was under an obligation to come to Thailand's assistance. Thailand had no duty to help the United States in the event of attack. As far as the Thai military was concerned, the alliance with the United States was the easiest solution for safeguarding Thailand's security. By depending upon the American security umbrella, they could free themselves from having to make a hard decision: how best to deal with the communist countries and the volatile situation in Indochina. Should Thailand adopt a conciliatory attitude toward China, North Vietnam and the Indochinese communist movements? When? How? Would it promote better understanding or would it even encourage the communists to be more aggressive? As Viraphol pointed out, by keeping in step with their mighty American patron, the Thai military "... did not need to initiate anything of their own which might result in ambiguity and uncertainty." Moreover, domestically, the military gained prestige from being allied with the most powerful nation; this plus massive American military assistance helped the military consolidate their influence in Thai politics.

4 Modelski, p.104.

5 Viraphol, *Direction in Thai Foreign Policy*, p. 12. (see footnote no.44, chapter II.)

6 See ibid., and Morrison, *Strategies of Survival*, pp.112-113. (see footnote no. 3, chapter II)
economic development also profited from America's substantial economic aid and military spending.\(^7\)

However, by the late 1960's, the advantages of the close alliance with the United States sharply declined. The reversal of American policy in Vietnam in 1968 truly shocked the Thai leaders. Having antagonized China and North Vietnam with its active participation in the Vietnam War, Thailand now faced the prospect of confronting communist hostility without the backing of the United States. The fact that Thailand was suddenly left out on a limb reflected a principal flaw in Thai policy of alliance with the United States: in leaning heavily on Washington, Thailand had in the process closed other options and lost its freedom of action. When a drastic change took place, Thailand could not readily switch to other alternatives. The result was a disarray in Thai foreign policy.

To make this point clearer, it would be helpful to compare Thai foreign policy with that of Cambodia under Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Like the Thai military, Sihanouk was apprehensive about China and the Viet-Minh; he had originally been very anxious to join SEATO as a guarantee against the communist aggression.\(^8\) However, as it turned out, Sihanouk opted for a neutral policy befriending with the East and the West in the Cold war. There were three main reasons for Cambodia's choice of neutrality. First, unlike the Thai military, Sihanouk did not perceive the communist countries as absolutely evil and implacably

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\(^7\) Viraphol, op.cit, pp. 12-13.  
\(^8\) Leifer, *Cambodia...*, pp.56-57. (see footnote no. 1,chapter II)
hostile to other nations of different ideologies. On the contrary, in his opinion, friendship with China could enhance Cambodia's security; for China was able to restrain the Viet-Minh activities against Cambodia. Therefore, Sihanouk declined to be a full member of SEATO lest it might provoke China, thereby compromising Cambodia's security interests. China itself made it clear to Sihanouk that it would be benevolent toward Cambodia as long as he did not associate his country with the United States. Second, Sihanouk, again in contrast with the Thai military, doubted the the Americans would succeed in containing the communist influence in Indochina. Thus, he thought it politic to adopt a neutral foreign policy so that Cambodia could live peacefully with the communist countries in the event of an American failure. Third, Sihanouk realized that SEATO could not help Cambodia cope with all the threats it was facing. SEATO could serve as a powerful deterrent against an open communist aggression. But it would be ineffective against an externally-directed internal threat. Besides, Cambodia was threatened not only by the communists but also by its traditional enemies, Thailand and South Vietnam. Both of them were America's close allies. Should Cambodia

9 Ibid., pp. 59-63.

10 SEATO offered Cambodia its protection against open aggression. This commitment entailed no corresponding obligation from Cambodia. Sihanouk was contented with this gratuitous offer but he did not accept it publicly for fear that it might invoke Chinese hostility. Ibid., pp. 58-59 and p. 63.

11 Ibid., p. 63.

12 Ibid., p. 153.

13 Ibid., p. 60 and p. 81.
have disputes with these two countries, Sihanouk was convinced that the United States would side with them—not with Cambodia. Conversely, in such an event, China and the communist bloc would be sympathetic to Cambodia provided that it did not join SEATO.

In the face of multiple menaces, Sihanouk found it necessary to preserve Cambodia's freedom of action. Flexibility in foreign policy would make it possible for Cambodia to combat each threat to its survival in the most suitable manner. As Sihanouk stated:

If Cambodia were the object of an attack by the Viet-Minh and the Chinese People's Republic, it could demand the support of the Free World and the United States, and, if the attack came from Thailand or South Vietnam, it is certain that it would demand the aid of the Communist bloc in particular the Chinese People's Republic.

Sihanouk in other words attempted to maintain a balanced posture between China and the United States in the hope that he would be able to secure support from either of them in time of danger. To put it differently, Sihanouk was playing the balance-of-power game, manipulating China and the United States to counterbalance each other in Cambodia's interests.

Given that flexibility is an outstanding characteristic of the realist view of foreign policy, Sihanouk's policy was evidently more realistic than that of the Thai military. Sihanouk's policy to create a balance of power reflected the Realists' conception of the ideal foreign policy: it involved continuous international interchange and deft handling of relations with the major

14 Ibid., p.81.
15 Ibid., p.83.
powers. By contrast, Thailand's policy to maintain a balance of power by complete dependence on the United States was simplistic and inelastic. While Cambodia could respond to any dramatic changes in circumstances readily, Thailand could not.

It is true that by early 1970 Sihanouk's policy had encountered serious difficulties. The Vietnamese communists had sought sanctuaries along the Cambodian borders and the Americans often came to attack these communist positions. Sihanouk could do nothing but to tolerate the violation of Cambodia's neutrality by both sides. Actually, Sihanouk was in favour of limited American strikes against the communists. However, he realized that a fullscale American intervention in Cambodia would directly involve the country in the war. Therefore, Sihanouk carefully avoided close military relationship with the United States and continued to maintain good relations with the communist countries. This policy enabled Sihanouk to preserve Cambodia's fragile neutrality and keep it out of the Vietnam War. Cambodia's neutral policy was abandoned when General Lon Nol overthrew Sinhanouk's government in March 1970. Lon Nol pursued an anti-communist policy and called in American massive military assistance. This in effect made Cambodia an active belligerent in the Vietnam War and the country was engulfed in the war with disastrous consequences. It could be argued that if Lon Nol had

16 Chapter 1, p.19.


18 See details in Ibid.
continued Sihanouk's policy, Cambodia could have been saved involvement in the war.

Rigidity in Thai foreign policy was primarily a result of the Thai military's phobia against communism and their overconfidence in the United States as a patron. Obsessed with the twin spectres of communist expansionism and monolithic communism, the Thai military firmly believed that only a hardline policy toward the communist countries could neutralize the communist threat to Thailand. They failed to realize that a more flexible attitude toward China and North Vietnam might have lessened their animosity and thus improved Thailand security conditions.\(^\text{19}\) On this point, Thailand forgot the Realists' warning that ideology should never dominate the making of foreign policy.\(^\text{20}\)

While one can justifiably criticize the Thai military for their blind anti-communism, it might be unfair to blame them for aligning Thailand with the United States. After the Second World War, the United States emerged as the superpower with economic, political and military power beyond other nations; it must have occurred to the Thai military that the most realistic policy was to form an alliance with the strongest nation. In addition, unlike the case of Cambodia, the threat to Thailand was simple and


\(^{20}\) Chapter I, pp.10-11.
unambiguous: communist expansion. The United States shared this same concern and was able to fully satisfy Thailand's security needs. There were no compelling reasons for the Thai military to keep other options open. And for two decades, the Thai military's foreign policy, though rigid and ideological, had worked well and did help preserve Thailand's independence. Similarly, Thailand's fateful decision to participate in the Vietnam War was based on the assumption that the United States, the most powerful nation on earth, was willing to make every sacrifice to achieve its goals. In the 1960's, it was difficult to foresee that the United States would ever lose a a small war in Vietnam. Only with the benefit of the hindsight could one comment that the Thai military was unrealistic in placing complete reliance on the United States.

**Thailand's Policies of Accommodation and Equidistance:**

**Flexibility and Readjustment**

1975 saw two dramatic shifts in Thai foreign policy. One shift meant moving away from a total dependence on the United States to a more balanced relationship with Peking, Moscow and Washington. The second shift had been a moving away from enmity toward reconciliation with the communist regimes in Indochina. Given the fact that Thailand had maintained its strict, US-supported anti-communist posture for more than two decades, these

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readjustments manifested the Kukrit government's extraordinary flexibility.

Kukrit's decision to chart a new course for Thai foreign policy was obviously in line with the Realists' cardinal rule, that is, a nation must be willing to accept and adapt itself to a changing situation. By the early 1970's, the Sino-American detente had made invalid the raison d'etre of SEATO: the containment of Chinese expansionism. In the same manner, the American plan to disengage from Indochina proved that the existing American commitment to the Thai defense has lost much of its credibility. Thailand could no longer expect the United States to fight its war; Thailand must bear the main burden of combat itself. Both Thailand's membership in SEATO and its close alliance with the United States had become anachronistic.

Conditions had changed. The Kukrit government fully understood that Thai foreign policy had to change too. Without the protecting shield of the United States, Thailand could no longer afford to antagonize the communist countries. This line of thinking was the rationale of Thailand's insistence on the American withdrawal, the establishment of diplomatic relations with China and friendly overtures toward the Indochinese communist governments.

As against Kukrit's realistic reasoning, the Thai military leaders clung to the Cold War mentality.  

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22 Chapter I, pp. 18-19.

23 Viraphol, Direction..., p. 51.
Unrealistically, they yearned for the certainties and stability afforded by the Americans during the Cold War. Unable to rid themselves of the concepts of the Cold War - containment, communist expansionism etc., the Thai military leaders still felt an acute need for American protection against the communist threat.²⁴ Hence, they objected to Kukrit’s insistence on complete American withdrawal. They wanted the United States to retain the Ramasoon electronic surveillance facilities in return for continued American provision of military equipment and training.²⁵ The Thai military leaders were also critical of Kukrit’s cultivating better relations with the communist countries. In their opinion, it was dangerous to trust a friendship with the communist countries: Kukrit’s policy would jeopardize Thailand’s security.²⁶ In brief, the Thai military leaders still believed Thailand could and should rely on military means rather than diplomatic means in managing its security problems.

Although the opposing views of the Thai military were vocal, they had no effect on the Kukrit government’s determination to go on with readjustments in Thai foreign policy. The Kukrit government was convinced that the prospects of Thailand’s security after the Vietnam war depended on the success of these readjustments. It was

²⁴ Ibid.


therefore necessary to make every effort in order to facilitate the process of change. In an attempt to mend relations with the communist countries, Kukrit announced in his foreign policy address to the Thai Parliament that his government would reverse Thailand's anti-communist stance and conduct foreign relations "irrespective of differences in ideologies or political systems." Hence, the termination of the close alliance with Washington and SEATO. More significantly, the Kukrit government, in opening diplomatic relations with China, agreed to go along with Peking's insistence that it would continue to maintain ties with the Communist Party of Thailand. Kukrit was prepared to make this concession to China because he saw that China could act as a counterbalance against a resurgent Vietnam. Kukrit in other words attempted to work for the balance of power by playing communists against communists. The Realists would have approved of Kukrit's policy in regard. They have emphasized that states should determine their practical interests and separate them from ideological overtones.

**ASEAN: A Realistic Calculation or A Romantic Grand Design**

When ASEAN was founded in 1967, most observers doubted its longevity and viability. Indeed, there was no legitimate reason to be optimistic about this regional organization. Its five original members were vastly different in size, population, religion, language and ethnic composition; their relations after the Second World War were


28 Chapter I, p.10-11.
marked with distrust and conflicts; after the establishment of ASEAN, mutual resentment still ran deep. Today, however, ASEAN stands as the most effective and by far the most successful regional group among developing states.\(^{29}\) Nineteen years after its inauguration, ASEAN has not only become a credible regional body that has clearly made a significant impact on developments in Southeast Asia; but it has also been accepted by the great powers as a relatively cohesive block to be taken seriously in political and economic negotiations.

As a founder of ASEAN, Thailand's foreign minister, Thanat Khoman deserved to be praised for his fruitful initiative in promoting regional cooperation. However, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, it is evident that Thanat's idea was based on the perception of clear and tangible advantages of regional grouping which might accrue to each individual country; it was not inspired by a romantic grand design which aimed at melting the states of Southeast Asia into a new identity. Thanat himself admitted that:

\[...\text{the motivations which have prompted me to push the idea of regional cooperation were less lofty and idealistic but stemmed from practical and realistic considerations, among them the fact that Southeast Asian nations are comparatively weak and small.}...\text{Separately, they represent little, if any, significance in world affairs.}...\text{To correct the situation, the erstwhile colonial aloofness and isolation must be overcome and a new sense of}\]

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\(^{29}\) To be sure, the performance of ASEAN has fallen short of expectations in some areas, particularly intra-economic cooperation, and there still remain many obstacles to closer association. See Hans Indorf, *Impediments to Regionalism in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982). However, most observers agree that ASEAN is an outstanding achievement.
regional solidarity and partnership would have to be forged so as to bring those nations together in a movement toward regional cohesiveness and collaboration. If such an objective can be reached, their individual weaknesses and impotence will gradually be replaced by a greater combined strength and their voices will be heard and weight noted on the international forum. These were the aims that the founders of ASA and ASEAN set for themselves...30

Thanat was correct to avoid subscribing to ASEAN any motive of supranationalism: the individual sovereign position of each member was not to be subordinated to the organization's authority. In view of many divisive elements among the ASEAN countries, it is more realistic to limit the aims and activities of ASEAN to a manageable scale and allow some time for member states to get acquainted with one another before embarking on grand joint projects. This explains why at the inception of ASEAN, political cooperation was not set as a major goal.

Though Thanat and most of the Thai leaders attached great importance to ASEAN, they had a realistic expectation of what benefits Thailand could derive from ASEAN. Thailand could count on ASEAN to provide moral and political support. This has enabled Thailand to cope well with radical changes in its external environment e.g. the American withdrawal from Southeast Asia and the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. By coordinating its policies with the other ASEAN countries, Thailand has been able to

increase its bargaining power with larger states.\textsuperscript{31} However, Thailand realized that ASEAN was incapable of providing effective military assistance in time of danger. Faced with serious external threats, Thailand looked to some sort of collaboration with the great powers to enhance its security. As far as the maintenance of military security is concerned, Thailand has never overestimated ASEAN's potential.

This attitude also explains why Thailand has not been very enthusiastic about ASEAN's ZOPFAN idea. From the Thai standpoint, ASEAN is not strong enough to shape the future of Southeast Asia single-handedly. Peace and stability in the region is still contingent on the policies of the great powers. The neutralization of Southeast Asia is an ideal plan; but the Thai are aware that the United States, the Soviet Union and China cannot simply be wished away from the regional power equation. For the sake of Thailand's security interests, it is necessary to work with the great powers for the balance of power even though this might encourage the growth of the great powers' influence and postpone the realization of ZOPFAN. Thailand in other words followed the Realists' advice that a nation should not subordinate its national interests to other interests, regional or international.\textsuperscript{32}

Though at present the idea of ZOPFAN remains unattainable, the ASEAN countries have contributed to stability in the region by agreeing to settle their

\textsuperscript{31} On the benefits ASEAN provides for its individual members, see ibid., pp. 273-275.

\textsuperscript{32} Chapter I, p.10.
bilateral disputes peacefully. For the past nineteen years, ASEAN has been able to contain frictions among member states which could otherwise have escalated into major conflicts and provided opportunities for external intervention in the region. Among these problems are the unresolved dispute over Sabah between Malaysia and the Philippines, border problems between Thailand and Malaysia and a confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia. The success of ASEAN in this regard is highly beneficial to Thailand. Had there still remained serious bickering among the ASEAN countries, Thailand would have far more difficulties in safeguarding its security.

Thailand's decision to establish ASEAN must be considered a prominent diplomatic achievement. It demonstrated that Thailand recognized the need to cooperate with other nations in order to promote and all-round gains in security and stability. Had Thailand been cynical and placed excessive emphasis on competition to further its interests, it could have increased tension in the region, thus making it more difficult to pursue its own interests. In a word, Thailand's enthusiasm for ASEAN stemmed from its self-enlightened interests.


The experience of overdependence on the United States taught Thailand an important lesson: a close alliance with great powers is not to be seen as an unqualified blessing. The great powers can change their policy with little regard to their small ally and leave the latter in a very vulnerable position. With this lesson in mind, the Thai governments during 1975-1979 (except for the Thanin
regime) carefully avoided rigid association with any single country. Nonetheless, the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchean in late 1978 compelled Thailand to abandon its policy of equidistant policy and become China's de facto ally. Peking and Bangkok now share a common interest in pressuring Hanoi to withdraw its troops from Kampuchea.

Whether Thailand's policy toward the Kampuchean question is realistic or not is debatable. During the last eight years, Vietnam has consistently claimed that the situation in Kampuchea is irreversible. And it has given every indication that it is prepared to make every sacrifice to keep Kampuchea under its sphere of influence. Hanoi simply regards its dominance over Kampuchea as absolutely vital to its security. Hanoi should have accepted ASEAN's solution to the problem. A neutral Kampuchea could not pose any threat to Vietnam. Yet, the truth of the matter is that ASEAN lacks a means to guarantee that the pro-Peking Khmer Rouge regime will not be allowed to resume power after the Vietnamese withdrawal. In this light, Vietnam is expected to insist on the control of Kampuchea. Judging from its record in the fight against the Americans, it is doubtful that China and Thailand will succeed in breaking Vietnam's recalcitrant will. This is particularly true when one takes into consideration the fact that the military operation of the Khmer resistance coalition has so far failed to raise

the cost of the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea substantially. Besides, it is unlikely that China will take decisive military action against Vietnam. Such an action might well provoke Soviet retaliation.

By all accounts, the Kampuchean crisis will remain protracted. The problem for Thailand is that it has to continue to pay a high price for resisting the Vietnamese occupation. In cooperating with China, Thailand risks becoming too dependent on China and in the process willy-nilly helps the latter expand its influence in Southeast Asia. As discussed in the previous chapter, the growth of Chinese presence in the region is likely to generate adverse effects on Thailand’s long-term interest: the neutralization of Southeast Asia. More importantly, while China can maintain pressure on Vietnam without fear of retaliation, Thailand cannot. In a word, the more security Thailand seeks by resisting the Vietnamese occupation, the less security it will have. Given the seemingly implacable situation and serious implications, will it be more realistic for Thailand to adopt a more accommodating attitude toward Vietnam?

It is not easy to answer "yes" to the above question and there is a good case for Thai foreign-policy makers to argue that the present course of Thai policy is realistic enough. Thailand is now facing a militarily powerful Vietnam at its doorsteps; therefore, it must do

what it can to maintain its position vis-a-vis Vietnam. In line with the Realists' balance-of-power principle, Thailand must resist the Vietnamese supremacy over Indochina.\textsuperscript{35} A dominant Vietnam would be in a position to coerce Thailand into complying with its demands. In such a case, Thailand's freedom of action would be restricted in managing both its internal and external affairs. Though China might become a threat to Thailand in the long run, Thailand has no choice but to work with it in order to cope with Vietnam which is the immediate threat. As Machiavelli advocated, it is incumbent on the realistic policy makers to choose the lesser evil.\textsuperscript{36}

Moreover, the Thai leaders can contend that their policy toward the Kampuchean problem is realistic because the cost of opposing the Vietnamese occupation has so far been acceptable. Thailand has enjoyed and will continue to enjoy at least in the foreseeable future the support from China, the United States and ASEAN. Thailand itself has been handling the border situation carefully in order not to provoke Vietnam into an open conflict. As long as Thailand can manage to avoid a catastrophic war with Vietnam, it is realistic to continue its maintain pressure on Vietnam. Should Thailand persevere in its efforts, Vietnam might find it necessary to modify its policy. According to this line of thinking, the time has not arrived

\textsuperscript{35} Chapter I,p.11-12.

\textsuperscript{36} Chapter I,p.19.
for Thailand to consider accommodation with Vietnam. The present policy is correct.  

In addition, as a matter of principle, Thailand must challenge the Vietnamese violation of Kampuchea's sovereignty. Without such a challenge, a precedent for the settlement of disputes by force in Southeast Asia would be established. It is in all ASEAN countries' interests to ensure that sovereignty of every regional state and the principle of non-intervention are strictly observed. Unless all Southeast Asian nations agree that each of them should be immune from external interference and free to arrange its internal affairs as its government sees fit, peaceful coexistence is practically impossible. As evident from Article 2 of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, ASEAN attaches supreme importance to the respect for sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention.

What is undoubtedly realistic about Thailand's policy toward the Kampuchean problem is its support for the Khmer Rouge regime despite its atrocious historical record. Though the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea was not motivated by humanitarian reasons, it was undeniable that Hanoi had liberated the Kampucheans from one of the most


38 Michael Leifer claimed that the ASEAN countries considered the Vietnamese intervention as a demonstration of the principle of limited sovereignty pioneered with success by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe in August 1968. Thus, to recognize the Hanoi-backed Heng Samrin regime would be tantamount to endorsing that perverse principle for Southeast Asia. Leifer, "The International Representation of Kampuchea", p. 56. (see footnote no.47 ,chapterII)
barbarous governments in recent history. In this light, the
international community was morally bound to applaud the
Vietnamese action. Given the Khmer Rouge's odious record on
human right, it appears morally wrong to stick to the non-
intervention principle in this case.39 From a moral point
of view, the Khmer Rouge deserved to be wiped out. And yet,
for the sake of its security interests, Thailand suppressed
its moral repulsion against the Khmer Rouge and actively
backed it against the Vietnamese troops. This is truly in
the realist view of foreign policy which urges states to
subordinate moral concerns to survival.40 As the saying
goes," desperate cases require desperate remedies."

On the whole, Thailand's foreign policy after the
Second World War has accorded with the realist view of
foreign policy. Thailand understood well the rule that
foreign policy must be in tune with realities. In the case
of Thailand, these realities are its unstable external
environment. Geographically situated next to Indochina, the
region which has been continually been conflict-ridden,
Thailand could not avoid being implicated in security
problems. Owing to its strategic location in Southeast
Asia, Thailand could not avoid being caught in conflicting
outside pressures, either. In conformity with these
realities, Thailand's foreign policy has been primarily
concerned with security issues. There is no need for the
Realists to remind Thailand to give priority to security and

39 On the question whether there are circumstances in
which intervention might be morally permissible, see Charles
R. Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations.

40 Chapter I, p. 18.
survival. Thailand also realized the importance of power in international politics; it was never under the illusion that it could escape power politics. In ensuring its security, Thailand sought to manipulate power relations to its advantage. Thailand, in line with the Realists' advice, recognized the necessity to maintain the balance of power. Ideals and morals were not allowed to obstruct its efforts to promote a desirable balance of power. In addition, Thailand has been very conscious of cost-benefit analysis before implementing its policies. There is a sensible relationship between its undertakings and its real capabilities. When the cost of a given policy outweighed its benefits, Thailand abandoned that policy. (Thailand's declared policy of unilateral intervention in Laos in 1962 is the best example.) It is noteworthy that during the last forty years, Thailand has never embarked on adventurous policies. In these respects, the Realists would have commended Thailand's foreign policy for its rationality, prudence and sense of proportion.
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