United States-Thailand Relations
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United States-Thailand Relations

EDITED BY
Karl D. Jackson
and Wiwat Mungkandi
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Contributors

Prok Amranand is former ambassador of Thailand to the United States, former deputy minister of commerce, and senior partner of Kanung-Prok International Law Offices, Bangkok.

Ernest J. Briskey is science and technology advisor to the U.S. ambassador to Thailand and director, Office of Science and Technology, USAID/Thailand.

Somphong Choomak is associate professor of political science at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

Likhit Dhiravegin is dean of the faculty of political science at Thammasat University, Bangkok.

Sunthorn Hongladarom is former ambassador of Thailand to the United States, former deputy prime minister, and currently chairman of Thailand’s National Economic and Social Development Board.

Karl D. Jackson, is associate professor of political science at the University of California, Berkeley, presently on a two-year leave of absence serving as U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

Thanat Khoman is former foreign minister of Thailand and one of that country's distinguished elder statesmen.

Wiwat Mungkandi is director of the American Studies Program and associate dean for academic affairs of the faculty of political science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

Theera Nuchpium is lecturer in political science at Silapakorn University, Bangkok, and editor of Thai-American Forum.

Herbert P. Phillips is professor of anthropology with a specialty in Thai culture at the University of California, Berkeley.

Douglas Pike is director of the Indochina Studies Project, Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

Vichitvong N. Pombhejara is chief economic advisor to Thailand’s minister of science, technology, and energy and chairman, Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research.

R. Sean Randolph is U.S. Assistant Secretary of Energy for International Affairs; at the time of this forum he was deputy to the U.S. Ambassador for Pacific Rim Affairs.

Robert A. Scalapino is director of the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

David I. Steinberg is president, Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs, Helena, Montana; at the time of this forum he was an economist with the U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C.

Kramol Tongdhamachart is professor of political science at Chulalongkorn University presently serving as minister of the prime minister’s office.

Leonard Unger is former U.S. ambassador to Thailand and now dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, Boston.

Pichai Vasnasong is one of Thailand’s leading radio and TV commentators.

Sarasin Viraphol is a foreign service officer of Thailand, currently deputy chief of mission of the Royal Thai Embassy in Tokyo.

Donald E. Weatherbee is professor of political science and director of the Institute of International Studies, University of South Carolina, Columbia.
Introduction: Thai Politics in Transition?

Karl D. Jackson

The papers comprising this volume resulted from the first United States-Thailand Bilateral Forum held at the University of California, Berkeley, March 25-28, 1985. The forum was sponsored jointly by the Institute of East Asian Studies, the American Studies Program of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, and The Asia Foundation, San Francisco. Shortly after our conference, a political event took place in Thailand that underlines some of the themes set forth by our authors.

On September 9, 1985—Black Monday—an ill-organized coup d'état fizzled in Bangkok. The putsch mobilized a scant 22 tanks and five hundred men along with several thousand labor union supporters. Before it ended, two American newsmen and several Thais had been killed, although actual fighting was minimal. For all the incompetence of its plotters, the attempted coup may represent a watershed in Thai history as coup d'état politics fall into relative disfashion in a country whose economic and social development is steadily transforming the political landscape. Whereas the Thai polity from 1932 to the early 1970s was controlled almost uniformly by Thai army politics, other social forces and political constraints have arisen which make it increasingly difficult for a few officers with tanks to overthrow a sitting government. The wildwest aura of Thai coup politics seems to be giving way (albeit slowly) to more institutionalized methods of managing and maintaining political power. The cardinal error of the Black Monday plotlers may have been their inability to recognize their own obsolescence.

Colonel Manoon Roopkachorn, former commander of the 4th Cavalry Regiment, had been drummed out of the army as a result of his involvement in the earlier, much more substantial April Fools' Coup in 1981. Several hundred cavalry troops motivated by personal fealty to Colonel Manoon slipped into Bangkok, commandeered 22 tanks, and took up positions at vital points. They were joined by Air Force Marines loyal to Colonel Manoon's younger brother, Wing Commander Manat. Thai radio announced that the Revolutionary Party had dissolved the government, the parliament, and the Constitution. Revolutionary Party radio communiqués were issued in the name of former Supreme Commander and former commander in chief of the army retired General Serm Na Nakorn.

Also present at coup headquarters were former Prime Minister and leader of the National Democratic Party (NDP) Kriangsak Chommanand and former deputy commander in chief of the army General Yot Thepasa-
din Colonel Manoon and Wing Commander Manat fled the country. Generals Serm, Yot, and Kriangsak initially claimed to have been forced to participate. Along with 22 others they were formally charged with treason, although the Thai state, following its political traditions, did not exact severe formal penalties from the unsuccessful plotters.

The coup itself collapsed within ten hours and never controlled any sizable portion of Bangkok. Manoon's tanks were limited to the Government House, Supreme Command Headquarters, and the radio station. This contrasts with the April 1981 coup in which Manoon fielded 8,000 troops and succeeded in taking control of Bangkok before collapsing in the face of direct opposition from King Bhumiphol.

In the April Fools' Coup of 1981 and the Black Monday Coup of 1985, the Revolutionary Party represented an articulate minority within the Thai military establishment. The Young Turks graduated from the Royal Thai military academy in the 1960s after the curriculum had been modernized on the model of West Point. As a group the Young Turks around Manoon were contemptuous of their superiors, whom they viewed as personally corrupt, professionally mediocre, and willing to tolerate the rivalries of civilian party leaders, whom they perceived to be "dirty" representatives of a "rotten" political system. The Revolutionary Party was meant to offer a strong nationalist alternative to socialism and communism through nationalization of some private enterprises (especially financial institutions that "cheat the people"), land reform, more equitable income distribution, and antagonism toward currency devaluations. As such the Revolutionary Party favored nationalism over interdependence, statism over a free-market economy, Thais over Sino-Thais, farmers and the urban poor over the wealthy elite. In 1981 and 1985 revolutionary consciousness met traditional politics in the competition for power in Thailand and revolutionary consciousness lost hands down.¹

The coup failed because its tactics were utterly impractical and because its leaders did not recognize that Thai politics have changed. Tactically, Thai coups succeed when they have the backing of the Bangkok-centered First Army, the neutrality or support of the monarch, and a serious groundswell of popular opposition to the sitting government. The Black Monday coup was doomed from its conception because it was opposed by the King and the First Army and lacked a burning issue around which to mobilize popular support. Coup politics always involves skulduggery. Perhaps the plotters were led to believe that General Pichit, who was not scheduled for promotion in the 1985 annual military rotation, might join them, if only to advance his career. Alternatively, Colonel Manoon might have tricked Generals Kriangsak, Serm and Yot into participating by assuring them that Pichit's First Army was already committed.
Thailand’s strength lies in the stability of its institutions: Buddhism, the army, and the monarchy. Even though there have been 13 constitutions, 14 elections, 14 coups, and 42 cabinets since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in the 1932 revolution, the system of government has remained constant. Thailand, from 1932 to the present, has remained a bureaucratic polity in which army bureaucrats control the government and run the country for the benefit of the monarch, the army, the highest echelon of the bureaucracy, the business community, and the people in general, in descending order of importance. The army’s unchallenged sway over Thai politics was briefly overturned by the student revolution of 1973 which brought liberal civilian governments to power until the military reasserted its authority in October 1976.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the style of government was starkly authoritarian. Conditions today have changed. The Prime Minister no longer has the same type of autocratic power. Prime Minister Prem, and his immediate predecessors Kriangsak and Thanin Kraivichien, have ruled through a system of consultation (with factions in the army and bureaucracy, civilian party leaders, business leaders, and trade unions). Most important of all, King Bhumiphol’s support is requisite to continued tenure in office. Gone are the days of decisiveness; these have been replaced by temporizing, compromising, and the representation of interests from outside the bureaucracy and army.

The transition is not simply a matter of personality. Thai society has been altered markedly by the emergence of new groups and new centers of power outside the direct control of the army, the bureaucracy, and the Palace. When the Thai economy remained small, the Palace awarded business privileges directly in response to bargaining outcomes in the military-controlled cabinet; university graduates were absorbed into high-prestige billets in the bureaucracy, creating a stable, entirely elite-centric system of participation. The underpinnings of the old bureaucratic polity have been destabilized by successful development. Rapid increases in personal income, mass exposure to modern education, and the intrusion of the mass media into every corner of the Kingdom have substantially increased the pressure for political participation. The growth process has produced Thai corporations that no longer depend exclusively on government largess and the favor of the Palace. Likewise, the thousands of office workers employed by international companies are not directly beholden to the Palace, the Cabinet, or the army.

Controversy still exists over whether “bureaucratic polity” has completely given way to “bourgeois polity,” but there can be no doubt whatever that the system has changed, that power is more diffuse, that the military no longer holds as much power as it once did. While growth, education,
and mass media exposure have not transformed Thailand into a free-
swinging democracy, a much larger segment of the public than ever before
must now be considered in the public decision-making process.2

Plotters had best beware. Successful coups now require more than a
couple of colonels and a few tanks; a minimum winning coalition must
include the King, the First Army, and more popular support than ever
before.

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this volumes goes to press, preparations are being made for a second U.S.–

Notes

1. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, The Thai Young Turks (Singapore: Institute of
Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

2. For more on the controversy see chapters by Ansil Ramsay, Suchit
Bunbongkarn, and Sukhumbhand Paribatra in Karl D. Jackson, Sukhumbhand
Paribatra, and J. Soedjadi Djiwandono, eds., ASEAN in Regional and International
Context (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986).
I. 
Historical and Cultural Setting
Thai-American Relations in Historical Perspective

Wiwat Mungkandi

An Overview

Few people would attempt to describe the relationship between Thailand and America, with a record of more than 150 years of friendship and cooperation, in a short paper. On the lighter side is the fact that the first "economic aid" originated not from the United States to Thailand, but from Thailand to the United States—in the form of elephants for transportation to be sent by King Rama IV to President Buchanan of the United States—an offer that was subsequently declined by President Lincoln.

While the list of such trivia could go on indefinitely, our concern here is with more substantive considerations. Consequently, I have been very selective with regard to the aspects of Thai-U.S. relations to be included in this paper, placing particular emphasis on the central theme, the policy pillars of the relationship, in order to better interpret the ways in which the relationship has been unique, important, and, at times, asymmetrical. I also hope to reveal how the relationship has developed from distant to close to cautious.

Historically, the long years of Thai-U.S. relations may be divided into three main periods: pre-World War II (1833–1945), post-World War II (1945–1975), and contemporary (1975–present), with each of the three periods emerging at some critical point in time amidst events and developments that determined its shape and direction. Furthermore, within the latter two periods, two major turning points can be identified, those being the engagement, from 1945 to 1950, and the disengagement, from 1973 to 1976, each of which marks the beginning of Thai-U.S. relations in the post-World War II and the post-1975 eras respectively. Cutting across all three periods to form a vital link between each are what I have termed the two policy pillars of continuity: American technical expertise and Thai-U.S. security relations. These two policy pillars have been the mainstay of Thai-U.S. relations since their beginning and have provided an overall continuity in the relations, despite periodic lapses and fluctuations, that is still visible today.

Each period of Thai-American relations is historically distinct and characterized by a different level of relationship and by a different degree of importance given to each of the policy orientations. Thus, a brief analysis of each of these three periods is vital to our understanding of the rela-
tionship as a whole and to bring to light the underlying significance of the roles played by the two policy pillars in maintaining the continuity of Thai-U.S. relations throughout their 150-year history.

The first of these three periods, the pre-war period, lasting from 1833 to 1945, laid the foundation for subsequent friendship and goodwill and for building an enduring relationship that has been most remarkable in many important respects. Generally speaking, the period may be characterized as one of a "cordial but distant" relationship. Contacts were mostly nonofficial. There were few government-to-government transactions. People-to-people encounters and dealings were almost entirely effected on an individual basis. Most Americans resident in Thailand went there either on their own or on behalf of some private institution. Moreover, these early encounters were mainly incidental in many respects. The Americans, whose central interest in Asia was China, came incidentally into contact with the Thai people.

However, this period of Thai-American relations is not altogether "superficial," as some might believe. Missionary activities and the role of the American advisors were the two most vital American contributions. These did not constitute "official" relations but fostered "goodwill" between the peoples of the two countries. This undoubtedly laid the groundwork for the development of the close cooperation of the later periods. Missionary activities and U.S. advisorial services indeed bear witness to the fact that American "technical" roles (as embodied in the missionary activities) and "security" roles (as implied in the advisorial services) had already emerged in Thailand during this early period.

The second period covers the post-war span from about 1945 to 1975, and the years 1945–1950 mark the first significant turning point in Thai-American relations, the engagement. As will be shown later, when we deal with Thai-U.S. security relations, it was during the immediate post-war years that Thailand made a fateful choice that turned an ordinary friendship into a special relationship with the United States—that is, one based on security ties. This is a characteristic which differentiates the post-war cooperation from the earlier period of "cordial but distant" relations. We shall see that changes and developments, in both the external environment and in Thailand itself, were decisive in shaping the attitudes of the two countries to each other. The "Seri-Thai" activities, the U.S. intervention in the British post-war demands on the Thais, and the U.S. support for Thai admission to the United Nations—all of these served as the first turning point in Thai-U.S. relations, which paved the way for a "close and intense" cooperation in the post-1945 period. Indeed, since 1950, government-to-government relations have been intensified and their scope widened. Cooperative efforts have been most evident in anti-Communist activities, particularly during the Vietnam War, as well as in the economic, technical, and educational areas.
The second significant turning point in Thai-U.S. relations—the American disengagement—occurred just before the onset of the third period. The earliest signals of this turning point were to be found in the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, but they were not fully felt in Thailand until the early 1970s, with Nixon’s visit to China and the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in January 1973. Hard upon the heels of these major events came the fall of the government of Field Marshal Thanom in 1973, and the Mayaguez incident in 1975, symbolizing the peak of anti-American sentiment in Thailand, and leading to the withdrawal of all American troops from Thailand in 1975.

The third period of Thai-U.S. relations, from 1975 to the present, has been marked by a “cautious and calculating” attitude. Following the Vietnam War and Watergate, the U.S. posture in Southeast Asia was primarily one of keeping a low profile. During the Carter administration, U.S. involvement in the region was further diverted by President Carter’s human rights policies, which severely limited military-economic aid, and American credibility in Asia was adversely affected by the planned withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea.

It was not until the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in late 1978 and the Chinese attack on Vietnam in early 1979, followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Vietnamese incursion into Thai territory in June 1980, that the American attitude began to change. There was then an increase in military aid to Thailand, along with strengthened cooperation with ASEAN and promotion of ASEAN solidarity. However, the U.S. policy of following the ASEAN lead, which is appreciated by ASEAN, could be viewed as an attempt to avoid direct involvement in Indochina. This apparent reluctance to become directly involved, particularly with regard to the ASEAN request for U.S. military aid to the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, continues to foster a climate of uncertainty in the area.

However, as a result of this somewhat cautious atmosphere, Thai-U.S. relations have in recent years become more diversified and sophisticated. They are more diversified in that not only are there security ties, but cooperation is increasing in the areas of trade, investment, and science and technology, lending the relations an air of economic dynamism.

Furthermore, the relationship has become more sophisticated in that a multilateral dimension has been added to the bilateral relations within the context of the ASEAN framework, the participation of ASEAN’s dialogue partners, as well as China on security matters, thereby involving the active participation of several countries and a proliferation of issues.

Throughout these three periods, there have been a few major negative twists and turns in Thai-U.S. relations, such as the American support of the French position in the Franco-Thai territorial dispute in 1940, the Thai declaration of war on the U.S. in 1941, and the low ebb in relations following the U.S. withdrawal in 1973. Nevertheless, Thai-U.S. relations through-
out this long span are most notable for their positive and meaningful continuity. And what has sustained this continuity is, as has been suggested, the two "pillars," namely, American technical expertise and Thai-U.S. security links.

It must be stressed at this juncture that "pillars" do not refer here to any particular concrete issues but rather to abstract concepts relating to patterns of Thai-American relations. By proposing that American technical expertise and Thai-U.S. security links are "pillars" sustaining relations between Thailand and the United States, I am not suggesting that trade, investment, cultural exchanges, and many other forms of bilateral interaction do not exist. What must be borne in mind is rather that while these activities and even some kinds of aid programs characterize Thai relations with many countries (including, needless to say, the United States), it is American technical expertise and our mutual security concerns that distinguish Thai-U.S. relations from Thai relations with all other countries. It is these two ingredients of the relations between the two countries that have served, figuratively, as "pillars" maintaining the continuity of this relationship and that have made it so "special." The pillars, in other words, have provided not only the continuity but also the special status of Thai-U.S. relations. It follows, then, that without these pillars the long continuity and the special status of this relationship would be called into question.

**Technical Expertise**

The first pillar sustaining Thai-American relations—that based on technical expertise—developed early in the history of the relationship between the two countries. Included in this pillar is an often invisible link which represents a sort of sixth sense in Thai-U.S. relations—an ability to grasp the abstract principle behind the concrete contributions. The initial motives that brought Thailand and the United States into contact in the first place were in large measure commercial. But concomitant with these early commercial contacts, which were officially sanctioned for the first time by the Friendship and Commercial Treaty of 1833, were missionary activities that were to play a very significant role in the modernization of Thai society. Indeed, it may be argued that contributions of the early period of Thai-U.S. relations, though made by private citizens on an individual basis, were the forerunner of the technical cooperation of the post-World War II period.

Missionaries were among the first Americans to land on Thai soil. In 1831, the Rev. David Abeel, M.D., dispatched by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, arrived in Bangkok and was the first American resident. The missionaries were in fact not very successful in converting the Thais. Their lasting contributions were found instead in
such areas as education and medicine. The missionaries indeed laid the groundwork for America's subsequent role in technical cooperation, which eventually would make substantial contributions to the modernization of Thai society.

Missionary contributions in the field of education may be found in activities such as the teaching of English, the creation of schools and the publishing of newspapers. Knowledge of English, which the missionaries were in the best position to offer, opened up the world of knowledge in other fields, especially science and technology, and also provided a means by which the peoples of the two nations were to develop a very good understanding. And it is not a matter of insignificance that among those learning from the missionaries was King Mongkat himself. More formal education was offered by the missionaries at the schools they created later. Those founded by American missionaries which subsequently rose to fame in Thailand include the Bangkok Christian College and Wattana Wittaya Academy in Bangkok, and the Prince Royal College and Dara Academy in Chiangmai. The missionaries' work in printing also had a considerable impact on Thai education. The publishing of Thai literary works, royal edicts, and newspapers (among them Dr. Bradley's Bangkok Recorder and J. H. Chandler's Bangkok Calendar) constituted an important step toward increased literacy and a change of reading habits in Thai society.

In the field of medicine, the best known American missionary was Dr. Daniel Beach Bradley, who pioneered inoculation against smallpox and cholera and introduced the printing press into Thailand. The Rev. Dr. Samuel House, a Presbyterian missionary in Thailand from 1874 to 1876, was, apart from being responsible for saving a great number of lives during the great cholera epidemic in Rama III’s reign, among the first to use ether in Thailand as an anesthetic in surgery. During the same period, Dr. McGilvary rendered another valuable service to the Thai people by introducing quinine to combat malaria.

The list of Americans who provided such beneficial services to Thai society with courage and dedication is, in fact, almost endless. Though concrete evidence of their contributions can still be seen in many forms and places (for instance, the McCormick Hospital in Chiangmai), perhaps none is so remarkable as the Royal School of Medicine at Siriraj Hospital—which was later to become one of the most famous medical schools in Thailand, and one of the best medical schools in Asia. Several names were associated with its development. The most prominent was Dr. George Bradley McFarland, upon whom His Majesty the King conferred the rank and title of Phra Ajvidhyakom for dedicated service in the medical field. Needless to say, this early development of Thai medical education and training, to which American contributions were immeasurable, paved the way for the impressive progress and fame with which Thai doctors were later to be credited.
American missionaries, gaining increasing respect from the Thai people for their benevolent role, were at the same time laying a firm foundation for the friendship and goodwill that were soon to develop between the United States and Thailand. Dr. William M. Wood, who accompanied the Townsend Harris mission to Thailand, confirmed that the missionaries' personal qualities, especially their sincerity and perseverance, commanded love and respect from the Thais and paved the way for the burgeoning understanding between the two nations. In short, it is during this period that the Thai people came to be impressed with the Americans—whose representatives in Thailand in the pre-1940 years, whether missionaries or advisors, were men and women of a high professional and personal caliber.

Formal Thai-U.S. cooperation in the technical field began with the signing of the three cooperation agreements in 1950: a technical and economic cooperation agreement, an educational exchange agreement, and a military agreement. At that time, it was recognized that Thailand still lacked vital economic infrastructures: roads, bridges, ports, dams, and a skilled work force. Emphasis was therefore placed on creating the essential conditions for Thailand's economic development. Nevertheless, even though contributions to this infrastructural development were enormous, an even greater impact on Thai-American relations—that is, in terms of creating goodwill and understanding between the peoples of the two countries—was made by the "technical" service aspect of these agreements. There are two dimensions of this service: education (human resource development) and military training.

In 1950, the Fulbright Foundation launched its educational aid program, which was badly needed. Since then, about 800 Thai students have completed their higher-degree training in the United States. In fact, during the first two decades of the technical and economic cooperation, the United States government provided more than $35 million worth of assistance for Thailand's human resource development.

This aid was widely distributed—covering practically every area of Thailand's educational and technical structure: vocational training, medical training, teachers' training, and general education. Technical assistance to agriculture—the country's economic backbone—received special attention. A central figure in this field of cooperation was American rice-breeding expert Dr. H. H. Love of Cornell, who spent seven years in Thailand researching local rice seed breeds and carrying out a rice improvement program. The United States was, in fact, widely involved in the country's agricultural development—including irrigation, soil and water management, agronomic development, and agricultural credit and marketing.

The United States was also active in assisting the development of many education institutions. A Faculty of Public Administration was established in Thammasat University, Bangkok, the first advanced training institution to be set up in Thailand. It was later developed into the National
Institute of Development and Administration (NIDA). Moreover, from 1955 to 1962, USAID provided essential financial backing for the development of Prasanmitr Teachers' College, Thailand's first degree-conferring institution of this kind, with the help of Indiana University, which developed its degree program.

Of all the educational institutions in Thailand, none has received more aid than the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), originally conceived in 1959 as the SEATO School for Engineering. It was mainly financed by USAID. From 1959 to 1973, when the School was renamed AIT, U.S. funds accounted for more than 52 percent of its financial resources. Moreover, since then, USAID has given financial support for the construction of such vital facilities as the library and computer center. At present, the United States is involved in developing Thailand's use of remote sensing data, which is actually part of the science and technology cooperation—a new and increasingly important dimension of Thai-American relations.

Another important area of Thai-U.S. technical cooperation has been military cooperation. In fact, from some points of view, the assistance that Thailand has received from the United States has been largely in the form of military and police aid rather than economic aid. There has never been any question about the U.S.'s strategic interest in this region (containment of communism), and its economic and military aid to Thailand has always been partly aimed at serving this interest. However, what is of greater importance, from the point of view of this paper, is that Thai-U.S. military cooperation, formally initiated as the Agreement Respecting Military Assistance (October 1950), has always been notable for its "technical" aspect, and this characteristic of the cooperation has had a far greater impact on the Thai military establishment, I believe, than any quantity of arms deliveries or any other form of military aid. This technical cooperation may be found in the various training programs for Thai officers and its influence may be seen not only in the fact that the Chulachomklao Military Academy was modeled on the U.S. Military Academy at West Point but also in the military thinking and orientation of Thai military leaders. Their "pro-American" attitude and their tendency to depend on the United States both for arms and for a security guarantee cannot be emphasized enough.

Thai-American technical cooperation has continued to the present day, with some significant developments in the field taking place recently. Most notable is the cooperation in science and technology, which, as a new dimension of Thai-U.S. relations, should be treated as a separate area of cooperation in its own right—not as part of the general field of "technical cooperation." Nevertheless, it is undeniably a continuation of the "technical expertise" aspect of Thai-U.S. relations.

Thai-U.S. cooperation in science and technology may be said to have originated in the activities of private citizens and organizations, such as the missionaries, in the pre-1940 period. One lasting non-governmental contri-
bution from the U.S. was the creation, mainly with funding from the Rock-
efeller Foundation, of a medical school in Thailand—which was later to
become one of the best of its kind in Asia.

Formal government-to-government cooperation was not fully devel-
oped until after World War II, with the signing of the Technical and Eco-
nomic Cooperation Agreement of 1950. Since then, great strides have been
made in building Thailand’s economic infrastructure as well as promoting
scientific and technological progress. However, cooperation in science and
technology under this agreement has not in fact produced a significant
degree of what may be called “technology transfer” to Thailand. The first
major attempt to provide a strategic framework for Thai-U.S. cooperation
in science and technology was initiated by the Ministry of Science, Tech-
ology, and Energy in 1983—an initiative that led eventually to the signing of
an agreement of cooperation in this area on April 13, 1984.

The primary purpose of the agreement is to strengthen the scientific
and technological cooperation between both countries by encouraging and
facilitating joint projects and exchanges of people and information among
government agencies, universities, and research centers, as well as private
firms and industries. The agreement covers a wide range of areas, from
agriculture to space. It not only provides a framework for increased coop-
erative efforts in these areas but also serves as a formal program to which
leaders of both countries can give their political support.¹

It should be noted in this connection that the most important aspect
of cooperation in science and technology is technology transfer. This form
of cooperation naturally benefits the recipient of technology. At the same
time, however, the supplier of technology may also benefit. If technology is
transferred through joint ventures or co-production, this could be a valu-
able means of promoting the supplier’s products and protecting its market.
Technology transfer, in other words, promotes trade, and in this sense the
cooperation becomes mutually beneficial. This form of science and tech-
nology transfer, I believe, will be the basis of enduring relations between
Thailand and the United States for many years to come, especially when the
two countries enter the twenty-first century and meet common challenges.

The Americans have, in fact, been aware of the importance of this
new dimension of Thai-U.S. relations. Such an awareness has been reflected
in the testimony of Paul Wolfowitz, Assistant Secretary of State for East
Asia and Pacific Affairs, to a Congressional sub-committee at the time of
the presentation of the U.S. government’s foreign aid programs for fiscal
year 1986. “Working closely with the Thai Government,” he said, “the
emphasis of our program has shifted as the Thai economy has changed.
Our program will now emphasize two new areas—the creation of jobs
in rural areas . . . and assistance in the field of science and
technology.”²
I wish to add that to make Thailand strong through science and technology is a low investment on which the long-term return will in all probability be high. For a strong Thailand can more effectively deter aggression by its neighbors; and for the United States that means the Manila Pact and the Thanat-Rusk agreement are much less likely to be tested. A strong Thailand can, in the final analysis, contribute immeasurably to stability in Southeast Asia. As a status quo power, in contrast to a revolutionary one, Thailand, weak or strong, has a minimal propensity toward aggression; but a strong Thailand is, by definition, in a better position to deter aggression by other countries. That deterrent capacity is, in fact, a strong dose against prospective aggressors, thereby contributing to regional stability.

Security Relations

As we have already seen, when Thailand and the United States first came into contact, the motives were mainly commercial. Nevertheless, even those early contacts were not entirely devoid of security implications, bringing us to the second pillar sustaining Thai-American relations—the security ties between the two nations. The Thais, who had concluded a commercial treaty with Britain in 1826, wanted to strike a similar deal with other powers to counterbalance British influence. This facilitated the signing of the first Thai-American commercial and friendship treaty, in 1833.

The U.S. security role, however, was more evident with the presence of American "advisors" in the early 1900s. U.S. advisorial assistance at that time essentially consisted of technical cooperation, for those advisors essentially provided legal service for the Thai government. However, for reasons given below, it is more appropriate to subsume this service under security relations.

The Role of American Advisors (1903–1940)

The decision to opt for American advisors, after Belgian legal expert Rolin Jacquemyns had completed his term as the Thai government's first "General Advisor," is explicable in terms of both the favorable attitude of the Thais toward the United States (which not only entertained no territorial designs on Thailand but had, through benevolent missionary activities, played a constructive role in the technological and social advancement of the nation) and America's neutral posture. In other words, not only was the U.S. viewed as trustworthy, but, as it was a neutral country, employment of an American citizen was not likely to displease either Britain or France. As the Thai Ambassador to France reported to Prince Devawong, then Siam's Foreign Minister: "The intention of the Siamese Government is to seek [an advisor from] a neutral [country]. Neither France nor Britain could thus accuse us of employing their enemy."
From 1903 to 1940, eight Americans served as advisors to the Thai government. Most of them were Harvard-trained legal experts who had no affiliation (apart from being American citizens) with their government. Their contributions consisted essentially of "technical" advice and expertise. Nevertheless, in their capacity as representatives of the Thai government in negotiations with Western powers and other foreign governments, they played not simply a "technical" role but, more significantly, a "security" role as well.

As is well known, Thailand, in the face of imperialist encroachments, was struggling for its survival as an independent nation. It had to steer a careful diplomatic course in the hostile imperialist sea, attempting to fully restore its sovereignty, which was being severely constrained by the unequal treaties to which it had been subjected. Insofar as American advisors were involved on the Thai behalf in this struggle for full independence and survival, their role was obviously security-oriented. Such a role, indeed, could be considered the forerunner of the part the United States was to assume in its security relations with Thailand in the post-World War II period. As is well known, the United States was pursuing an "open door" policy. It was naturally in favor of maintaining Thai integrity; and even though it was not directly involved in protecting Thai sovereignty and independence, its attitude, and the advisorial services provided by its citizens, should not be dismissed as totally irrelevant to the preservation of Thai administrative integrity. This security role was to become even more pronounced during the post-1945 period, to which we shall now turn.

Post-War Settlement (1945–1950)

Thai-U.S. relations from 1945 to 1950 represent an important turning point that was soon to transform the "cordial but distant" relationship into a "close and intense" one. Indeed, by 1950, Thailand and the United States had developed a relationship that was unprecedented in the history of Thai diplomacy.

Before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Thailand was confronted with a crisis. She approached both Great Britain and the United States for military help should she be attacked by the Japanese. The replies were in effect reluctant and evasive. When the Japanese landed on Thai soil in December 1941, the Thai government appealed to Great Britain for immediate military assistance. The reply that finally came from the British Minister in Thailand conveyed a message from Winston Churchill which in effect read: "You have to fend for yourself." The result was a Thai-Japanese alliance and a declaration of war by Thailand against Great Britain and the United States in January 1942. The American government, however, did not reciprocate by declaring war against Thailand. The Thai
reaction in the 1941–42 crisis was, according to Phibun, a result of uncontrollable circumstances, not of opportunistic calculations.

The Thai Minister in Washington (M. R. Seni Pramoj) soon established a “Free Thai” movement in the U.S., which later collaborated with the Free Thai activities in Thailand under the clandestine leadership of the Regent, Pridi Panomyong. These activities consisted mainly of guerilla actions against the Japanese and supplying the Allies with military intelligence about the Japanese forces in Thailand. These Free Thai organizations and activities provided a rationale for the Americans to support the Thai position in the post-war negotiations with the British and in getting Thailand admitted to the United Nations.

The British, on the other hand, according to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, regarded Thailand as an enemy who must “work her passage” before she could rehabilitate herself. In other words, as a condition for her ultimate freedom, sovereignty, and independence, she should accept “such special arrangement for security or economic collaboration as may be judged necessary to the function of the post-war international system.” This British policy position provided a basis for the “Twenty-One Demands” delivered to the Thais in September 1945. These demands, presented under the guise of a military settlement with Thailand, constituted a wide-ranging proposal for a post-war agreement that would have turned Thailand, in Seni Pramoj’s words, into “a slave state for years to come.”

During the lengthy negotiations, from mid-September to the end of December 1945, the United States played a crucial role. In fact, the negotiations were of an Anglo-American rather than Anglo-Thai nature. The United States was able to force the British to drop traces of British unilateral control inherent in the Demands; one of the weapons used by the Americans was the threat to resume diplomatic relations with Thailand before the United Kingdom did, and to make the U.S. goodwill policy toward Thailand known to the public.

There was no doubt on the part of the United States government that it wanted Thailand to be committed to an “open door” diplomacy, with a trade policy based on multilateralism and nondiscrimination, secured within the United Nations system and stable as well as prosperous as a democratic, capitalistic society able to resist any other ideology of a more violent nature. In short, the Americans wanted to see Thailand follow the lead of the United States and take a path similar to their own, while at the same time providing the U.S. with equal opportunities of trade, access to raw materials, and investment. The element of American idealism in 1945 should not be overlooked. In fact, it was a major driving force in supporting the new world order. The Americans were intent upon restoring Thailand’s full independence and sovereignty, and the success of that effort was crowned by Thailand’s admission, with U.S. support, to the United Nations in 1946.
The most important external event after the was was the Communist victory in China in October 1949. America, influenced by the British and the French about the importance of Southeast Asia, began to reevaluate its strategic defense. Indeed, after the signing of the Sino-Soviet Pact in February 1950, Washington made its first move toward containment of communism by recognizing Bao Dai in South Vietnam in early 1950. The decisive event, however, was the Communist aggression against South Korea in June 1950, which convinced Washington of the Communists’ expansionist aims. With the Chinese intervention in the Korean War in November, there seemed to be no doubt in the minds of the Americans that China and the Soviet Union represented a monolithic Communist bloc proceeding in union toward global domination. It was at about this time that Thailand was caught up in the web of the Cold War.

The situation, insofar as Thailand was concerned, was complicated by the fact that the same man who had been the center of the 1941 crisis was now again Prime Minister, and this fact explains a good deal about why the decision of 1950 came to be adopted. In that year, Thailand was not precisely in a crisis situation, as she had been in 1941. A threat from China, however, in Field Marshal Phibun’s view, was a real possibility, and there was no doubt in his mind about who would be the victor in the next contest, given U.S. economic and technological superiority in the immediate post-war period.

The Korean War brought Thailand and the United States one step closer. Thailand was the first Asian country to support the U.N. Security Council resolution, endorsed by the United States, to resist the aggression by force. The Korean War, viewed as concrete evidence of direct Communist encroachment, prompted Phibun’s decision to fully commit Thailand to the Western camp led by the United States. On July 1, 1950, Thailand and the United States signed an educational and cultural agreement, which was followed, on September 19 and October 17, by a technical and economic cooperation agreement and a military assistance agreement, respectively. The military agreement, which was technically neither a military alliance nor a defense pact, was the first formal indication of the Thai abandonment of neutrality. Indeed, as an agreement to supply arms and equipment to Thailand as well as technicians and officers to aid in the training of the Thai army, it paved the way for Thailand to become a Western ally. Not surprisingly, therefore, Phibun was at this time charged by Radio Peking with being “a lackey of Wall Street” turning Thailand into an advanced base for aggression against Vietnam and China.

The Indochina crisis in the 1950s led to a joint effort between the U.S. and Thailand, a kind of an “anti-Communist crusade.” A Thai National Security Council memorandum (NSC 64—February 1950) concluded that Indochina was a key area under immediate threat. Moreover, by this time

Containment of Communism (1950–1975)

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America had been immensely influenced by the idea of the domino theory (NSC 124/2, 1952). Though the Korean War ended in 1953, fear of the threat of China continued. In Indochina, after the failure of the Navarre Plan, France called for a peace settlement at the Geneva Conference—which took place between April and July 1954. Dien Bien Phu, in fact, fell in July, just one day before the Geneva Conference took up the Indochina question, thereby sealing France’s fate. Under the armistice agreement that followed, Vietnam was divided into North and South along the 17th parallel, and a general election, by secret ballot, would be held two years later, in 1956. The United States, displeased by the results of the conference, refused to associate itself with the agreement, which it regarded as a Communist victory.

With South Vietnam’s future highly uncertain, Thailand figured prominently in the American defense strategy for the region. As one observer wrote, if Thailand’s freedom and independence could be preserved, “the heart and much of Southeast Asia will have been saved.” This concern led to the Manila Pact and the formation of SEATO in 1954, which would serve, for America, as a multilateral defense pact in conformity with the U.N. Charter, and for Thailand as a protection against China’s southward advance. By this time, Thailand realized that it needed a strong ally. In the words of one eminent Thai: “For the preservation of peace and security, Thailand has tried many policies in the past, such as those of neutrality and of non-aggression treaties, but found that they did not work, nor can any reason be seen why they should work now.”

Thai leaders had also come by now to view Communist moves as concerted actions. The Vietminh’s incursion in 1953 and early 1954 into Laos, which has traditionally served as a buffer between Thailand and Vietnam, had already caused some concern among Thai leaders, who believed that this move was not unrelated to the Chinese threat. Therefore, by joining SEATO, Thailand hoped the organization would one way or another defend its interests in Laos. But Thailand’s pleas failed to convince the other SEATO members of the need to intervene in the fighting in Laos, which escalated into a civil war between the right and the left factions during 1960–1962. The prospect of the leftists (assisted by a Vietnamese and Soviet airlift of supplies) extending their control over all of Laos finally led the Thais to take action in 1962 by deploying their army units without prior consultation with either Washington or SEATO.

At this point, however, the United States, in view of SEATO’s inaction, and in response to the Thai tactical move, assured Thailand of American protection of its security under SEATO. This assurance came out in the form of the famous Thanat-Rusk Communiqué of March 1962, which reaffirmed America’s commitment to the independence and integrity of Thailand as vital to the U.S. national interest and world peace. The Communiqué said, in part:
In case of aggression, the United States, under a modified SEATO framework and in accordance with its constitutional process, would act to meet the common danger with Thailand without prior consultation of all SEATO members, since the treaty obligation was individual as well as collective.

The first test of this U.S. commitment came soon after its announcement. The deterioration of the Laotian situation in that year brought about a quick and forceful response: the dispatch of a U.S. Marines task force of about 2,000 men to Thailand, followed by troops from Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, a move that not only placated the Thais but also assisted in bringing about negotiations and a fourteen-nation agreement in July 1962 to neutralize Laos and establish there a coalition government consisting of leftists, neutralists, and rightists.

The Laotian crisis brought with it a new awareness of the limitations of an alliance system. Disappointed with SEATO, the Thais could nevertheless look at the Thanat-Rusk Communiqué as a real source of consolation. Despite their serious doubts about the sincerity of the Communists to uphold the neutralization of Laos, the Thais signed the Geneva Agreement because the United States was willing to compromise, probably in order to bow out of the Laotian situation gracefully and concentrate its attention on South Vietnam, the key domino, whose situation was also deteriorating during 1960–1962 in favor of communism.

The Vietnam War was undoubtedly the most important episode ever in Thai-U.S. security relations. It was a period of very close cooperation, which stemmed from a common dedication to maintaining South Vietnam as a non-Communist state. As is well known, American leaders viewed South Vietnam from a geopolitical standpoint rather than as an immediate national security threat to the U.S.—that is, the concept of falling dominos was very much on their minds. Given American setbacks in Cuba and Berlin, the United States was prepared to make Vietnam a test case of American will. For Thai policymakers, on the other hand, the idea of keeping Thailand’s neighbors as non-Communist states was always uppermost in their minds.

In order to justify America’s new role in Vietnam, U.S. leaders realized the importance of bringing Asian allies into the war effort. Their support was seen as a legitimization of American policy and would show that others were sharing the burden. Thailand was vitally important in this regard, because Washington assumed that it would be the next domino to fall after Indochina, and therefore it would show the greatest appreciation of the U.S. involvement. Given the Thais’ insistence that the events in Indochina seriously jeopardized their own security, as previously shown in the Laotian crisis, Thai support for the U.S. war effort in Vietnam was not hard to obtain.

The U.S. military involvement in Indochina, beginning with the fateful decision in 1962 to significantly increase the number of American mili-
tary personnel in Vietnam, reached a turning point with the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, when North Vietnamese torpedo boats launched an attack on the U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The immediate American response consisted of air strikes against North Vietnam. But more important was the U.S. Congress's agreement to President Johnson's request for support of his Vietnam policies. This agreement came out in the form of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which in effect provided the President with authority to escalate the Vietnam war.

As the war escalated, there was a corresponding increase in Thai-U.S. military cooperation. In March 1963, Thailand and the United States signed the Special Logistics Agreement Thailand (SLAT), under which the United States agreed, among other things, to improve the Thai transportation network and to develop Korat as a major supply center. The mounting American involvement in South Vietnam in 1964-1965 resulted in an expansion of the American military presence in Thailand. As the war continued, the U.S. required a vastly expanded base system for its air operations in Indochina—which included not only combat missions but also air rescue and reconnaissance operations. The United States also constructed road networks linking those air bases and other basic air facilities in the northeast of Thailand and developed a major deep-water port at Sataheep. For American servicemen, Thailand became a rest and recuperation (R&R) center. Lastly, the United States established communications and intelligence facilities throughout eastern Thailand. The most important was Ramasun. Thailand agreed to U.S. requests for stationing its troops, armaments, and planes on Thai soil, in exchange for which Thailand received a substantial amount of U.S. economic and military aid.

Whereas the air bases had been sought purely for strategic purposes, direct Thai involvement inside Vietnam was needed for political reasons—to demonstrate to the American public that the war was indeed an allied effort. The U.S. request for Thai ground combat forces was complied with at the end of 1967, when the Thai government agreed to send a full division of its combat forces. Why did Thailand do this, thereby allowing itself to be drawn into the Vietnam conflict? This decision arose mainly out of security considerations—the idea of fighting the Communists before they reached the Thai border. Moreover, apart from material benefits from the United States, Thai policymakers felt that it was necessary to accommodate the U.S., which was providing Thailand with a security guarantee. Thailand thus found itself increasingly dependent on the success or failure of the American war effort in Vietnam.

Then came the beginning of the American disengagement, which constituted another turning point in Thai-U.S. relations. Richard Nixon assumed the presidency with a pledge to bring an honorable end to the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The Vietnamization program, which followed the declaration of the Nixon Doctrine in July 1969, signaled the disengagement
of American activities in Southeast Asia. The Nixon administration tried to placate Thailand's leaders by dispatching many high-level representatives to reassure them of U.S. commitment to Thai security. This had some success, and during the U.S. air operations in Laos and Cambodia, Thailand still fully cooperated with the United States by offering Thai facilities. Thailand even sent irregular forces known as Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs) into Laos and an undisclosed number of Thai volunteers of Cambodian origin to fight in Cambodia. Both missions were trained and equipped with U.S. financial support.

Why did Thailand expose itself to the enemy at a time when the Americans were preparing to disengage from Southeast Asia? In the early 1970s, the Thai leaders, obsessed with the security problems posed by neighboring countries that had served so long as buffer states, seemed placated by the large-scale military assistance the United States was pouring into Thailand during the escalation of the war into Cambodia and Laos. In a sense, Thailand had become bastion of American power in mainland Southeast Asia, and this was enough to alleviate the Thai leaders' concerns about Thailand's security.

However, it was quite apparent at that time that the diplomacy of détente had created an irreversible trend toward American acceptance of Hanoi's preponderant position in Indochina, with only the future of Saigon being left in uncertainty. This trend was reflected in the Paris Peace Accord of January 1973. Obviously, it was not easy for the Thai military rulers to adjust their policy orientation to these new realities. The Thanom-Prapas government, which had been closely associated with the Americans for years, was therefore adversely affected, despite some adaptive efforts, such as the attempt to accommodate the People's Republic of China by sending pingpong players and commercial teams to Peking. Mounting pressure from the press and public, discontented with the government's external posture and with its failure to liberalize its rule and to solve various internal problems, led to a student uprising in October 1973, which toppled the military regime and replaced it with a series of civilian governments.

These internal developments greatly facilitated Thailand's adjustment to the new realities of international life. Beginning with the opening of formal diplomatic ties with Outer Mongolia and several East European countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, East Germany, and Bulgaria) in 1974 and the conclusion of a cultural agreement with the Soviet Union in August 1974, the Thai government (with Kukrit Pramoj at its head in March 1975) proceeded with these moves rapidly and finally normalized Thailand's relations with the PRC in July 1975. In the same month, Thailand and the Philippines jointly announced that SEATO would be phased out within two years. Later, the Democrat Party under Seni Pramoj succeeded in arranging the American troop withdrawal in July 1976.
and the normalization of relations with Hanoi in August 1976. SEATO was terminated in June 1977, although the Manila Pact remained valid. The day of the Thai-American anti-Communist crusade was over.

But adjustment was not that easy. Growing anti-American sentiment, concomitant with or related to the growing left-wing movement in Thailand, contributed to strains in a relationship that was already in bad shape, as the Thais realized that the U.S. pullout from Southeast Asia was inevitable. There were also some ugly incidents, most notably the *Mayaguez* affair, which added fuel to the disappointment with, or disgust at, the U.S. "sellout"—that is, America’s letting the whole of Indochina fall so easily to the Communists. The tension created by the *Mayaguez* incident, although in retrospect it might seem trivial, in fact complicated Thai-American relations at that critical juncture. It led, in particular, to the Thais’ unwillingness to allow a noncombat U.S. residual force to remain on Thai soil. This episode, indeed, marked the lowest ebb in Thai-U.S. relations since the end of World War II.


As we have seen, Thai-American security relations reached an important turning point in the early 1970s. The new pattern of Thai-U.S. security relations, needless to say, was shaped and conditioned by changes in the environment—the détente in East-West tension, the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, increasing Sino-Soviet tension, and Sino-American rapprochement—which led to a significant shift in U.S. policy toward this region and an adjustment thereto by Thailand, especially after 1975. What are the elements of change and continuity here? What implications have they had for Thai-U.S. security relations?

The Nixon Doctrine, as announced by the new President in July 1969, was the first official signal of America’s new approach to Asia. Encouraging self-reliance in internal security and military defense without terminating U.S. treaty commitments, the doctrine provided a rationale for the eventual U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973. Another U.S. policy change can be found in the Pacific Doctrine of President Ford in December 1975. Reaffirming the importance the United States had always attached to Japan and China, Ford emphasized America’s "continuing stake in stability and security in Southeast Asia." However, he also emphasized the need for each of the countries in this region to protect its independence by relying on its own national "resilience and diplomacy," and with "growing maturity and more modest realistic expectations on both sides." A greater emphasis would also be placed on the search for "new trading opportunities and more equitable arrangements for the transfer of science and technology." This policy line, in my opinion, has remained valid. President Carter’s foreign policy, with its
stress on human rights, was, at most, a distraction from, but certainly not an alteration of, this fundamental orientation. The Reagan administration has proceeded along this line more steadily.

One further important change in U.S. Asian policy was the inclusion of the People's Republic of China into its security equations. America, it seems, cannot make an Asian security assessment of arrangement without taking China into consideration, either as friend or foe. Sino-American strategic cooperation, which developed from the rapprochement of the early 1970s, has had a profound impact on Southeast Asia. It has, to some extent, freed the Chinese from their deadlock with the Soviet Union, allowing them to play an active role both as a stabilizer and destabilizer of the security in this region.

Since 1975, the United States has kept in low profile in Southeast Asia. However, following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, the U.S. has become more concerned with Thai and ASEAN security. ASEAN has been called the "heart" of U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia as a whole, representing "the best hope of peace, stability, economic and social development" in the region. In short, the United States perceives ASEAN as the centerpiece of Southeast Asia, and wants it to remain an open-market economy, independent of, and free from, domination by regional and/or extra-regional powers.

The "dark spot" or trouble area in Southeast Asia has always been Indochina. For the U.S., this has been so since at least the Japanese occupation in 1940 and the extension of Chinese influence in the 1950s and 1960s. In geopolitical terms, Indochina has been considered a gateway to the whole of Southeast Asia. Recently, with the area increasingly drifting into the Soviet orbit, it has become a subject of grave concern to ASEAN countries as well as to the United States.

For the Thais, however, the security threat from the eastern border has always existed. Indochina has been a highly sensitive frontier for a very long time. From the French seizure of eastern territory, Japan's encroachments in 1940-41, and the PRC's expansionist policy through Indochina, to the current Soviet-backed Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, the Thais have become so obsessively preoccupied with threat, especially that which comes from the eastern border, that we may call her preoccupation a "security syndrome." Nevertheless, as a front-line state directly facing the threat, Thailand has successfully rallied ASEAN's diplomatic support for its dealings with the Kampuchean problem.

The U.S. role in this respect is quite important, for it provides substantial indirect support. Its diplomatic cooperation with ASEAN has been almost total. The U.S. has supported, and rallied support for, the Democratic Kampuchea seat in the United Nations General Assembly since 1979. It supported ASEAN's proposal for a U.N.-sponsored International Conference on Kampuchea in July 1981. U.S. officials, including Vice President
Bush, Secretary of State Haig, and President Reagan himself, have put personal effort into discussions with Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim on this issue. The U.S. role was, in fact, vital in creating the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea in September 1981. Finally, the United States has cooperated with ASEAN in putting diplomatic and economic pressure on Hanoi to withdraw from Kampuchea.

Since the Vietnamese incursions into Thai territory in June 1980, the United States has cooperated with the PRC in guaranteeing Thai security. The PRC has threatened Vietnam with a second "punitive war," and the United States has confirmed its cooperation with the PRC through statements of its officials, especially Harold Brown in January 1980 and Alexander Haig in August 1981. Moreover, during the Mondale tour of Bangkok in 1978, the Kriangsak visit to the U.S. in 1979, and the Prem visits to Washington in 1981 and 1984, the United States confirmed its commitments to Thailand under the Manila Pact and the 1962 bilateral agreement. Since 1980, U.S. military aid to Thailand has substantially increased, together with a step-up of arms deliveries.

All of these American measures are appreciated in Bangkok, but there are still significant differences in Thai and American perspectives on security matters. With their sensitivity to the eastern border situation, the Thais have always considered Kampuchea a buffer state, and feel that measures there have to be implemented in a manner that is commensurate with the gravity of the problem. Thailand therefore wishes to see the U.S. provide military aid to the anti-Vietnamese coalition government of Kampuchea. The Americans, on the other hand, because of their Vietnam syndrome, do not wish to get involved directly or militarily in Indochinese affairs. In other words, the Americans would like to focus on the security of ASEAN rather than on that of Kampuchea.

With regard to Southeast Asia, America seems to have moved its defense line to ASEAN, with Thailand as a front-line state. If Thailand were openly invaded by Vietnam, which is very unlikely, it is believed that the U.S. would do more than respond with some slight gesture. It might, indeed, decide to use air strikes or naval blockades, though a dispatch of ground combat units is virtually out of the question. Thus, one constant factor in both Thai and U.S. security considerations is the concern over Vietnamese adventurism (expansion and subversion) along the Thai border, particularly since the Soviet Union and China have interests in Indochina. This problem is likely to continue to shape Thai-American security relations in the foreseeable future.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, Thai-American relations represent a positive chapter in the histories of both nations, constituting, as they do a 150-year span that
includes three distinct periods, two turning points, and two pillars of continuity that have served as a vital link in the relations. This framework represents a multi-faceted view of the relationship. There are, however, three major characteristics which provide us with a review of the relationship that should be briefly mentioned in closing, namely, the unique, important, and asymmetrical qualities of the relationship.

Thai-U.S. relations have often been characterized as "unique," although few have ventured to explain in what way. I would like to suggest here that they are unique because, with brief exceptions, Thailand and the U.S. have shared parallel interests throughout their relationship.

In the European colonial period, for example, when Thailand was concerned with survival in the midst of British and French encroachments that resulted in the loss of territory, unequal treaties, and treaties involving extraterritorial rights, American legal advisors were instrumental in paving the way for more equitable treatment. Between 1903 and 1940, a succession of American lawyers were brought to Thailand to advise Thai leaders on the renegotiation of treaties with the major European powers. Although Thailand ceded territory to those powers upon American advice, she maintained her independence and gradually regained sovereignty.

In the post-World War II period, the Communist threat brought Thailand and the U.S. together yet again, and the continuing threat posed by Vietnamese expansionism has kept them together up to the present day. It is these parallel concerns that have made the relationship a unique one. Although Thailand has developed relations with such nations as France, Britain, Japan, China, and the Soviet Union, all of these nations have, at one time or another, represented a threat to Thai national security. The U.S., however, has never posed a real threat to Thai security. In fact, the U.S. has always supported Thailand, even at the height of hostilities during World War II.

Thai-U.S. relations can further be characterized as "important," in the sense that the U.S. has always been involved in Thai national security. This involvement is one to which the Thais have attached much significance, primarily because Thailand has been threatened by other nations throughout its history, resulting in the "security syndrome" mentioned earlier. However, over the past decade, the level of U.S. involvement has been greatly reduced, thus lessening the importance of Thai-U.S. relations.

Finally, the Thai-U.S. relationship has often been characterized as "asymmetrical," because of the sheer differences between the two countries in economics, military power, and management, among other things. Generally, however, the lack of symmetry is revealed by the comparative ease with which the U.S. is capable of influencing Thailand, in direct contrast to the relative difficulty Thailand has in influencing the U.S., both in terms of security and trade.
Furthermore, the U.S. does not tend to be very sensitive to long-standing, deep-rooted local conflicts that were present even before American involvement. Instead, the U.S. often maintains a standard problem-solving formula even after it is clear that the formula is inappropriate to certain situations or in certain localities. The U.S. tends, for instance, to apply lessons of the past, particularly those of past wars, to the resolution of present conflicts, sometimes without having thoroughly investigated the real heart of the conflict. Examples of this can be seen in its application of the lessons learned in Germany during World War II to Korea, and in Korea to Vietnam. What the lessons of Vietnam will lead to is still uncertain, but let us hope that America will maintain a broad historical perspective, allowing itself greater flexibility, when applying the lessons of the past to future conflicts.

NOTES

2. Paul Wolfowitz, "Report to the House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on Asia and the Pacific, February 20, 1985."
8. The agreement was signed by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat as Minister of Defense and Kenneth Todd Young, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, on March 19, 1963.
Thai-American Relations in Perspective

R. Sean Randolph

In the 102 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties between Thailand and the United States, the Thai-American relationship has been unusually warm and positive. It is also a relationship which has evolved and grown and which, despite sharply changing circumstances, has shown a remarkable continuity. Thematically, U.S.-Thai relations can be divided into four periods: the first from the early 1800s through 1950; the second from 1950 to 1973; a transitional period from 1973 to 1979; and the current phase dating roughly from Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia. Since 1948, when close bilateral cooperation began in earnest, the ebb and flow of Thai-American relations have been fundamentally premised on security considerations. In the last several years, the foundation of that relationship has achieved new diversity and complexity, suggesting that this pattern may be shifting. Nevertheless, for the present, “security” in its broadest sense remains at the core of the modern U.S.-Thai relationship.

Benign Distance (1882–1950)

American contact with Thailand was superficial in the century prior to 1945. Thai-American intercourse was based primarily on contact involving missionaries and traders. The former, in particular, played a constructive role in the Kingdom’s modern development, accounting for both medical and educational advances. Because of this constructive role, several Americans were asked to serve as confidants and advisers to reigning or soon-to-be reigning monarchs.

Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries were first established in 1856, followed in 1882 by the upgrading of the resident U.S. diplomatic mission from a consulate to a legation. With the establishment of the U.S. legation, the United States became the first power to have a representative with the rank of Minister at the Siamese court. Various U.S. gestures during the 1920s addressed the sensitive issue of foreign extraterritoriality and contributed to Siam’s efforts to obtain full judicial autonomy from other European powers. From 1903 to 1940, the post of foreign affairs adviser to the throne was created for and successively filled by Americans. In 1925, the best known of these advisers, Francis B. Sayre, was empowered to carry out important and ultimately successful treaty negotiations with the European powers for the restoration of full Thai judicial and
fiscal autonomy following the renunciation of all extraterritorial rights by the United States in the December 16, 1920, Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation.

This trust placed in the hands of an American suggests the role which the United States played for Thailand at this time. Essentially, the United States was perceived as a friendly, powerful Western nation with no regional ambitions or designs on Thai territory. For similar reasons, American advisers were felt to be impartial and less likely to arouse the suspicions of contending European powers. This evenhanded role was in part made possible by the fact that the United States at that time had few direct interests in Siam, trading or otherwise. On a less formal level, these early political bonds were further strengthened by the generally supportive attitude of resident Americans toward Thai aspirations and by the United States' well-known anti-colonial sentiments.

During the inter-war years of the 1930s, American influence in Thailand declined as a result of decreased trade and missionary activity, growing Thai nationalism, and changed internal conditions following the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932. Thailand's ambiguous alliance with Japan (under the leadership of Phibunsongkhram) during the Second World War sent Thai-American relations to their nadir. Even this negative fact, however, contained the seeds of a new and closer relationship. Following Thailand's declaration of war on Britain and the United States on January 24, 1942, the head of the Thai legation in Washington, M. R. Seni Pramoj, chose not to deliver his government's declaration of war, but instead declared that his legation would henceforward be the center of a "Free Thai" resistance movement. As a result, Washington chose to ignore the declaration of war and to treat Thailand as an "enemy-occupied state." The resulting relationship, which was facilitated by close cooperation between the Free Thai and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) throughout the war, set the stage for still closer cooperation in the post-war years.

**Close Association (1948–73)**

The 1948–50 period saw a transition in the Thai-American relationship toward a pattern of closer interaction and alliance, which was to last until approximately 1973. The new structure of this relationship was determined by what was for the first time a convergence of mutual interests on a significant scale. Emerging from the rising heat of the Cold War and continuing essentially unchanged for twenty-five years was the perception of a growing security threat in Southeast Asia, which posed a direct challenge both to Thai sovereignty and to broader United States security interests. As a result, security issues quickly coalesced as the core of the working Thai-American relationship.
It is one of the anomalies of Thai-American relations in this period that the very perception of a shared security interest which brought Thailand and the United States together was also the principal point of difference between them. For while perceiving a common threat, each defined that threat in somewhat different terms. For the United States, the rise and spread of communism in Indochina carried global implications, and was perceived in that context. This meant that Thailand, whatever its inherent value, was important primarily for its utility in the struggle to prevent further Communist gains in Indochina. This also meant that America’s global responsibilities dictated a fundamentally broader perspective on regional security issues than that taken by the Thais. Actions could be taken only with an eye to their broader implications. For Thailand, on the other hand, the struggles of Indochina were of much more immediate concern. Should Communist forces prevail, they would be established not thousands of miles away but just across the Mekong, directly threatening the security and existence of the Kingdom itself. Consequently, Bangkok consistently sought to secure the firmest possible guarantee of American support for Thai security and the maximum possible commitment of American resources to Thai objectives. In short, Thailand abandoned its traditional policy of “bending with the wind” in favor of an outright alliance with the United States, based on a judgment that only by such an association could Thai security be ultimately secured. As a persistent side effect, however, that association also produced a situation conducive to psychological insecurity and physical dependence.

For the United States, the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords and the subsequent partition of Vietnam was the prime catalyst for deeper involvement in Southeast Asia, including Thailand. The most visible product of that heightened involvement was the Manila Pact, signed by Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Great Britain, France, Thailand, and the Philippines on September 8, 1954. Thailand had for a number of years sought to obtain a firm and explicit guarantee of its security from the Western powers, and most importantly from the United States. At the Manila Conference, therefore, the Thai sought the strongest treaty possible, with NATO as the preferred model. Under those circumstances, United States military action in support of its fellow members would, if the right factors were to occur, be automatic. Then-Secretary of State John Foster Dulles approached the Pact from a different perspective, however. Dulles resisted the creation of a joint military force or joint command, or the permanent stationing of American troops in the region. Nor did he accept the concept of automaticity of response. The operational language contained in the Manila Treaty thus reads that in the event of an armed attack against any of the parties, each party will “act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.” The outcome of the Manila Conference
was thus an ambiguous one for Thailand. On the one hand, it had not obtained the hard-and-fast security guarantee it had sought, but on the other hand, Bangkok now had an explicit commitment from the United States to Thailand's security, formalized in a solemn treaty. This was, from the Thai perspective, a major achievement.

The resulting Thai-American alliance can be divided in its active phase (essentially the period of America's direct involvement in Indochina) into two distinct but interrelated periods: the first was concerned with Laos, and the second focused on events in Vietnam. In the former, Thai concern with the security of its eastern border and, more specifically, with the threat posed by the possible establishment of a Communist regime in Laos dominated the SEATO agenda. From 1957 through 1963, the fabric of SEATO was repeatedly tested by the deteriorating Laotian situation. In the ebb and flow of conflict in that country, the Thai consistently urged strong Western support for anti-Communist forces. For Thailand the litmus test for the utility of SEATO became the degree to which the United States and the other SEATO allies were willing to embrace such a policy.

Though grounds could ultimately be found for both satisfaction and disappointment, on balance SEATO's performance fell short of Thai expectations. France and Britain in particular did not find the factional struggles of Laos sufficient cause for intervention under the Manila Treaty, particularly in the absence of clear evidence of foreign military involvement. Initially, Thailand was displeased with the United States' performance as well, feeling that the U.S. was giving insufficient attention to Thai interests and was not facing up to the realities of the situation. Beginning in 1960, with Washington's decision to back the conservative forces led by Phoumi Nosavan, however, the United States increasingly began to embrace the Thai view. Subsequently, Thai-American security cooperation was for the first time extended beyond the limits of Thailand, as Thai territory was extensively used for the CIA's resupply of Phoumiist forces.

The Thai-American alliance achieved its highest form—and one that was close to what Thailand had long been seeking—in the February 1962 Rusk-Thanat Communiqué. In that communiqué, which followed a 40-minute meeting in Washington between Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, the United States affirmed that its obligations to Thailand under the Manila Treaty were not dependent on the prior agreement of other parties to the Treaty, as the Treaty obligations were "individual as well as collective." What the United States offered, in effect, was an assurance of U.S. assistance in the event of a Communist attack—independent of and, if necessary, without the prior consent of other SEATO members. The effective result was the transformation of the multilateral Manila Pact obligation into a bilateral defense agreement between Thailand and the United States. The Rusk-Thanat Communiqué remains in effect today, and is the subject of regular reaffirmation.
The second major phase of Thai-U.S. security cooperation was related directly to the parallel conflict in Vietnam. In that conflict, Thailand played a major role as the United States' major logistical and intelligence base and land-based center for regional air power. Eventually, as the Indochina conflict widened, the scope of those activities was broadened to include Cambodia as well.

In the years between 1960 and 1973, but most significantly from 1965 onwards, the United States developed in Thailand an extensive network of bases related directly to the requirements of the Indochina conflict. At its height, this network included seven major air bases (Don Muang, Takhli, Nakhon Phanom, Udorn, Ubon, Korat, and U-Tapao), housing more than 750 U.S. aircraft. Fifty thousand U.S. servicemen were stationed in Thailand, and countless others visited Thailand for rest and recuperation (R&R). An extensive network of intelligence facilities oriented toward China and Indochina was also developed throughout the country.

It is clear that without Thai support the U.S. war effort in Vietnam would have been vastly more difficult to sustain. U.S. facilities at Udorn were located only forty minutes' flying time from Hanoi. In the three years prior to the November 1968 bombing halt, 80 percent of all bombing over Vietnam was carried out from Thai bases; following the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973, 100 percent of U.S. bombing over Indochina originated in Thailand. Thailand also provided valuable political support to the U.S. war effort by its dispatch of a full combat division, the Black Panthers, to fight in Vietnam alongside other allied forces.

This intensive pattern of interaction placed new burdens and strains on the Thai-U.S. relationship, making it at once closer but also more difficult. Given Thailand's strategic location, secure environment, and politically sympathetic government, that nation for the first time assumed a position of considerable importance in the U.S. military and policy framework. In turn, Thailand benefitted from large-scale military assistance, a large infusion of American economic assistance (directed primarily toward rural security), and, most importantly, the consolidation of an enhanced security relationship with the United States. A physical American presence, coupled with a willingness on the part of the United States to stay the course in Vietnam, thus became central to the Thai government's perception of its own security.

As opposed to the relationship which had existed prior to the early 1960s, the United States, as the Vietnam conflict deepened, could no longer deal with Thailand from the standpoint of a detached and disinterested benefactor. For both nations, major security, policy, and resource issues served to place the relationship on a more pragmatic footing, in which competing national and bureaucratic priorities achieved new prominence. Despite the new intensity of this relationship, an ambiguity also continued to pervade Thai-American relations. In return for the use of its facilities—
by which Thailand had heightened its exposure to both China and North Vietnam—Thailand consistently sought the maximum possible reassurance of U.S. security support. While the United States was prepared to offer substantial military and economic aid and a qualified security guarantee, it was unable to provide a direct, unilateral defense guarantee. An implicit mutual confidence thus provided a necessary seal to the working of the relationship. As the political pressures generated by the Vietnam War mounted, however, that confidence was submitted to ever-increasing strain. By 1973, those pressures reached the point where a new realignment of the Thai-American relationship was necessary.

Transition (1973–79)

The period 1973–79 marked an important transitional phase in the Thai-U.S. relationship. The catalyst for this transition was the changing environment, both domestic and international, in which both nations now found themselves.

The seeds of change had been planted in 1969, as the probability of a U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam became increasingly clear. The tensions which inevitably resulted—growing out of the imperatives of U.S. disengagement and Bangkok’s perceptions of the requirements for its own longer-term interests—led to a reconsideration on both sides of the nature of the relationship. While for the United States a number of important tactical issues were at stake (such as access to Thai facilities for the continued support of operations in and over Indochina), for Thailand the immediate question was whether, given the rising opposition to the Vietnam War within the United States and the prospect of U.S. disengagement from that conflict, the U.S. could still be relied upon as a long-term guarantor of Thai security.

The student uprising which swept Bangkok and other parts of Thailand in October 1973 marked a new and important departure for Thai domestic politics. The fall of the Thanom government and the accession to power of a series of democratically elected civilian administrations at once lessened the influence and direct role of the military in the Thai political process and introduced a dramatic new element of democracy into the political equation. Not surprisingly, the new power-holders in Bangkok had different views of Thailand’s national priorities than their military predecessors. Though still pro-American and pro-Western, their approach to foreign affairs was suffused with a more immediate sense of nationalism and a reduced willingness to tie Thailand’s policies directly to those of the United States. As already noted, an uneven trend in this direction had been under way since 1969 (interrupted in late 1972 and early 1973 by a large-scale augmentation of U.S. forces stemming from the transfer of U.S. military resources from Vietnam). From October 1973 onwards, however, this movement was rapidly accelerated.
On June 30, 1975, Thailand's newly elected Prime Minister, Kukrit Pramoj, visited Peking at the head of an official government mission. This was followed on July 1 by the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the two countries. Parallel moves were also made to improve Thailand's relations with neighboring Laos and with the Communist states of Eastern Europe. Through 1974, overtures were also made to Hanoi; these were consistently rebuffed, with the North Vietnamese demanding the prior withdrawal of all U.S. military forces from Thailand before talks could begin. Efforts continued after the fall of South Vietnam in April 1975, however; and on August 6, 1976, full diplomatic relations between the democratic Republic of Vietnam and Thailand were established. With these changes, Thailand's foreign policy perspective was fundamentally altered and a 25-year joint Thai-American effort, directed first against China and later against North Vietnam, ended.

The changing nature of the Thai-U.S. relationship could best be seen in the rapid drawdown of U.S. military forces in Thailand. In January 1974, as the new civilian government began its first full year, the total U.S. military presence stood at 35,000 men and 600 aircraft. Though a Congressional ban on U.S. military operations in or over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia was then in effect, Thai-based reconnaissance missions continued, and Thailand still served as the principal support base for U.S. assistance to the besieged government of Cambodia. The fall of both Cambodia and South Vietnam to Communist forces in April 1975, however, effectively ended the last rationale for a significant U.S. military presence. The defense of Thailand itself might have provided such a rationale. It was clear to Thai policymakers, however, that given the domestic political climate in the United States the probability of any direct reengagement of U.S. military forces in Southeast Asia was remote. Given the ascendency of Communist power in neighboring Indochina, a large and visible American military presence in Thailand came to be viewed less as an asset than a liability.

The drawdown of U.S. forces began in February 1974, with accelerated movement through 1975. This was a natural and necessary process. A new and more volatile chemistry was injected into the process on March 19, 1975, when the newly elected government of Kukrit Pramoj announced a one-year deadline for the withdrawal of all foreign troops. Whereas the negotiating process up to that point had been basically flexible and relaxed, a new element of pressure was now introduced into the bilateral atmosphere. The deadline was particularly resented in Washington, where then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger observed that "no country should imagine that it is doing a favor by a threat of termination; we will not accept that its security is more important to us than it is to itself."

The May 1975 rescue from Cambodia of the crew of the U.S.S. Mayaguez—by American forces operating without formal authorization from Thai bases—added new strain to the relationship. A further crisis was
generated by the politicization of the withdrawal issue in the parliamentary elections called by Kukrit for April 4. Relatively untroubled negotiations had already been under way for the retention of a "residual" U.S. military presence of noncombat personnel, to be located at U-Tapao and at various intelligence-related facilities. On February 4, however, the Foreign Ministry presented U.S. Ambassador Charles Whitehouse with a list of "7 Principles" which the United States was required to accept in connection with that presence. The public release of those principles on March 9, in the midst of an increasingly heated electoral campaign, added new volatility to the situation. From the American standpoint, the 7 Principles amounted to an ultimatum, and their release was regarded as an unwarranted attempt by Kukrit to gain political mileage at U.S. expense. While largely technical, some of the principles (relating in particular to legal jurisdiction over U.S. personnel) caused serious legal difficulties for the United States. As time went on, domestic political pressures also increasingly restricted the Thai government's room to maneuver. In an earlier and more trusting era, problems of this nature could undoubtedly have been resolved smoothly and quietly through informal understandings. In the strained and highly charged environment of 1975 and 1976, however, older rules and modes of operation no longer applied. By the preset deadline of March 20, no agreement had been reached, causing the negotiations to fail. Within four months, the 4,500 remaining U.S. military personnel in Thailand were (with the exception of 270 Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group [JUSMAG] advisors) removed. In June, the last U.S. air facility in Thailand (at U-Tapao) was formally closed, as was the U.S. intelligence facility at Ramasun. On July 20, U.S. MACTHAI (U.S. Military Assistance Command Thailand) offices in Bangkok were closed.

The failure of the 1976 residual troop negotiations marked a nadir in U.S.-Thai relations. The bitter aftertaste of the experience is reflected in the comment of then-U.S. Ambassador Charles Whitehouse that "we don't stay where we are not wanted." Whitehouse also commented, however, that "it's the end of an episode, not a watershed." Both comments were accurate. An obvious low-point in what had been a strong and unusually close relationship, the final U.S. withdrawals in the summer of 1976 also constituted a turning point. Though more contentious and acrimonious than was either desirable or necessary, the final withdrawal was a natural culmination of pressures caused by fundamental changes in both the domestic and international environments affecting both countries. For Thailand and the United States it constituted a pivotal point in the transition between the Vietnam-era alliance and the increasingly complex era of the later 1970s and the 1980s. What is also clear in retrospect is the fact that despite the difficulty of that transition for both sides, the underlying sense of mutual interest, identity, and friendship remained intact, to be built upon in coming years in forms better suited to the requirements of post-war Southeast Asia.
Kukrit, in the final event, lost the April 4, 1976, election to his brother Seni Pramoj. On October 6, 1976, however, the Seni government was itself overthrown by military forces designated as the National Administrative Reform Council (NARC). Exceptionally bloody and violent for Thailand, the coup abruptly ended Thailand’s three-year experiment in democracy and restored a series of conservative, military-backed governments to power, first under former Supreme Court justice Thanin Kraivichien and subsequently under General Kriangsak Chomanan. With the exception of the twelve-month Thanin period—which saw unusual tension both within Thai society and between Thailand and its Communist neighbors—the following three years witnessed a continued transition in Thailand’s international relations. On June 20, 1977, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was formally disbanded, while from late 1977 through 1979, Kriangsak consistently sought to improve Thailand’s relations with China and the Indochinese states. The United States, for its part, remained focused inward. In part this was related to the country’s own transition from the Vietnam Era, reflected in a rejection of the “real politik” policies of the recent past, a greater emphasis on moral issues such as human rights, and an allergy to entangling overseas involvements, particularly in Asia.

Accordingly, the American role in Thailand and elsewhere in this period remained distinctly limited, certainly by comparison with the recent past. Three major issues occupied the U.S. agenda: normalization of diplomatic relations with Vietnam, support for ASEAN, and the Indochinese refugee crisis. The refugee problem assumed particular importance for Thailand, as massive numbers of Indochinese (primarily Vietnamese boat people and Laotian land refugees) converged on Thailand as the nearest available nation of refuge. In August 1977, five hundred boat refugees and twelve hundred land refugees were arriving in Thailand per month; by August 1978, the combined total reached six thousand per month, divided almost evenly between Vietnamese and Laotians (primarily Hmong).

The humanitarian response of the United States was swift. The new U.S. Ambassador in Bangkok, Morton Abramowitz, devoted great attention, after his arrival in August 1978, to the refugee issue, particularly as it affected Thailand. The responsiveness of the United States, both in supporting international efforts such as the July 1979 Geneva Conference on Refugees and in assuring a regular offtake of Indochinese for resettlement in the United States not only provided essential support to Thailand in coping with a crisis of major proportions, but also provided a key ingredient underpinning the Royal Thai Government’s continued willingness to absorb new refugee flows. The continuity of the United States’ willingness to accept Indochinese refugees on a sustained basis has subsequently remained a central issue on the U.S.-Thai political agenda.
1979–Present: A Balanced Relationship

The political, diplomatic, and military climate of Southeast Asia was changed fundamentally by the December 25, 1978, Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The fallout from that event has transformed—or vitally affected—a number of the key relationships in the Southeast Asian region, including that between Thailand and the United States. These patterns continue to the present day. Among other developments, the invasion sealed the process already under way of closer association between Vietnam and the Soviet Union, as well as the emerging and increasingly acrimonious split between Vietnam and China. ASEAN, which had first begun to coalesce in 1976 as a defensive reaction to the fall of South Vietnam, solidified and achieved new coherence in its opposition to Vietnam’s continued occupation of Cambodia. Closer ties of cooperation also developed between Thailand and China.

The Sino-Vietnamese split has impacted most importantly on Thailand. As a result of that division and the increasingly close political relationship between Bangkok and Beijing, the guerrilla forces of the pro-Chinese Communist Party of Thailand were expelled from their Lao-tian and Cambodian bases in 1979. As a result of closer ties between Bangkok and Beijing, those forces were severed from their traditional Chinese sources of supply, and the CPT’s China-based clandestine radio, the Voice of the People of Thailand, ceased broadcasting on July 11, 1979. The most dramatic demonstration of the new power alignment, however, was China’s limited invasion of Vietnam in February 1980, as “punishment” for Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia. In August 1980, the Chinese assured Thai Foreign Minister Sitthi Savetsila of China’s military support in the event of Vietnamese aggression, an offer which has since been repeated. This constituted a dramatic reversal of the Thai security equation of the previous thirty years, in which China was perceived as the principal threat.

The Cambodian crisis also directly affected Thailand in the form of massive numbers of Cambodian refugees. In the fall and summer of 1979, between 500,000 and 600,000 Cambodians converged on the Thai border. With Thailand already burdened with large numbers of Laotians and Vietnamese, the new refugee influx constituted a security as well as a humanitarian problem of major proportions.

In these circumstances, Bangkok turned again to the United States for support. Such support had, of course, been both invited and provided in preceding years. The seriousness and complexity of the issues now facing the region required, however, a return by the United States to a more prominent regional role.

As with Vietnamese refugees in the past, the United States has, since the onset of the Cambodian crisis, served as the linchpin of the international effort for the resettlement of Indochinese refugees. Between October
1979 and April 1980, the United States provided $87 million in assistance for Cambodian relief operations. Monthly allocations for admissions from Thai refugee camps were simultaneously raised. U.S. admission levels have subsequently been held at a high level, in part as an assurance to the Thai Government that maintenance of its policy of first asylum will not result in an unacceptable buildup of camp populations in Thailand. Recurring nervousness in Bangkok on this score has kept the refugee question a central issue in current U.S.-Thai relations.

More direct security issues have also been brought to the fore. When, on June 23, 1980, Vietnamese forces launched an armed incursion into Thai territory opposite Aranyprathet, the United States soon after (on July 1) began an immediate emergency airlift of small arms and artillery to Thailand. It was also announced that the United States would shortly begin the accelerated delivery of thirty-five M48-A5 tanks. These moves were intended to serve primarily both as a symbolic gesture of U.S. support for Thailand and as a warning to Vietnam. A similar exercise was repeated in April 1983, when Vietnamese attacks on Khmer resistance camps spilled over the border. The United States responded then with the expedited delivery to Thailand, by sea and air, of Redeye missiles and new-model extended-range 155 mm howitzers drawn directly from U.S. military inventories.

New emphasis has been placed by the United States in the last four years on restoring confidence in the reliability of U.S. commitments among American allies, Thailand among them. Part of that process has been psychological, growing out of the perception of a greater U.S. willingness to confront or resist Soviet advances globally. More concretely, in the case of Thailand, U.S. aid packages, including foreign military sales (FMS), have risen from $69.3 million in 1981 to $107.3 million in 1982, $117 million in 1983, and $132.8 million in 1984.

Thailand has also sought and received consistent U.S. support for ASEAN’s policy on Kampuchea (though differences remain regarding the appropriate amount of U.S. support for the non-Communist Cambodian resistance), an issue of direct and immediate importance to Bangkok. Active U.S. political support for ASEAN can be dated back at least to 1977, when the first joint U.S.-ASEAN meeting took place in Manila. In July 1979, Cyrus Vance became the first U.S. Secretary of State to attend the annual meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers, setting a precedent which has since been maintained with more or less regularity. Since that time, the United States has regularly supported ASEAN positions in the United Nations favoring the accreditation of Democratic Kampuchea and calling for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea. With Thailand as its recognized “front-line state,” ASEAN’s policy of opposition to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia has provided important support to Thai policy interests.
Conclusion

In the past five years, Thai-American relations have achieved a new, more natural, and more mature balance than at any other time in the recent past. If the pre-1950 period was one of unusual detachment (because of the paucity of direct mutual interests), then the period spanning the second Indochina War was one of extraordinary closeness. As a result of the pressures of that period and Thailand’s particular vulnerability, the relationship that evolved with the United States was largely one—Thai pride and diplomatic skill notwithstanding—of dependence. At the center of that relationship was the issue of security and, from the Thai perspective, the question of American willingness to act as a direct guarantor of that security.

Security today remains at the heart of the U.S.-Thai relationship. In the present case, however, I would argue that “security” must be given a more varied and sophisticated definition than it usually has.

In the direct sense, the United States remains central to Thai security considerations. U.S. military assistance to Thailand continues to be given high priority in Washington. By its response to the June 1980 and April 1983 Vietnamese incursions, the United States has demonstrated its readiness to stand behind Thailand in the event of a direct external threat. The Rusk-Thanat Communiqué is the object of constant reaffirmation, and will continue to be so. At the same time, there is recognition in both Washington and Bangkok of the practical constraints on the U.S. role, and thus of responsibilities which each can best assume.

In the increasingly complex environment of Southeast Asia, however, security must also be seen in a broader sense. Thailand’s continuing refugee problem, and Washington’s continued engagement in addressing it, is both a humanitarian and a security issue. This is particularly the case for Bangkok.

The pattern that is now establishing itself in Thai-American relations reflects the broader pattern of political diversification in Thailand and the Southeast Asian region. In Bangkok, the U.S. Embassy now enjoys a broader range of contacts in the Thai community than in the past. This is a significant change from the pattern prevailing only ten years ago, when U.S. channels ran primarily to the Thai military. This, in turn, reflects the broadening of the Thai political base which has occurred in halting fashion since 1973.

With the significant economic growth experienced by Thailand and its ASEAN neighbors in the past decade, trade and economic issues have also assumed a greater importance in the Thai-U.S. relationship. The recently concluded Thai-U.S. Science and Technology agreement is an indicator of this important trend, and hopefully, a harbinger of even closer cooperation to come. Nevertheless, the economic component of the government rela-
tionship today remains relatively small compared with the security and other political issues on the bilateral agenda.

The past five years have also witnessed a diversification of Thailand's external political base, leading to a diminished level of direct reliance on the United States. This, too, is a positive development. The United States continues, and must continue, to play a pivotal role as a friend, ally, and prime supporter of Thai integrity and security. Since 1979, however, two major developments have occurred which in different ways have impacted heavily on the regional security and political environment. These are (1) the emergence of China as a supporter of Thai security vis-à-vis Vietnam, and (2) the development of ASEAN as a coherent political-economic grouping and a support mechanism for Thailand in its Kampuchea policy.

China's role in support of the resistance to Vietnam inside Kampuchea, its countervailing pressure on Vietnam's northern border, and its ultimate assurances to Thailand of support against aggression all constitute a significant reversal of former threat-perceptions and have placed China in the position—at least for the moment—of a prime backer of Thai security interests.

More important in the long run has been the development and maturation of ASEAN. Clearly, the whole of ASEAN is greater than the sum of its parts; the influence and prestige of Thailand have thus grown together with that of ASEAN. ASEAN policy toward Kampuchea has consistently reflected the Thai view, adding critical muscle to international efforts to reverse the current status quo in Cambodia. Ultimately, the continued unity of ASEAN stands as not only an important basis for Thai political and economic interests, but as a critical element in the continuing stability of Southeast Asia itself.

The United States has an important role to play in this new environment, but it is a more complex role than in the past. With a broadening of the regional agenda, more emphasis will be placed in the coming years on trade and economic issues. This is already being demonstrated by the regular economic dialogues which now take place between ASEAN and the United States, and by the "6 + 5" economic dialogue on the Pacific launched at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in Jakarta in 1984. Thailand's regional partners now include not only the United States but China and, most importantly, the ASEAN nations. Here again, the United States has been called on to play an important but indirect role, in support of ASEAN and as a counter to excessive political-security reliance on China. A final and intangible factor in this evolving regional chemistry is the liking and friendship which Americans generally feel for Thai, a feeling that is widely reciprocated. This sense of affinity and shared interests provides, I believe, a vital ingredient in what is today an increasingly balanced and mature relationship.
NOTES

5. Interview, Charles Whitehouse (July 1, 1976).
7. "6 + 5" refers to the dialog on Pacific Basin economic issues occurring annually at the ASEAN Postministerial Conference and including the foreign ministers of the six members of ASEAN plus the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.
Thai-U.S. Cultural Relations

Pichai Vasnasong

An Overview

H. Carroll Parish, a former President of the American-Siam Association, once mentioned that there is evidence that Thomas Yale, a relative of Elihu Yale, the founder of Yale University, arrived in Siam in 1682, well before the American declaration of independence in 1776. When Yale arrived, other westerners, including the Portuguese, French, British, Dutch, and others, were primarily interested in trading activities, especially in spices.

During what is known as Bangkok’s early Rattanakosin period, more than two hundred years ago, many countries in our part of Asia were under colonial rule. The Portuguese occupied part of India and the coast of China; the British ruled over most of India, Burma, Borneo, and Malaysia; the French governed Indo-China; and the Dutch, Indonesia. Under unique circumstances, Thailand managed to maintain its sovereignty and to ward off various attempts by western powers to permanently intrude into Thai territory. Indeed, there were times when compromises had to be made—when Thailand was forced to give up certain parts of the country in order to diplomatically appease European powers during the reign of King Chulalongkorn.

When the first group of American missionaries arrived in Siam, King Mongkut (Rama IV) said: “The American missionaries are among the very first group of foreigners to set up schools and teach the Thail people. They are straightforward and honest, never interfering in affairs of state, nor creating any difficulties for Thais. In this regard, the Government of Siam deeply admires and respects them. In time of trouble, the American missionaries have always shown their utmost willingness to help Thais, and they have in fact rendered great assistance and service to the Thai people.”

King Mongkut wrote several letters to two American Presidents, Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan. The King’s most famous message to a foreign head of state was the historic letter he wrote to Buchanan on February 14, 1861, after receiving gifts from the President. Having heard from the captain of an American ship that there were no elephants in the U.S., the King proposed to send a pair as a gift, to be used in the American transportation system.

King Mongkut’s letter arrived in the U.S. after Abraham Lincoln had succeeded Buchanan as President, and, because of the Civil War, it was not answered until a year later. Lincoln thanked the King for the gift of a sword.
with a scabbard decorated with silver and gold which was placed among the archives of the U.S. Government. However, Lincoln declined the King's offer of raising elephants in the U.S., saying that "steam on land, as well as water, has been our best and most efficient agent of transportation in internal commerce."

The present King of Thailand, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, mentioned this famous exchange of messages in an address delivered before the two Houses of the U.S. Congress on June 29, 1960. His Majesty said that King Mongkut's offer of elephants had "no other objective than to provide a friend with what he lacked, in the same spirit in which the American aid program is likewise offered."

People from all levels of Thai society, from the Chakri kings to people in ordinary walks of life, have been genuinely impressed by the kindness and generosity of Americans, particularly the hardworking American missionaries who were so sincerely dedicated to establishing friendly and cultural links between the two countries, even though their efforts at propagating Christianity did not meet with as great a success as their educational, medical, and scientific contributions to Thai society.

Numerous Americans who came to really know Thailand and its people became very fond of the country, and often wished to spend the rest of their lives there. Quite a number of Americans, in fact, did just that. They were totally won over by the hospitality of the Thai people and the magnanimity of their King. In a poetic tribute to King Chulalongkorn, David B. Sickels, U.S. Consul to Thailand from 1876 to 1880, wrote:

Joy to the King Chulalongkorn
Greet him from palace to port,
Welcome with land-praising cannon,
Booming from vessel and fort.
Welcome the King at his coming,
Fling every flag to the wind,
Happy the ruled and the ruler—
Kingly, but noble and kind.

Following the landmark Thai-American trade treaty of 1833, the relationship between our two countries continued on a limited, person-to-person basis for well over a century. The key figures, of course, were the American missionaries and the handful of American advisers to the Siamese Government, who contributed much to the country's gradual modernization.

After World War II, rapid technological advances facilitated a two-way flow in the relations between our countries, involving thousands of tourists, students, teachers, performing artists, military men, government officials, and technicians from both countries. Today, the large American community in Thailand is many times outnumbered by the Thai commu-
nity in the U.S. There are Christian church services in Bangkok, but one can also pay respect to the Lord Buddha at a Thai-style temple in Los Angeles.

In a message to the Thai Government on the occasion of the Rattanakosin Bicentennial held in 1982, President Ronald Reagan said: "Our common commitment to freedom and friendship has served us well in the past, and I believe that shared values that link us across the globe will continue to help promote the well-being of both our nations." President Reagan also affirmed in that message that "one of the bonds that has held us together is our shared love for individual and national freedom."

The Earliest Contacts Between Thais and Americans

A certain Captain Han commanded the first American ship to visit Thailand, in 1821, during the reign of Rama II. Captain Han presented five hundred flintlock guns to Rama II, who in return bestowed upon the captain the rank and title of "Khun Pakdiraja" and decreed that a part of his merchandize be exempted from taxes.

In 1828, the celebrated Siamese twins, Eng and Chang, went aboard the ship of another American sea captain, Abel Coffin. The twins were seventeen years old when they left their homeland. Captain Coffin presented the twins in highly popular act in major cities in Europe and the U.S. Sometime later, the boys developed a business sense of their own and began touring independently, which they did for many years. Along the way, they married two American sisters, Sarah and Adelaide Yates. Among the twins' numerous American descendants are a president of the Union Pacific Railroad and a general in the U.S. Air Force.

During the same year that the twins left Thailand for their long and memorable career in Europe and the U.S., the first two pioneering missionaries, Carl Frederick Augustus Gutzlaff and the Reverend Jacob Tomlin, arrived together in Bangkok from China, via Singapore. Tomlin was sent by the London Missionary Society, Gutzlaff by the Netherlands Missionary Society. Possessing some knowledge of medicine, Gutzlaff was able to treat simple ailments. Thus originated the Thai custom of calling all missionaries moh ("doctor"), irrespective of whether or not the missionaries concerned were actually physicians. Gutzlaff and his associates were the ones who paved the way for the American missionaries, who were originally sent to Thailand at Gutzlaff's request.

The Introduction of Printing in Thailand by American Missionaries

Printing was one of the first branches of modern technical knowledge introduced to Thailand by the American missionaries. The Thais were able
to adopt quickly to the printing techniques, and many new volumes of literary works were produced for them to read and enjoy. One can say, therefore, that Thai culture was able to spread at a faster rate because of the acquisition of these techniques from the American missionaries.

Printing during the reign of Rama III was mostly connected with Christian teaching. The first official document ever printed in Thailand was a royal edict banning the smoking and importing of opium. Nine thousand copies were printed.

During the same period, Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, one of the most outstanding American missionaries in Thailand, published the maiden issue of a Thai-language newspaper called The Bankok Recorder on July 4, 1844. In 1859, John H. Chandler started publishing another newspaper, The Bangkok Calendar. This was soon followed by the publication of the Siam Times Weekly, the Siam Monitor, and the Daily Advertiser.

In response to the American missionaries' good example of presenting to the reading public world news and information on scientific and technological progress, the Thais themselves were inspired to publish their own newspapers. The Darunovad, the first Thai-owned newspaper, was launched in 1874 by Prince Kasemsanta Sopark, King Chulalongkorn's younger brother.

It was also an American, Dr. George Bradley McFarland, who invented the first Thai-language typewriter. Dr. McFarland was the founder of the Vidhayakom Company, Ltd., the local agent for Remington. All subsequent Thai-language typewriters have been based on Dr. McFarland's model—which still exists, incidentally. Over the years, many people have tried to change Dr. McFarland's arrangement of the keys, but no one has succeeded in significantly altering or improving it.

Dr. McFarland also compiled and published one of the most authoritative and concise Thai-English dictionaries, which proved to be especially useful because it included the scientific Latin names of flora and fauna found in Thailand, thus providing a convenient reference for students, teachers, and scholars alike.

Actually, Dr. McFarland, who was trained in the U.S. as a physician and dentist, made an even greater contribution to the development of modern medicine in Thailand. In 1892, he was appointed head instructor of the Royal School of Medicine at Siriraj Hospital (founded in 1889), succeeding Dr. T. H. Hays, who was handicapped by his limited command of the Thai language. Dr. McFarland spent many years building up Siriraj's medical school, translating many textbooks into Thai, and simultaneously practicing dentistry in his spare time. For his enormous contribution to medical education in Thailand, Dr. McFarland received the royal rank and title of Phra Ajvidhyakom. He died in Bangkok in 1942.
The Establishment of Schools and Other Educational Institutions

Education has always been, and remains to this day, a vital part of Thai cultural development. Prior to the arrival of the American missionaries, no foreigners had shown interest in establishing schools in Thailand. Both male and female American missionaries were very active in promoting educational projects from the very start of their pioneering work in Thailand.

Three American ladies established schools for young people. These were Mrs. Davenport, Miss M. E. Pierce, and Mrs. Stephen Mattoon. The very first school that taught subjects in both the Thai and English languages was opened in 1836. Miss Pierce opened the first boarding school, in 1840. Mrs. Mattoon opened a private boys' school in 1852, located next to Wat Arun (the Temple of Dawn). In 1856, the first girls' school, concentrating on home economics, and another boys' school, the predecessor of the Bangkok Christian College, were established. It is generally believed that one of the most impressive achievements of the American missionaries in the educational field was the Wattana Witayalai, originally founded as a girls' school by Miss Edna S. Cole.

The American missionaries set up schools not only in Bangkok but in many provincial areas. Today, the Dara Witayalai and the Prince Royal College in Chiang Mai are among the finest examples of old established educational institutions originally founded by the American missionaries. Both are still under American management. The opening of an agricultural school in Lampang province was another educational milestone for which the American missionaries have to be thanked.

Prior to the establishment of Thailand's Department of Education in 1887, a good start had been made and a great deal had been achieved in the field of education by the American missionaries. Their former students worked as teachers at a number of newly founded government schools, and the American missionaries also contributed a great deal to the development of school curricula. In retrospect, the ceaseless devotion of the American missionaries to educational pursuits—the teaching of English, the construction of schools, the introduction of printing techniques, and the publication of newspapers—proved of great importance to Thailand's cultural and social development from the early Rattanakosin period onward, paving the way for the introduction of science and technology from the West.

Acquiring a knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, proved essential to establishing, maintaining, and improving diplomatic relations between Thailand and western countries. Following the arrival of the American missionaries, Thai Princes and noblemen became much more interested in learning English, and felt that the American missionaries, by virtue of their affability and conscientious efforts to educate the Thais, were in the best position to teach not only English but also science and technology.
Among those who were interested in receiving instruction from the American missionaries were King Mongkut (Rama IV) himself and several other members of the royal family. After acquiring a fair knowledge of the English language from the American missionaries, many of the younger members of Siamese royalty went on to study other subjects such as history, politics, military science, medicine, engineering, shipbuilding, and so on.

**American Contributions in Medicine**

As mentioned earlier, it was the pioneering missionary Reverend Gutzlaff who served as the first qualified physician in Thailand. He spoke six languages fluently, including Thai. Even more outstanding were the medical accomplishments of Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, who invented a smallpox vaccine applicable for local use in 1836, and introduced the use of anesthesia for surgical operations. In fact, even before that, Dr. Bradley was the first surgeon to operate on a patient in Bangkok. He saved the life of a monk, following an accidental cannon explosion that killed eight persons and seriously wounded several others. Firmly believing in local traditional medicine, the wounded persons at first refused to be treated by Dr. Bradley. But the doctor insisted on amputating a monk’s arm, and did so without using chloroform or ether. Everyone there was greatly astonished, since none of them knew that it was possible to cut off a person’s limb without loss of life.

Institutional American medical aid to Thailand began with an assistance program for the development of public health and medical training under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1916, the Rockefeller Foundation sent Dr. H. E. Barnes to Thailand to eradicate the hookworm. The first physician sent to Thailand by the Rockefeller Foundation was Dr. John E. Ellis. Dr. Ellis decided to remain in Thailand after the completion of his work as project director for the Royal School of Medicine on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation. He went on to teach for many years at the Royal School of Medicine, the forerunner of Mahidol University’s Faculty of Medicine, which was then affiliated with Chulalongkorn University. With highly qualified instructors from abroad and with modern, up-to-date teaching aids and supplies, the Faculty of Medicine was better equipped at that time than the rest of the university.

The development of medical education in Thailand can only be regarded as a remarkable American contribution to the overall progress and advancement of the nation as a whole.

**American Missionaries Won the Trust and Friendship of the Thais**

The invaluable contributions made by the America missionaries to Thai society will be long remembered and appreciated. Perhaps the most
important role they played in the country’s development was that, from the early Rattanakosin period onward, they were able to win the trust and friendship of Thais at all levels—from the Monarch himself to members of royalty, noblemen, and the country as a whole. The nineteenth century saw a rapid expansion of imperialism by the Western European powers, so it is understandable that Thailand’s basic attitude toward westerners was one of mistrust and fear of exploitation. However, through their sincerity and their honest devotion to making positive, beneficial contributions to Thai society, the American missionaries managed to change this negative Thai attitude toward westerners, in the process enabling Thailand to opt for flexibility in solving problems affecting national integrity and unity. Indeed, as it turned out, the American missionaries undeniably and consistently proved themselves to be among Thailand’s truest and most reliable friends.

The Widespread Appreciation of American Music

Modern and classical music from America have been widely appreciated in Thailand ever since the invention of high-fidelity equipment in the 1950s. Thailand was among the very first countries in Asia to welcome hi-fi, with disks by Capitol, RCA, and Columbia widely available at record shops. Consequently, American music spread much faster in Thailand than did music from other countries.

I should mention that I had a personal role to play in that, because I was one of the first to broadcast American music to Thailand. Back in 1950, I was the announcer for a USIS-produced radio program called “Music Pavilion,” on which I introduced American jazz by people like Jack Teagarden, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington, together with the popular big band music of the time, including the work of Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, and Glenn Miller.

In 1952, I started to broadcast western classical music, using mostly American material such as the recorded performances of the NBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Arturo Toscanini, and the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Normandy. It was through American orchestras that most Thais became familiar with western classical works. In 1955, when Toscanini died, the NBC Symphony Orchestra was disbanded. However, some of its members then formed the Symphony of the Air, which was the first symphony orchestra to visit and perform in Thailand under the auspices of the U.S. Government’s cultural exchange program.

During the following year, 1956, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Alfred Wallenstein, visited Thailand and performed music by American composers, including such works as Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” and “An American in Paris.” The performance took place at the Chulalongkorn University Auditorium.
Also during the early 1950s, mambo and other Latin American music became popular in Thailand, following the personal appearance in Bangkok of Xavier Cugat and his orchestra.

Towards the early 1960s, an American variety show led by Joey and Cindy Adams performed in Thailand, touring Bangkok and northern Thailand.

Incidentally, the very first personal appearance by an American troupe in Thailand took place on April 28, 1871, when an American circus performed for the royal family during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. What was then the handsome sum of one thousand U.S. dollars was paid for the spectacular performance. On May 4, 1871, the people of Siam had an opportunity to attend a public performance of the same circus extravaganza.

Thai Appreciation of American Culture

Besides popular American music and American versions of classical music, American films have greatly influenced many Thais. It was in 1910, during the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama IV), that American movies first played in Thailand, and they have been popular ever since.

American film classics such as *The Lone Ranger* and *Rin Tin Tin* have influenced the common Thai household vocabulary, with lots of people wishing they were "as brave as the Lone Ranger" or "as clever as Rin Tin Tin," or in some other way comparing themselves to famous American movie legends.

But whereas there have been many Americans who have either inspired the Thais, or enjoyed enormous popularity among them, there have only been a handful of Thais who have made history in the annals of Thai-American relations. Aside from the famous Siamese twins Eng and Chang, whom I mentioned earlier, there is the legendary Private Yod, a Thai national who volunteered to fight in the American Civil War. Joining the 13th New Jersey volunteers in 1862, under the name George Dupont, Private Yod fought in several major battles, and was honorably discharged in mid-1865. In 1870, he decided to return to Thailand, where he died in Bangkok in 1890, at the age of fifty-six.

American Appreciation of Thai Culture

In the field of musical study, the University of Indiana offers courses in the theory and practice of Thai classical music, and some of the students there have formed a Thai-style orchestra and play authentic Thai musical instruments and compositions.
While many Thais have felt it necessary to learn English, some Americans have taken the trouble to learn Thai. Thai language courses are offered at Cornell University, the University of California (Berkeley), the foreign language institute of the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Army's foreign language institute in Monterey, California.

**Archeological Studies**

In the field of archeological studies, the small northeastern Thai village of Ban Chiang has achieved international recognition as one of the most fascinating archeological sites in the world. Several American archeologists and research institutions were involved in the Ban Chiang discoveries.

Professor Wilhelm G. Solheim of the University of Hawaii and two of his graduate students, Chester Gorman and Don Bayard, in cooperation with the Thai Fine Arts Department, undertook pioneering archeological work in the northeast of Thailand, discovering ancient implements dating back to 6000 B.C. From these they concluded that the inhabitants of Ban Chiang originally cultivated rice earlier than anywhere else in the world—a fact that is now accepted by many scholars worldwide.

The findings of Professor Solheim eventually led, in 1973, to a major excavation by the Thai Fine Arts Department in cooperation with the University of Pennsylvania Museum—the largest excavation of its kind ever made on a prehistoric site in Southeast Asia. The first major exhibition of Ban Chiang artifacts was held in the U.S. a few years ago, revealing an advanced culture far more sophisticated in important respects (metallurgy and pottery, for example) than more recent Asian civilizations.

**Architectural Studies and Influences**

Through the years, there has been a constant crop of Thai architects educated at American universities such as Cornell, Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and others. U.S.-educated Thai architects have designed some of the finest examples of modern architecture in Thailand: banks, hotels, offices, apartment houses, shopping centers, and, more recently, condominiums. The majority of these high-rise buildings are located in Bangkok, where they have changed the skyline and elicited a deep admiration among the Thai people.

**AFS Scholarships**

Under the auspices of the USIS Cultural Section, Thai students have had the opportunity of living with American families and spending a year studying in the U.S. as American Field Service (AFS) scholars. Most of these former AFS boys and girls have become very successful later on in their lives and chosen careers.
AFS activities in Thailand first began in 1961, when a group of fourteen Thai high school students spent a year in the U.S. In return, American students received AFS scholarships to live and study outside the U.S. Recently, AFS has gone international; as a result, AFS scholars from Thailand are now being sent not only to the U.S. but to other countries in Europe and Asia as well. By the same token, AFS scholars now coming to Thailand consist of students from various countries.

American Influences on Television Broadcasting

Thailand commenced television broadcasting in 1955, with the introduction of only one station, Channel 4. There is a well-known story behind that. In 1951, former Thai Prime Minister Pibulsonggkram went to the U.S. during the course of a world tour. Pibulsonggkram saw for himself how television services were operated by the American networks, and he decided then and there that television could be something very useful in providing the Thai people with education, information, and entertainment, all at the same time.

Upon his return to Thailand, Pibulsonggkram was intent on launching a local television network to help in the country’s modernization, growth, and progress. In 1953, America’s RCA won the bid to set up a local television network. RCA then proceeded to establish the first television station in Thailand, using American equipment and the American system of 525 lines on the screen—which forced the original and subsequent Thai television stations to use 60-cycle generators, although the 625-line screen used in Europe would have been much more suitable to Thailand’s electrical power system, which uses 50-cycle generators.

The early television programs, from the first day of service on June 14, 1955, consisted mostly of programs provided by USIS, such as “The World Through Stamps,” “Industry on Parade,” and “The Firestone Concert.” All these American television programs generated a much deeper understanding and appreciation of American culture among Thais.

Enduring Aspects of Thai-American Cultural Relations

Digging deeper into the different aspects of Thai-American cultural relations, one could say that the Thais have benefited a great deal from American cultural influences and have assimilated them rather well.

The word Thai means “free,” and it is in the exercise of the freedom to choose what is best for them that Thais have gained the most from the cultural, educational, and friendly exchanges that have taken place between the two countries since the early Rattanakosin period.
In my opinion, Thais and Americans have very similar ways of thinking, though they are separated by a great distance. The Thais are Indo-Aryan in origin, and have adopted the Khmer language with Sanskrit and Bali variations. Thias make use of Indian traditions and customs, and at the same time eat and sleep like the Chinese. As a result, Thais can be said to be a very mixed race indeed. But then, the same thing applies to Americans, since the U.S. has been the home for many generations of millions of immigrants from all over the world.

Thai-U.S. relations will constantly move forward, I believe, and there will be many changes for the better. The U.S. cannot possibly ignore our part of the world—the existing population and future population growth make this area of the Far East one of the most thickly populated on earth, with a great abundance of both human and natural resources. China, Japan, Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh have a combined population that is larger than half of the total world population. Thus, the U.S. can, and most likely will, see this part of the world as a giant market, with the U.S. taking upon itself the responsibility of being the principal protector of Asia’s security, stability, peace, and order.

With respect to future cultural exchanges between our two countries, I devoutly hope that any future programs will come about naturally, as did the educational and extracurricular activities developed by the American University Alumni (AUA) Association. Of all the educational institutions in Bangkok specializing in teaching English to Thais and Thai to foreigners, the AUA has long been recognized as the leader. AUA’s Language Center regularly conducts a wide range of educational and cultural activities for both specialists and the general public, including lectures, seminars, films, dramatic productions, and all kinds of exhibitions and cultural events. At the same time, it has served as a living testimony to the warm relationship between Thais and Americans.

Indeed, from the time that the first American missionaries served the Thai community and started lasting, cordial Thai-American relations, we have needed—and still need—to emulate the missionaries’ selfless dedication to duty. May the pioneering American missionary spirit continue to serve as the model for mutual cooperation, trust, and understanding between your country and mine, your people and ours, between each and every one of us.
Some Observations on the Americanization of Thailand and the Thaification of the United States

Herbert P. Phillips

Historical Overview

I have done a thorough search of the literature, and other than the efforts of Darling (1965) and Wilson (1960) and two research-development reports by Sharp (1968) and Bradley (1968), I have encountered only one published article by an American Thai specialist—Lucien M. Hanks (1968)—that addresses the question of what Americans, all fifty or sixty thousand of us, have been doing to Thailand. Hanks’s view is quite doleful and, I am sure, represents only part of the story. But the fact remains that while American culture represents one of the two most significant external forces to have influenced Thailand in this century, the other being the Chinese, the vast majority of American Thai scholars have simply abdicated their responsibility to examine that influence. To continue to do so is to abdicate our admittedly limited, but nevertheless not unimportant, responsibilities to history.

—From “Some Premises of American Scholarship on Thailand,” in Foreign Values and Southeast Asian Scholarship, ed. Joseph Fischer (Research Monograph No. 11, Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1973).

More than a dozen years have passed since I made the above observations at a symposium that was part of the 1972 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. I am happy to say that in the intervening period there have been some attempts to remedy the situation reflected in my remarks. Hans H. Indorf (1982) has put together a series of essays by both Thai and American scholars on different dimensions of the Thai-American relationship. And USIS has put together a once-over-lightly, but nonetheless highly informative, Thai-English volume on the 150-year history (mostly official history) of these relations. The latter was published under the title The Eagle and the Elephant on the occasion of the Rattanakosin Bicentennial and was obviously intended to be a commemorative type of catalogue rather than an original piece of scholarship. In my own view, the most penetrating rendition to date of the recent history of the Thai-American relationship can be found in Chapters 2 and 6 of Thailand: Society and Politics by John L. S. Girling (1981), who is neither a Thai nor an American, but a British-born permanent resident of Australia. My effort today is prompted by the conceit that I might take some of my own advice, and try
to address a few issues that have not really been discussed in the scholarly record, but that I think are an important part of the ambience of Thai-American relations over the past three decades.

For purposes of clarification, however, I should note that my interest in all of this is not with the nature of Thai-American relations *per se*, and certainly not with official relations, but rather with the long-term impact of such relations on the changing nature of Thai society and its citizens. The 55,000 American airmen who worked at the eight American-created air bases in the kingdom and the 6,500 troops per week on R&R from Vietnam are long gone from Thailand. But Patpong Road and Patpong II in the Soi Asoke area of Bangkok—now patronized predominantly by European, Japanese, and Near Eastern tourists—are permanent legacies of that era. And however ambivalent Thai attitudes might be about such semi-redlight districts, they, along with other tourist attractions, contribute significantly to Thailand's dearly sought foreign exchange earnings. Along the same dimension, but with strikingly different implications, is the fact that one of the twelve ecclesiastically recognized Thai Buddhist temples that have been established in the United States since 1970 is located in the otherwise heavily Mormon community of Ogden, Utah. It exists and is thriving mainly to attend to the spiritual needs of the Thai wives of the American airmen who work at nearby Hill Air Force Base. And like good Thai daughters, these women continue to send a little money home to their parents, sponsor relatives and friends who can raise the funds to visit the United States, and fight the losing battle of trying to inculcate some "Thai culture" into their Thai-American children.

The short-term presence of thousands of American troops in Thailand or the long-term presence of a much smaller number of Thai wives in America is, of course, part of a worldwide process involving the migration and mutual impact of millions of people who previously lived under much more insular circumstances. There are scores of thousands of Yugoslavians now living in Australia, even larger numbers of Turks in Germany, and, I am told, perhaps as many as 200,000 Thais working in the various countries of the Near East. The remittances home of this last group represent one of the three largest sources of Thailand's foreign exchange earnings. What is fascinating here from the point of view of the interests of this conference is the fact that the vanguard of these short-term alien Thai workers in the Near East, many of whom began their sojourns in the early 1970s, originally learned their skills while constructing the air bases, roads, and other infrastructural elements of the American military buildup in Thailand during the 1960s. I cite this simply to point to the complexity of the historical causalities that have ensued from the Thai-American relationship.

The rhythm of the Thai-American relationship has, of course, change over the years—from the low-keyed activities of a small JUSMAG unit of the 1950s, supplying military equipment to both Generals Sarit and Phao;
to the febrile and occasionally deafening rhythms of the mid-1960s, when Thailand was being used to bomb Vietnam and when the vast majority of American activities within the kingdom were official activities justified on “counterinsurgency” grounds; to the ambiguities of the mid-1970s, when the American military presence was reduced to fewer than 300 soldiers, but when American electronic firms were beginning significant investments in plants and equipment near Bangkok; to the most recent past, when mutual, and sometimes competitive, economic interests have become the primary currency of the relationship.

Nonetheless, for most of these decades the driving force of the Thai-American relationship has been the two national governments and their mutually reinforcing perceptions of their own security interests. Consequently, much of the relationship has been characterized by the kinds of things that governments do for one another. Girling reports (1981: 96) that for the 1950-1975 period, the U.S. government provided more than 1.7 billion dollars in defense and security aid to Thailand, equivalent to more than half of the Thai government’s own defense expenditures (3.07 billion dollars) for this period. Similar budgetary contributions were made by USOM’s Office of Public Safety to the development of the Thai National Police Department, by the CIA to the development of the Border Patrol Police, and by the Accelerated Rural Development Program to the construction of all-weather roads throughout the kingdom’s Northeast. Less dramatic were the USIS contributions to Mobile Information Units and the Peace Corps’ role in the teaching of English. The point that I wish to make is that whatever consequences such underwriting activity may have had in improving the quality of Thai life or the relationship between the Thai government and its citizens, it represents a very narrow and anomalous expression of the nature and purpose of American culture and its interests. The issue is simply that as a cultural phenomenon, rather than as a security arrangement or the working through of an American fantasy of its own unlimited power, what we know as the “American presence in Thailand”—what I am blithely calling here the “Americanization of Thailand”—is a very skewed representation of the realities of American life.

The point is perhaps obvious, but I do not think its historical import has been realized yet by either Thais or Americans—namely, that the “American culture” that Thai citizens came to know most directly in the persons and activities of American functionaries in Thailand was a culture mainly (although not exclusively) of either short-term military people or middle-class federal bureaucrats. It excluded poor Americans as well as truly wealthy ones, contained virtually no working wives or working adolescents, and because no Chief of Mission would ever conceivably permit it, it was a community without overt political or intellectual controversy. (On the other hand, because of its size and hierarchical nature, it was a community rife with internal factionalism.) Also, because of its “mission” ethos
and its designation as a "hardship post," many of its functionaries assumed something of a colonial stance toward their Thai hosts, perhaps not consciously but with sufficient frequency to be picked up by some of their more sensitive hosts. Most important, because it was systemically necessary, most of its members functioned mainly to implement established policy and conventional wisdom, rather than to create or test new policies and understandings, although admittedly people sufficiently high in the system (for example, the Commanding General of JUSMAG and the Ambassador’s Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency) occasionally would climb out on a limb.

I mention these considerations not to be either critical or pejorative, but simply because I think it is an historically more accurate account than our shibboleths typically admit—in the same sense, if you will, that I think the story line of the television play "Jewel in the Crown" is a more valid account of the final days of the British Raj than are the World War II British newscips than punctuate, and contrast with, the drama. If this assessment is correct, we must judge the "Americanization of Thailand" not primarily in terms of the cultural impact of the Americans who were there or the "institutions" that they may have tried—but for the most part, failed—to build, but rather in terms of the infrastructure they constructed (roads, airfields, ports) and the consumables they delivered (gasoline, helicopters, carbines). The failure of American "institution building" derives simply from the fact that the institutions and practices that were already there had their own inherent integrity, an integrity based upon 700 years of indigenous historical development. Too, the nature of the "host-guest" relationship that characterized the American presence, particularly the short-term tenure of virtually all key American personnel, further diluted the quality of the American impact.

**Relationships on the Ground**

None of this is to deny the long-term relevance of other American practices in Thailand—the work of American foundations (Rockefeller, Ford, Asia Foundation); the training that thousands of Thais received in the United States, most on a short-term basis, but many for advanced degrees; the workaday and, in many cases, enduring contacts between Thai and American diplomats, businessmen, and scholars. The convening of this conference and the people who are here are undeniable testament to the long-term importance of such links.

However, even in these domains, I think we have to be careful and probing in our assessments. The issues are complicated. Thus, the mere fact that people have studied overseas tells us absolutely nothing about what they derived from the experience, what they utilized from it upon their return, or how they view it relative to all the other experiences that impact
upon their lives. The role of the unexpected and serendipitous in the overseas training experience is extraordinary. Thus, Seksan Prasertkul was a 16-year-old village-born-and-bred Thai boy who, as an A.F.S. exchange student, found himself surrounded by snow in a small northern Wisconsin town, where he learned all about American culture, including the role of American college students in protesting the Vietnam War, through TV. A few years later, the lessons he learned from CBS and NBC News reached their fruition in his leadership of the 1973 Student Revolution. In contrast, Wattana Kiowimol studied Business Administration at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. But his most vivid American lesson was the behavior of Bible-thumping, down-home American preachers, which he adapted in organizing Nawaphol, which in turn played such an important role in the events leading up to the 1976 coup. In further contrast is Major Sanchai Buntrisawat, who while studying at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, decided simultaneously to pursue an M.A. program at the University of Kansas, where he worked with Carl Landé, who is distinguished for his research on the Philippines. It was in this program that Major Sanchai encountered the ideas of Harvard’s Samuel Huntington on the role of the military in politics, which, with his reworking, was to loom so large in the thinking and motivation of the “Young Turks” who participated in the April 1981 coup. Still different is the experience of Khamsing Srinawk, one of the kingdom’s best-known “socially conscious” writers and novelists, who spent a year in New York City at a training program at Time magazine sponsored by the then president of Time, Inc., James Linen. Khamsing was there to learn “modern publishing techniques,” but he spent much of his year ensconced in the Time Inc. library (which, he noted, “no Thai publication could ever conceivably afford”), learning all about modern dairy practices, which he implemented on his farm upon his return to Thailand. I cite these cases not only because they refer to public figures who are likely to be known to us, but because they describe some of the things that, for better or worse, actually occur in the intercultural training situation.

Similar, although perhaps more expectable, kinds of permutations occur at the institutional level. Thus, among the numerous American universities that Thai graduate and undergraduate students have attended over the years, there are three (or four) that have been particularly well known and sought out: Cornell, Indiana, and Berkeley-Stanford. (I hyphenate the last two because, although they are obviously different universities, the students on these two campuses regularly visit each other, belong to a “Northern California Thai Students Association,” consider each other’s university to be of equivalent rank, and after returning home take the annual “Big Game” football movie almost as seriously as Thammasat and Chulalongkorn students take their annual soccer match.) Consequently, these three or four universities seem always to have a “Thai community”
which newcomers can join, where they can be made to feel at home and otherwise be socialized to American university life. In fact, I think it is clear that the nature of these Thai university communities has as great an impact upon the total educational experience of these students as do the various things that they learn in their classrooms. What is significant here is the differential nature of these communities and their impact as they have developed over the years.

Cornell has an “old” reputation in Thailand, and in fact graduated the very first Thai student ever to attend an American university. With its South-east Asia Program and its College of Agriculture, it has attracted students interested in politics, economics, and rural development. Cornell students seem to be more politically attuned and sensitive than Thai students elsewhere in the U.S., and it is no surprise that the Ithaca campus includes among its graduates Pramote Nakornthap, one of the founders of the “New Force” Party that played such an important role in the April 1976 elections; Paitoon Kruakaew, a longtime Thai politician; Boonsanong Punyadhayana, assassinated former Thammasat Lecturer and Secretary-General of the Socialist Party of Thailand; and Thak Chaloemtiarana, the author of the best account of the nature of Thai politics during the regime of Field Marshal Sarit. In a book I have recently put together on modern Thai literature, I include a short story about a group of Thai students studying abroad who, attending a party, spend most of their time complaining about the lack of opportunity at home, the constricting nature of Thai life, the necessity to be corrupt to get ahead, and the like. The Thai hero of the story takes issue with his unhappy friends and advises them to stop their whining, to finish up and go home, and to use their fancy Ph.D.s to change Thailand into a place where precisely their kinds of grievances would have no substance. Whatever the merit of this piece of fiction or its message, it comes as no surprise to see that it was written in Ithaca, New York.

The “culture” at Indiana is strikingly different. The involvement of the Bloomington campus with Thailand began in the mid-1950s with a group of Indiana professors who came to Thammasat University and started a program in Public Administration. (This program later moved to the Ford Foundation and funded the then “new” National Institute of Development Administration.) I do not think it is fortuitous that two recent presidents of the University of Indiana were once involved in the Thammasat program, and that the then Dean of the Thammasat faculty was later to receive an honorary doctorate from Indiana. But with this kind of background and interest, Indiana became a favored American university to pursue studies in public administration, business administration, and education. At one time, Indiana had more than five hundred Thai students concurrently enrolled—a large, viable coterie of conservative and careful future Thai bureaucrats and educators. In fact, many Thai students then attending Indiana often complained that to be in Bloomington was to never leave home.
The ambience of Berkeley and Palo Alto is significantly different from either of the above. With typically no more than twenty-five to thirty persons on each campus, these students tend to concentrate in the sciences, engineering, and a few in the social sciences. Whether realistic or not, they consider themselves to be among the best in their respective fields and extremely lucky to be studying where they are. While they come from a variety of social backgrounds, they all perceive themselves returning to Thailand and assuming responsible or prestigious positions, some in government but most in the private sector. Extremely hard workers, they manifest an extraordinary spirit of mutual support and admiration. In fact, it is the least backbiting and least complaining Thai community this writer has ever encountered. Their real backgrounds deny it, but it is as if they were preparing themselves to become members of a new generation of phuu dii—well-spoken, civilized, disciplined, and strikingly capable.

The bottom line with all of these different, and always expensive, forms of foreign education and socialization is, of course, what they ultimately contribute to Thai society and culture. And, as we know, it is extremely difficult to measure such things in a precise way. However, one of the most persuasive answers I have heard came from a former Berkeley student who, after leaving the Bay Area, worked for several years with the Bangkok Bank, later went into land and agricultural investment, and most recently became the senior officer of a highly successful finance company in Bangkok. We were chatting about the course of our lives, and I asked what he thought were the major factors behind his own success. Without hesitation he named his experience with the Bangkok Bank, where he learned the nuts and bolts of the investment business. But then he said that even more important was his Berkeley education, because it taught him how to find and evaluate evidence realistically and to accept responsibility for his own decisions rather than to seek the approval of others. I would suggest that this is intercultural training in its most basic terms.

All of these illustrations, of course, describe intercultural relations at the level of the Thai elite, actual or potential. Can anything be said about such relationships at a more mass or broadscale social level? It is, of course, terribly easy to point to Foremost Ice Cream Shops as examples of the “Americanization process,” but I do not think that proves very much, other than that Thais have as large a sweet tooth as do Americans. At a more complicated level is the impact of a phenomenon like American youth culture on the clothing, musical, and leisure-time tastes of Thai youth, particularly with regard to what they aspire to, spend their money on, judge to be important, and the like. This impact is complicated because it is unclear whether the youth learn about such things through American mass media as shown on Thai TV, at Thai cinemas, or on rented tapes; or through the models represented by the culturally uprooted American youngsters who for years were the dominant group at the International
School of Bangkok; or through the highly selective interpretations of Thai journalists writing about American youth culture. More important, it is complicated because the cultural meaning of such seemingly borrowed behavior is so difficult to assess—as much by native Thais as by foreign commentators. Are Thai youngsters who take drugs simply aping what they perceive to be the fashionable practice of the ISB teenagers who take drugs (or is it really the other way around?) Or does their behavior herald a further breakdown in the concern and authority of Thai parents and older siblings? Or are they simply being adventurous, but self-destructive, children? There are no obvious answers to these questions, and I know of no Thai research that has seriously addressed them.

It is my own sense that those American institutions that in the long run are likely to have the most direct and significant impact on the largest number of Thai citizens are labor-intensive business enterprises such as American auto, electronics, and pharmaceutical firms. Small American assembly plants have been in Thailand for several years—Bristol-Myers since the 1950s, and the Ford assembly plant since the early 1960s. What I find to be particularly felicitous is the optimism of some of the larger American electronics firms—National Semiconductor and Signetics are perhaps the most obvious—who established plants in Thailand during the uncertain 1973-1976 period, and have since expanded and thrived, employing and training thousands of people at all levels of operations. Unlike many indigenous firms, they conform to Thai labor, investment, and export laws to the letter; allow unionization; have retirement programs; provide some English-language training programs; and bring back some of their Thai personnel to Santa Clara and Cupertino not only for further training but as sources of counsel for the efficient management of the entire firm. Several such persons have "green cards" and have taken up semipermanent residence in Silicon Valley. Questions of "dependency theory" or "protectionism" aside, this is multinationalism in the most comprehensive meaning of the term. It is perhaps still too early to determine what the cultural fallout of this kind of investment practice is going to be, but a decade after their establishment, these firms have been able to maintain remarkable rates of employee loyalty at the middle and lower levels.

The Thaiification of the U.S.A.

One of the most intriguing ironies of the Thai-American relationship of the past quarter-century is that while there has been a clear recognition of the American presence and impact upon Thailand, there has been virtually no attention given to the Thai presence and impact upon the United States. The reasons for this are perplexing, other than perhaps the likelihood that it is easier to hide 200,000 Thais in America than it is to hide 50,000-60,000 farang in Thailand. Of course, we do not know how many Thais there really
are in America. There are approximately 60,000 who are here in an official, approved status, but the people who keep track of such things suggest that there may be another 150,000—mainly ex-tourists and ex-students—who should have gone home but probably never will. Nor do we have a clear idea of why Thai migrants have come to the United States when they did. For decades after the 1922 "Quota System" had been instituted, Thailand was one of the few countries in the world that never filled its U.S. immigration quota, and it was not until the liberalized immigration laws of 1965 and 1968 that the Thai flow into the United States appreciably increased. Even today, with the relatively large number of illegal Thais residing in the United States, Thailand still does not meet its limit of so-called "preferred immigrants."

While virtually no attention has been accorded to the Thais living in the United States (even in the scholarly literature; in fact, I know only of Desbarats's 1979 article on the demographics of the Thais of Los Angeles), it is clear that they represent a significant factor in the Thai-American equation. Most are, by definition, sufficiently well-educated to have been able to get here in the first instance, and among their numbers are numerous individuals of considerable talent—physicians, nurses, engineers, bankers, and artists. Simply by virtue of their presence here, they serve as a major conduit of money, information, and knowledge back to Thailand and as a network which relatives and friends in Southeast Asia can use to intensify their own links to the United States. Although they are not yet sufficiently numerous or residentially concentrated to comprise a pressure group in an American political sense, they do have liaisons to other, more politically well-organized Asian-American groups—in California, particularly Sino-American organizations. (Interestingly, they have not yet really been here long enough to take on that special hyphenated identity that, from an established American point of view, would truly institutionalize their presence, i.e., the title "Thai-Americans." It may be assumed, however, that that day is not long in coming.) On the other hand, they are sufficiently concentrated for visiting Thai political figures—Samak Sundtornavej and Bunchanaa Atthakorn, to cite a few of recent memory—to seek them out as a potential interest group.

As in Southeast Asia, the clearest symbol of an identifiable Thai presence in any area is the establishment of a Thai Buddhist temple that serves the spiritual and civilizing needs of its members. It is at such temples that Buddhist canon (Dhamma) is preached and taught, merit made, Thai spoken and read, psychological problems solved, a sense of community experienced, and the continuity of Thai culture maintained. Thus, the location of Thai temples in the United States is a fairly reliable index of the demographic concentration of transplanted Thais. Currently, there are twelve such temples scattered over the continent. They are located in Los Angeles, San Francisco-Berkeley (with a satellite in Sunnyvale), Chicago, New York (with a satellite in Mount Vernon, New York), Washington,
Tkmpa, Miami, Houston, Ogden, and Denver. In several locations, these temples serve not only the needs of Thais but of lowland Lao and Khmer now living in the United States. The first and most famous of these temples is the “Thai style” temple that was established in Los Angeles in 1970, although the one in Denver may be the most actively patronized, in that it serves as a haven and rest house for virtually all Thais who are travelling across the country by car.

The Thais of Los Angeles, whatever their actual numbers, represent the largest Thai community in the Western world. Originally comprised of a disproportionately high number of young Yawaraad men—or the sons of Chinese migrants to Thailand who, like their fathers, sought their fortunes elsewhere—the community is, through intermarriage and the increased migration of women from Thailand, slowly normalizing into a demographically better proportioned population. Widely dispersed throughout the Los Angeles basin, the community supports four Thai-language newspapers, a troupe of Thai classical dancers, and even a “Thai Yellow Pages Telephone Book.” Because of its size and dispersion, it is internally the most socially varied of all the Thai communities in the United States, although it still contains a large number of unattached young men who live on the fringes of the world of “undocumented foreign workers” that supplies Los Angeles with most of its housecleaning men, dishwashers, gardeners’ helpers, and the like.

In contrast, the Thai community of Chicago has a disproportionately high number of nurses, most of whom were trained in Thailand and came to the United States with the intention of staying sufficiently long to accumulate a nest egg that would permit them to return to Thailand and lead a reasonably comfortable life. Some return home, but most do not, and many of the latter move on to Miami or Los Angeles as permanent American residents. As might be expected, Thais living in New York and Houston are heavily involved in the business world. And everywhere in the country that there is a Thai community, there are a number of thriving Thai-owned restaurants; in Berkeley alone, there are now fourteen restaurants serving Thai cuisine.

Within the Thai-American community, there are a number of individuals who have achieved considerable success. To cite simply a few cases about which I have personal knowledge: there is an engineering graduate of Oklahoma University who wants very much to return home, but who will not do so until he can get an oil company operating in Thailand to pay him international, rather than domestic, wages; a Thai-born-and-bred artist who could not speak a word of English until he was a young adult, but who later was selected as “California Artist of the Year,” created a Thai Wing in the Asia-Pacific Museum in Pasadena, personally sponsored a trip of six of Thailand’s finest living artists to the United States, and now serves as a major international stimulant to other Thai artists; and a Thai-born-and-
trained physician who has a thriving practice in Los Angeles, and who frequently visits Thailand to see his mother and other relatives, but who otherwise sees himself and his own family as full-fledged Americans.

While the impulse is to see such persons as part of a Thai "brain drain"—as experts that Thailand can ill afford to lose—I would suggest that it is also appropriate to see them as stimulants to Thai society. Certainly, the artist I have cited is already playing that role voluntarily, and in fact thrives upon the attention that his work and ideas receive when he visits Silapakorn, Por Chang, and other Thai art centers. In the case of the engineer, it might be asked whether the time has not finally come for firms and agencies operating in Thailand to end the insidious double standard between Thai and farang specialists, and to award native Thais the same salaries and prerogatives that are given to foreigners, or at least to make such matters highly negotiable. In the case of the physician, it might be asked whether formal arrangements could not be made to bring such persons home to practice in a kind of reverse "Peace Corps" program.

The most fundamental fact about Thai society during the past century has been its increasing openness to foreign ideas and practices, and the transformations that those ideas and practices have wrought. If Americans have at times played a heavy hand in that transforming process, and more recently a somewhat defter and lighter hand, it is clearly time for a new category of people, Thai-Americans, to play an appropriate role in that historical synapse.

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II. Economics, Science and Technology
The close relationship between science, technology, and economics has been evident since the dawn of modern economic history. The closer the relationship, the greater the potential for a nation’s economic growth. The economic leadership of England after the Industrial Revolution was attributed to an unprecedented wave of technological innovations in that country. When such a wave swept through the entire Western world, the economic power of England was challenged. Later, when Japan joined the technological race, the contest for economic supremacy became worldwide. Today, technological capability is a decisive factor in practically all aspects of international relations. International advantages and disadvantages are no longer determined by natural endowments, but rather by technological capabilities and their potential growth. Technology therefore reigns supreme.

Scientific discoveries at the early stage of the history of science were not necessarily related to economic activities. They were products of human intellectual efforts to satisfy curiosity about the natural environment. Only when those discoveries were accumulated as a body of scientific knowledge that deepened and widened man’s understanding of nature did they begin to serve as a means of promoting economic and social improvements. While men continue searching for scientific knowledge, they increasingly make use of the available knowledge for economic applications, thus transforming science into technology. The “modern economic epoch” clearly has been brought about by the emergence of science-based technology, and its continuation is based on the close link between science, technology, and production. The tremendous impact of this phenomenon has given rise to the hope for further economic and social progress, increasingly turning desire into reality. The success in economic development in turn brings pressures for further technological innovations and a continuation of scientific research. More and more scientific discoveries have become candidates for technological innovations, while a great number of innovations have become candidates for economic and industrial applications. Modern economic growth is therefore basically founded on the relationship between science, technology, and economics.

Despite the significant role of technology in economic development, most of the growth models can be explained in terms of capital accumulation, leaving technology as a residue. The general neglect of science and
technology in growth theories is perhaps due to the difficulty of quantifying their direct contribution to economic performance. Although the impacts of science and technology appear to be very strong, their presence is like shadows: seen, felt, but somehow uncontrollable. Under these circumstances, capital, not technology, has been generally accepted as the central growth variable. In fact, capital and technology are closely related. Technological progress is a major determinant of capital investment, and it also guarantees the latter's rate of return. Capital investment essentially serves as a vehicle for transforming technological innovations for economic and industrial applications. Steady economic growth, therefore, requires a parallel and coordinated contribution of capital investment and technological progress. While technological progress needs capital investment, the latter's rate of return depends on the former. For this reason, the industrially advanced countries always see to it that a substantial portion of their national investment is earmarked for technological development.

When Thailand decided to launch her economic and industrial development programs in the early 1960s, the emphasis was placed exclusively on capital formation. During the first decade of intensified development efforts, heavy investments, mostly financed by generous foreign grants, were made in infrastructures to sustain further development of the economy. Industrial investment was also promoted by generous tax concessions that were intended to help establish industries serving domestic requirements. By the 1970s, Thailand's import bills had already grown very large, following heavy imports of capital goods, intermediate products, and energy. These growing import bills were paid for by foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports, supplemented by the inflow of foreign capital funds. As the export growth rates did not keep pace with the import growth rates, the country's trade deficits, as well as the foreign debts, became larger, thus adversely affecting both the internal and external equilibria.¹

In recent years, realizing that her international economic performance cannot sustain the national currency's exchange value, Thailand has been forced to undergo a series of devaluations in order to restore her equilibrium.² The devaluation policy has been supported by monetary and fiscal policies of spending restraint and a shift of economic policy from import substitution to export drives. Attention has also been focused on improving the price system as a means of strengthening productivity, efficiency, and international competitiveness. It appears that in their attempt to find a solution to the country's economic problems, Thailand's policymakers and economic planners have considered practically every conceivable policy measure. However, they have tended to overlook one very important factor: the nation's technological capability and self-reliance.

A careful study of the Thai economy and its development reveals that the root of the problem is found in the country's low level of technological capability and self-reliance. The national weakness in science and technol-
ogy has become an acute problem as the Thai economy has become increasingly dependent externally. Thailand has entered the worldwide economic competition technologically unprepared. She is simply producing goods of the nineteenth century in exchange for goods of the twenty-first century. The price differential between imports and exports is large, and there is a strong tendency for the international price gap to become wider. Technology not only forms a major part of the cost structure of modern products and services, it also, through quality and design, influences demand. Rapid technological progress in the West and Japan has left Thailand behind, even in traditional industries such as agriculture. Lack of technological self-reliance has had a negative effect on the manufacturing sector, import-substitution and export-orientation alike. Without a domestic technological capability, an import-substitution strategy for industrialization imposes a heavy burden on the trade and payment balances, as local industries have to pay high costs for imported technologies, both hardware and software, just to get goods manufactured in Thailand. Similarly, an attempt to export foreign technology industrial goods will not alleviate the economic problem, since most earnings will go to pay for importing the machinery and technology needed to produce such goods, leaving little but labor wages to benefit the country. Thus, as long as Thailand cannot rely on her own technology, there will be no permanent solution to the problems of economic growth and stability. The question of science and technology, therefore, is very crucial.

However, science and technology have been unfortunately neglected by the Thai policymakers and economic planners. Before the energy crisis, this negligence was evidently due to the absence of serious balance of trade problems, and perhaps also to all the emphasis on building physical infrastructure. But since then, the neglect of science and technology in Thai planning must be attributed to a misunderstanding of their role in the economy. In the first place, technology is often considered alien to the basic economic culture of Thailand. There is some apprehension that its presence, if not controlled, could produce an adverse effect on Thailand's economic life. Technology must therefore be selected very carefully, not for the sake of international competitiveness, but for its "appropriateness" to the existing socio-economic conditions. This apprehension has prevented serious attention being given to technological applications. Secondly, technology is viewed as expensive and luxurious consumer product that is only to be enjoyed by rich nations. Thailand is considered too poor to afford it. The concept of investment in technology has never been clearly understood in Thailand. Regarding such investment as a financial burden, the nation's policymakers and planners have preferred to leave it to the private industrial sector. Lastly, it is always assumed that technology transfer automatically accompanies imported capital. Since the government already promotes foreign investment, it assumes that it is automatically promoting
technology transfer. Therefore, the investment promotion scheme only emphasizes the objectives of job creation and product exportation, and ignores technology capability and self-reliance. Evidence of the neglect of science and technology can be found right in the national economic plans. From the First Plan to the Fourth, there was hardly a reference to science and technology. The Fifth Plan (1982–1986) devotes a few pages to a discussion of the supporting role of science and technology in industrialization. Until very recently, public policy statements on the economy rarely mentioned science and technology.

The neglect of science and technology on the part of Thailand’s policy-making and economic planning bodies has created concern in the country’s scientific and technological communities. Scientists, technologists, technoeconomists, and businessmen with technological backgrounds have long been convinced that a national science policy is needed to strengthen the Thai economy. In response to their complaints, the government finally responded by establishing the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Energy (MOSTE) to promote and develop science and technology. Since its inception, MOSTE has been advocating the inclusion of science and technology in government policy. Recently, it has taken a giant step forward by insisting that science and technology must be accepted as a primary tool for national economic and social development. MOSTE argues that science and technology transcend all economic and social sectors; that they are the direct answer to the questions of productivity, efficiency, and international competitiveness; and that their development is the base for national economic self-reliance.

With an improved technological capability, Thailand can enter the twenty-first century as a technologically developed nation. MOSTE’s efforts are, however, not confined to the promotion of science and technology; they are also oriented toward strengthening research and development (R&D) activities in strategic areas, such as biotechnology, metal and material technology, electronics, and industrial engineering; toward expanding technological services in the areas of testing and standards, engineering consultancy, and technological data and information; and toward transferring R&D products to industrial production. In pursuing this policy, MOSTE has the Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (TISTR) as its arm. TISTR is expected to play the role of a national research and development center, as well as a national center for the transfer of international technology. A new dimension for national development is therefore taking shape.

Thailand’s present science policy concentrates on strengthening technological capability and self-reliance through research and development activities, whose expenditures form an integral part of the national investment. These R&D activities are directed toward developing a national capability to handle technological problems concerning production. But a successful industrialization program cannot depend largely on imported
technology, either hardware or software. A certain degree of technological self-reliance is definitely needed, and it must be vigorously increased in support of further industrialization. With an increase in technological capability and self-reliance, Thailand is expected to cut down the cost of imported technologies, presently amounting to billions of dollars per annum. It will also raise productivity and improve efficiency in the economy, finally eliminating poverty. The standard and quality of Thai products are also expected to improve, thus strengthening their competitiveness in both the home and foreign markets. Apparently, the road to economic success begins at R&D. Although the national science policy as described above is a new dimension for national development, it did not start from scratch. For many decades, Thailand has invested heavily in human capital, and has in its possession a sizable stock of scientific and technical manpower, despite the braindrain to developed countries. It is now time to utilize that precious human stock fully and effectively for national economic and social development, and also for modernization.\(^7\)

Technological Capability and Self-reliance: A Basic Objective of Economic Policy

For an economy to function—that is, to produce, to distribute, and to exchange, with the aim of satisfying the overall needs of the society—a combination of productive factors must be taken into consideration. A sound economic policy must be designed in such a way that the necessary productive factors are available and the system in which they are put to work is an effective one. Technology is one of the most important factors, the absence of which renders the working of an economy inefficient. Technology takes the form of either hardware or software. Hardware technology consists of machinery, equipment, and component parts, which are required for the production of goods and services. Software technology, on the other hand, consists of what is termed “technical know-how,” which includes production processes. In a broader sense, software technology also covers the services of technologists and engineers, which are an integral part of technical know-how.\(^8\) And in an even broader sense, there is a third kind of software technology, social technology, which is needed for an efficient organization of production, distribution, and exchange. Social technology comprises the vast knowledge of the social sciences, including economics, law, business administration, sociology, and psychology. Languages may also form a part of social technology.\(^9\) Each economy requires a minimum stock of technology, in addition to the physical and human capital. To acquire a technological stock, a nation must invest in technology, just as it invests in physical and human capital.\(^10\) Success in international competition is determined largely by the degree of technological self-reliance.
Economic underdevelopment is fundamentally caused by low levels of technological capability and self-reliance. Limited technological capability makes it impossible for a country to fully utilize its own resources, no matter how rich it is. Underutilization of resources means economic underdevelopment. On the other hand, if a country lacks self-reliance in technology, an attempt to develop its economy will be a costly undertaking, because technology is normally the most expensive of all costs. For many products, technology costs more than all other factors combined. For this reason, every industrially developed country is willing to devote a substantial portion of its expenditures on research and development in order to maintain or increase its technological self-reliance. For an industrially developed country, much of its financial resources have been utilized to acquire technological capability and consequently economic development. Fortunately, developing countries today are not necessarily required to carry this financial burden to the same extent. It is possible for them to transfer technology from developed countries, provided that they have the financial ability to do so. However, since the transfer of technology is not simply the purchase of a research product, a developing country must see to it that it is properly prepared for the task.

A nation’s technological capability is in essence an aggregate knowledge of how to produce goods and services, and also an ability to use this knowledge for actual production. This national capability is not measured by the existence of plants, machinery, equipment, or other hardware in the country, because without knowing how those things work, even if one knows how to operate them, technological capability is nonexistent. In other words, technological capability means the mastery of technology, which can lead to the design, development, and adaptation of both hardware and software technologies, including the actual production of products based on those technologies. The mastery of technology is therefore much more significant to economic and industrial development than the utilization of local manpower and raw materials. In fact, utilization of the resources also requires technological capability. Similarly, manpower training also calls for technology. It is sometimes overlooked that before natural resources are brought to industrial production, they have to be explored, analyzed, developed, and processed. Each step needs technology, without which it remains economically useless. For this reason, technological capability and self-reliance must be a basic objective of economic policy. They do not compete with any other objective—for example, economic growth, employment, price stability, a satisfactory balance of payments, or social justice—and they cannot be traded off for any of them. It should be realized that technological capability sustains growth, employment, price stability, and a satisfactory balance of payments, and it is basic to practically everything an economic policy strives for.
Unfortunately, technological considerations have never been taken seriously in Thailand’s economic policy. A lack of conceptual clarity is perhaps most responsible for this phenomenon. In fact, the significance of science and technology to modernization and development was realized a long time ago by thinking men in Thailand. However, the sense of history appears to be rather weak among policymakers and economic planners of the present generation. Moreover, scientists and technologists have tended to have a limited representation among the country’s policymakers and economic planners, and only a few of those decision-makers have been truly exposed to the magic of science and technology. Most Thai economists tend to look at economic problems from a financial perspective, so that almost all of their attention is paid to the working of the price system. Only recently, as it has become clear that economic problems cannot be coped with solely by traditional financial and monetary measures, has attention gradually been drawn to a new approach—the techno-economic approach—which combines economic reasoning with technological reality. This recent awareness of the role of science and technology in the national economy, though still in its infancy, is an encouraging sign of a new trend. It gives hope and encouragement to the reshaping of the country’s economic policy: hope that knowledge will overcome ignorance; and encouragement for the idea that the scientific and technological assets of the nation will be given a chance, for the first time, to make a valuable contribution to the economy.

With Thailand’s existing stock of personnel, knowledge, and experience in science and technology, the task of strengthening her technological capability and self-reliance can begin systematically. MOSTE, of course, is expected to play a leading role in this challenging task at the national level. Its role consists of sharpening concepts, drawing up designs, and implementing the various projects formulated under this scheme. From a policy perspective, it is crucial to program national investment in the education and training of scientific and technical manpower, support for R&D activities, provision of technological services, and transfer of R&D products to actual industrial production. Most of the funds for the national investment in technology are expected to come from the national budget. However, to alleviate the national financial burden, the investment program should be supplemented by international cooperation and assistance. At the macro level, a target will have to be set for the amount of funds available during the plan period. These funds will be allocated for education and training, research and development, technological services, and the cost of transferring technologies for further development and adaptation. At the micro level, there will be a program for the efficient allocation of the national investment fund to various science and technology projects selected on the basis of national priorities. In this respect, special attention should be given
to strengthening TISTR as the national center for R&D activities and technological services. TISTR's R&D network, however, will be extended to cover research activities at institutions of higher learning and also at governmental agencies dealing with science and technology. It is also through TISTR that R&D products and technological services will be passed on to industry for actual production and distribution. At present, TISTR has been reorganized to serve as an effective implementing agency for the national science policy. However, it needs more support, both technically and financially, in order to accomplish its important task.

**Research, Development, and Transfer of Technology: A Structural Design for Industrialization**

Economic development theorists and practitioners have come a long way, through heated debates at times, to the conclusion that industrialization is needed to generate growth, achieve development, and sustain progress. The reason is that so many of the goods and services required by the society come from industries, both directly and indirectly. In other words, industrial outputs become the inputs of the other economic and social sectors, while the rest goes to final demand (consumption) and export. The industrial inputs of, say, the agricultural sector include farm machinery, fertilizers, and processing equipment. The communication sector requires wires, cables, and electronic products from industry. Even the public health sector needs medical equipment and pharmaceutical products, while the defense sector depends on industry for weapons, ammunition, and other military supplies. Thus, industry is the base for an economy. The question is not whether a country should industrialize, but rather how to do it effectively and efficiently. The industrialization concept is essentially a techno-economic concept, and its design is a techno-economic design that blends technological capability with economic rationale.

Conceptually, an industry is a physical transformation of "raw materials" to "finished products" at specific stages. The transformation is carried out with science-based technology, and its purpose is to create value-added. The economic principle involved is that to maximize the desired value-added, the most efficient technology should be adopted. Economics and technology therefore join hands in the industrial transformation process. On the one hand, industry is an application of science and technology to solve economic problems. On the other hand, it is an application of economics to solve scientific and technological problems. Thus, an industrial concept possesses an interdisciplinary character, or techno-economic balance. Very often in the Thai experience, however, industrial policy has lacked this techno-economic balance, which in turn has led to
failures in industrial development, both at the macro and the micro levels. The most obvious instance of imbalance in Thailand's industrial policy is the ongoing industrial restructuring program, under which R&D as the main determinant of technological capability is almost completely absent.

An industrialization program should aim to develop a permanent and self-reliant base for the industrial system, which may be termed "the industrial root." As industrial development is a long-term process, it needs an exceptionally strong base to withstand disturbances from technological change, market fluctuation, financial and monetary instability, and political turmoil. A national industry cannot be developed and sustained without national technological capability and self-reliance. TISTR is at present undertaking a techno-economic research project with a view to measuring the degree of technological self-reliance in Thai industries. Pending the outcome of the study, a preliminary finding has suggested that technological self-reliance may be very low in many industrial groups. This means that those industries are just foreign industrial establishments in Thailand, operating independently of the national technological capability. The success of an industrialization program depends on the extent to which technological self-reliance is attained. It is therefore an illusion to mistake the existence of industrial establishments in the country for true industrialization. As long as the country's industrial system depends on imported technology, without a serious effort to master it, there is no industrialization. As the cost of imported technology is always high, the domestic industrial value-added will be negligible, no matter whether the manufactured products are sold in the home market or abroad.

The Thai public has always been misinformed about the country's industrial growth, as that is reflected in the national income statistics. The statistics on value-added in manufacturing include the costs of imported technology. Once these costs, which are substantial, are deducted, it will be seen that the remaining net value-added derived from the manufacturing sector is indeed very small. The problem of imported technology and the external cost involved is vaguely recognized by Thai economic planners and investment promoters. Accepting that the imports of capital goods, intermediate products, raw materials, and energy account for more than 85 percent of the total import bill, they have adopted a policy to encourage the utilization of local raw materials as a solution. Enlightenment on the concept of technology will provide them with the light to see more clearly that the technological contents of imports are substantial, and their values are also enormous. The problem cannot be solved merely by providing incentives for the investors to produce the goods in Thailand. The problem should be tackled from a technological standpoint, which is at the root of the problem itself—the strengthening of the national technological capability and self-reliance. An industrialization program must start from here.
Mastering technology is a delicate and complex task—an intellectual rather than physical undertaking. A student cannot be said to obtain knowledge when he pays the school fees, purchases textbooks, and even attends classes. To obtain knowledge, he must read the textbooks, perform intellectual exercises, and participate in class until he feels that he has mastered the subject. Similarly, in the case of technology, R&D activities are imperative for a successful transfer and mastery of technology. With a strong R&D base, the country will not only transfer ready-made technology from outside, but it will also adapt, develop, and even pioneer new technology of its own. On the other hand, without an R&D base, there will be no possibility for the country to build a national technological capability and to attain technological self-reliance. The R&D process is, however, lengthy and costly, particularly at the initial stage of knowledge accumulation. But once momentum has been gained, development will pick up speed. The cost burden for R&D is high, but inevitable for the future, in the same way that the cost of education is inevitable for a child’s future. Since there is no alternative to R&D for a country seeking industrialization, the question centers on how to design the best R&D program with the country’s limited resources.16

There is, however, no need to start every R&D project from scratch. Technological knowledge can be purchased, or even obtained free of charge, under technological cooperation agreements with friendly nations. In most cases, it is advisable to obtain projects at their developmental stage, thus bypassing the initial research. This approach is less costly and consumes less time to reach desired objectives. The focus can then be on achieving better quality, lower products costs, or better suitability for local conditions. It would be ideal to achieve all three aims, but achieving only one would be satisfactory. TISTR has recently adopted this development approach for its R&D policy in order to accelerate its research output within a minimum time and at a minimum financial cost. In addition, TISTR is concentrating on R&D projects that will have quick results and a strong economic impact. Before funding an R&D project, TISTR makes certain that the research and development stages are complete, including the engineering stage. After that, TISTR’s research products are passed on to industries under a technological cooperation agreement. In return for a technological royalty, TISTR will provide the industries concerned with technical and technological assistance for five years; this includes plant installation, selection of machinery and equipment, and quality control. In the future, it may be possible for TISTR to contribute an investment fund to an enterprise’s equity, as a psycho-business support to the project.

Complementary to R&D activities, insofar as strengthening the national technological capability and self-reliance is concerned, are those activities grouped under “technological services.” The transfer of technology, both from outside the country and to industry, is one of these essential
services. Others include testing and standards, technological information, engineering consultancy, and so-called "contract research." In Thailand, TISTR alone provides all these services. TISTR's testing service covers a wide range of materials and products; among its clients is the Industrial Standards Institute. As the demand for testing is rapidly increasing from both the public and private sectors, TISTR needs to expand and improve its testing equipment and technical personnel. As an information service, TISTR's Thai Documentation Center, with a worldwide network, has been operating for two decades. The Center serves both TISTR's own R&D activities and the rest of the nation's science and technology community. In fact, its clients are to be found all over the world. Like the testing and standards service, TISTR's information center is seeking further support for its improvement so that it can become a genuine center for the nation's technological information system. The engineering consultancy service of TISTR is still in its initial stage of development. The service's present objective is to establish a national capability in the area of engineering consultancy, particularly for large and medium-size development projects called for in the national economic and social development plan. The service supplies engineering feasibility studies, engineering designs, and supervision of the construction of engineering projects, the technical costs of which have been enormous, adding to the country's foreign debt burden. The contract research service of TISTR assists private industrialists, government departments, and public enterprises in finding solutions to their operational problems related to science and technology. Many of the research contracts are "diagnostic" in nature, making TISTR a kind of "technological clinic." All of these services form part of a national program for industrialization.17

The above account is a sketch of science policy framework against Thailand's background. The present lack of clarity on relationships among science, technology, and economics makes it necessary to emphasize that the neglect of technological self-reliance in planning for the country's economic development is a basic weakness in the national economy. Should Thailand ever become a newly industrialized country, she must seriously devote more efforts and resources through R&D activities to building a self-reliant technological base. It is evident that without R&D, technology transfer is almost impossible to achieve. Perhaps this new dimension of development policy framework requires other kinds of understanding on the part of policymakers and economic planners, whose minds have unfortunately been fixed on a conventional financial approach. What is most needed is a recognition of technology as a prime determinant of economic power. Such a recognition will certainly put Thailand on the road to permanent economic and social progress.
NOTES


2. According to Kuznets, an economic epoch means "a relatively long period in economic history of a number of human societies, possessing distinctive characteristics that impart to a given epoch a unity and differentiate it from the others that preceded or followed it." The modern economic epoch is characterized by "continuous technological progress and a series of new scientific discoveries," which are the "necessary conditions" for economic growth. Simon Kuznets, *Six Lectures on Economic Growth* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 29–35.

3. The problem of trade imbalance was noticed even before the oil crisis, mainly in the light of the country's unfavorable trade balance with Japan. The pressure became stronger after the rise of oil prices. In 1983, Thailand's trade deficits grew to a peak of over Bht 80 billion, or about one-half of her export value. The foreign debts, meanwhile, have grown to Bht 220 billion, or about 25 percent of the GNP. The government concentrates on export promotion, particularly through investment promotion and marketing improvement, as the main corrective measure of the trade problem. However, as the Thai manufacturing sector depends heavily on imported technologies, both hardware and software, its net export gains are not expected to be substantial. The trade situation has become worse with the decline in the prices of agricultural exports.

4. In November 1984, Thailand decided to switch from a fixed exchange rate system to a floating exchange rate system, with an instant devaluation of about 17 percent, the largest in her monetary history. Since then, the exchange value of the baht has further declined. Although, officially, this monetary event is a crucial means of coping with the growing trade imbalance, it is critically viewed as an inevitable result of the failure in economic management.

5. It is strange but true that Thai economists have never taken the question of technological capability and self-reliance seriously. Perhaps this peculiar attitude is due to their relative weakness in economic history and also their lack of technological background. To them, the role of science and technology in the economy is only peripheral.

6. At present, MOSTE is still not classified as "an economic ministry," in contrast to the Commerce, Communication, Agriculture, Industry, Foreign Affairs, and Interior ministries. Instead, it is grouped with Education, University Affairs, and Public Health.

7. Most Thai scientists, many of them first-rate, are engaged in teaching, and to some extent in basic research at universities. It is MOSTE's policy to recruit them for R&D activities while they are still academically fresh. To be successful, this policy will need strong support both administratively and financially.

8. Technology is generally considered from a software aspect, that is, as technical know-how. Its hardware side needs a stronger emphasis, particularly in respect to the import trade. Imported machinery and equipment are priced in accordance with their technological value rather than the cost of material and labor.

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9. “Social technology” is a new concept designed to stress the role of the social sciences in the strengthening of technological capability.

10. “Investment in technology” is another new concept, distinct from fixed investment and investment in human capital. Its purpose is to emphasize that economic development is not feasible without a national stock of “technological capital.” Investment in technology is reflected in the expenditures on R&D.

11. A full discussion of the opportunities for technology transfer is found in ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), “Technology for Development,” a study by the ESCAP secretariat for the 40th Session of the Commission, held in Tokyo in April 1984. One paragraph reads: “They [developing countries] do not have to reinvent the wheel. Many useful technologies are available for purchase which make it possible to compress the time needed for development” (p. 72).

12. In Thailand, “natural resources” are generally thought of without reference to the need for technology to develop and prepare them for manufacturing processes. For this reason, there are frequently policy advocates for an increasing use of “local raw materials” in industries, without reference to the country’s existing technological capability to process them.


14. The first Thai who conceived of science and technology as a means for national modernization was King Mongkut (1804-1868). He is recognized as the “Father of Thai Science” for his intellectual leadership in modern science in his country. Another Thai scientist whose contribution to science and technology is well remembered was Dr. Tua Lapanukrom (1898-1941), the first Director-General of the Science Department. His numerous writings on the subject clearly show that Thailand never lacks men with foresight.

15. MOSTE’s new role in the promotion of science and technology took shape when Minister Damrong Lathapipat assumed office as Minister of Science, Technology, and Energy in 1983. A political scientist, Minister Damrong closely follows the policy advocated by Dr. Tua Lapanukrom before the Second World War.

16. See ESCAP, “Technology for Development,” p. 38: “One most important cornerstone of the technological infrastructure is the R and D unit.”

American Perspectives on Science, Technology, and Cooperation with Thailand

Ernest J. Briskney

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide my perspectives on science and technology for development in Thailand. These perspectives will include comments on the Thai/U.S. collaboration that has gone into the evolvement of the first major Thai/U.S. Science and Technology Project. And these perspectives will dwell on the problems, challenges, issues, and collective impacts which science and technology can and must have on development.

It seems appropriate, therefore, to comment first of all on the "setting" in Thailand. The country is in transition; it is being transformed, by necessity, into a more diversified agricultural and industrial economy. This has many implications. It means that the arable land is taken and that continued production increases, which have been so important to export trade in the past, must come from improvements in productivity. And it means that if this is to be realized under any reasonable time-frame, the process of improvement must shorten the time-frame for change. To do this it must draw on high technology, including the new high technology of biology. It means that the country's industry must prepare for modernization within the worldwide competitive framework of the 1990s. It means that there must be improvements in quality, productivity, efficiency, and uniqueness. Most of all, it means technology change. And all industries, including agriculture, must produce to quality, exact to standard, and create to uniqueness—and all must be done within the actual and perceived sphere of real value. For technological change to come about, all industries need science and technology. And within this context, science and technology and economic growth become inseparable. The best technology is clearly the technology that will keep Thailand competitive, help produce quality products, contribute toward the creation of more jobs, and contribute toward opening up new industrializable opportunities for the years ahead.

The Role of Science and Technology

How can science and technology help meet these challenges and exploit these opportunities? And how can science and technology bring forth an even better and deeper relationship between the public and private sectors of our great countries?
Historical Experience

Science and technology must be a tool that permeates the very fabric of social and economic development. Historical experience has shown that such has been the case in all countries that have industrialized: originally Great Britain, then the United States and Western Europe in the nineteenth century, Japan in the early twentieth century, and, more recently, the newly industrializing countries, such as South Korea, Brazil, Singapore, and Taiwan. While historical experience cannot set the stage or be a definitive model for Thailand, because education levels, economic conditions, and cultural patterns are different here, we do know that if prior experiences are viewed descriptively, and not prescriptively, they can be useful guides for the development of Thailand—particularly for its industrialization. Furthermore, the requirements for managing technological change can be precisely discerned from historical experience.

Basically, the importation of technology requires the building up of domestic capability for modifying technology. It requires the building up of capability to eventually design and manufacture even better equipment and technological processes. The industrialization process has taught us that nations cannot even be efficient borrowers or users of foreign technologies without adequate indigenous scientific capability. In fact, intelligent choices cannot be made about what to borrow or buy from the menu of alternatives available from industrialized countries without a considerable degree of domestic scientific and technological capability—and such is obviously also needed to modify the technology to scale, geography, topography, climate, and culture. What works well in the U.S., Europe, or Japan may be totally inappropriate in Thailand. Without an active domestic capability in science and technology, numerous poor choices will be made. And without an active domestic capability, Thailand will become only a land of "branch plants"—with the development capabilities at the home bases of foreign corporations—without the indigenous capability for innovation and further development. In fact, it seems that a genuine "take-off" into industrialization and modernization will be possible for Thailand only when it uses its own research, development, and engineering (RD&E) capabilities and develops its own industrial infrastructure to transfer, modify, design, or develop technologies that are more fully suited to its own domestic requirements. Reliance solely on borrowed technologies and joint ventures perpetuates a posture of dependence and passivity and is destined for industrialization failure—if such is the only approach being emphasized.

Science and Technology Self-Reliance

Achievement of self-reliance in science and technology (S&T) will chart a new road for Thai development. Self-reliance in S&T does not mean
autarchy; the greatest flows of S&T are between the world's most advanced science-based economies. Self-reliance in S&T will give Thailand the capability to:

1. make deliberate, intelligent choices between acquiring specific technologies from abroad or developing them domestically;
2. acquire suitable foreign technologies (located, chosen, and purchased on favorable terms);
3. adapt acquired technologies to domestic conditions;
4. generate new products and processes through domestic RD&E in areas more suitable for local development than external acquisition;
5. achieve technological mastery in application of these technologies; and
6. sustain and advance all of these capabilities from one technical and professional generation to the next.

As Thailand moves forward toward self-reliance, the degree to which it will depend on "making or buying" its technology will then be determined, as it should be, merely by factors such as economic size, natural resource base, and comparative advantages in trade.

Developmental Strengths and Constraints

The general policy environment for S&T development is good today, but many constraints exist. Let us consider the strengths of the present situation first and then the weaknesses.

Strengths

Thailand currently has eight universities with significant potential in one or more of the technical areas that are critical to its development plans. Chulalongkorn University has significant strength in the physical sciences; Mahidol University has a world-class biological capability; KMIT has unique strength in the practical aspects of engineering; Kasetsart University is preeminent in agricultural/biologically-based sciences; NIDA has reputed capability in management science; and each of the regional universities (Chiang Mai, Prince of Songkla, and Khon Kaen) has special capabilities related to regional problems. The Thailand Institute of Science and Technology Research (TISTR) has twenty years of industry-related experience and is currently being restructured for improved effectiveness. The Department of Medical Sciences is expanding with the creation of a National Institutes of Health, building on the world-class biomedical community they already have. The Department of Mineral Resources has an extensive network, and the Department of Inland Fisheries has a university-based facility. The list could go on and on—but they are basically the "quality
"base" needed to launch a major effort in S&T. Most of the professionals with advanced training have obtained at least one degree at a U.S. university. To train the professionals who have these advanced degrees and now reside in only four faculties at seven leading universities would, at today's costs, require an investment of about $300 million. These people are underutilized. They have been trained to carry out RD&E in specialized areas, but they do not have the opportunities or the resources to do so. The return on that $300 million investment is therefore not what it could be if adequate funds were provided to allow the technology that had been transferred to be productively used. When highly trained people return to Thailand—without adequate RD&E support—their abilities are soon lost. Their facilities, which are adequate, are not maximally utilized. Although the professional competence is very good, individuals are not being taught or trained in research-rich environments.

When given pride and support, however, the Thai investigators can both compete and excel. One proof of this is that Thailand leads the world in the quality and number of active and approved science grants from the U.S. (Product Support Task Control [PSTC] in worldwide competition. By the middle of 1985, over $4 million will have been awarded to Thai scientists, based on the merits of their proposals.

Problems or Constraints

So what are the problems or constraints?

1. The overriding constraint is the lack of an institutional and financial mechanism to bring about the relevant, coordinated use of the S&T capabilities. The mechanism is not in place to ensure that a demand-driven focus is given to all RD&E. Much of what has been done has been irrelevant or lacking in timeliness, because the performers are without clients. The work has not been necessarily focused on the real needs of industry.

2. Because RD&E funding has been so limited, little has been done, since the limited funds are so widely distributed. Decisions have been made too much by consensus, giving a little to all, rather than providing a concentrated focus with the limited funds. Within the last six months, for example, a leading Bangkok newspaper published an article indicating that researchers should be interested in more than showplace efforts, yet the average grant last year from the National Research Council (NRC) was $820.00 for one year only. How could more really be expected?

3. RD&E efforts have not been adequately based on the current state of scientific knowledge in areas under investigation. Access to information has been difficult. Private investors, likewise, have not had adequate information on the technological choices that are available to them.

4. The country has not been technically ready or sufficiently coordinated to absorb the technology that has been transferred. Many of the industries seem unable to diagnose their problems or to design remedies for
them, nor have they geared up their indigenous capabilities for doing so. Consequently, Thai industries face a continuation of significant problems in their production processes, resulting in inefficiencies and waste, increased cost, and uncertain quality.

5. Private-sector use and application of RD&E is practically nonexistent. Only about five companies have their own technical RD&E divisions.

6. The protection of intellectual knowledge is weak—and, unfortunately, some people still have the ill-conceived perception that this is good for Thailand at its present stage of development. But one consequence of this is that RD&E efforts are not rewarded. Ph.D.s earn little more than semiskilled workers. I have to pay my "driver" more than a new RD&E investigator earns. The career incentive is not present. Scientists and technologists represent only 0.13 percent of the work force in Thailand, compared to over 1 percent in Korea.

7. Professionals need a demand-pull, they need the technology of management, and they need the resources necessary to achieve excellence, so as to command respect and interest from the private sector. They need a source of pride. They need to speed up their movement toward technology intensity. This need for a speedup of the process in agriculture may now become recognized. The need in industry, however, is inadequately explored, and the potential benefits of modern technologies seem even less thoroughly understood.

Basically, problems are multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, multi-institutional, and multi-ministerial in nature. Very little effort has been made to absorb crosscutting technologies or to import only that portion of "new development" that cannot be locally supplied. The "Buy Thai" campaign, dictated by logic, demands confidence in local production and requires production to standard. The solution of the problem requires the creation of an overall metrological and quality-control program.

S&T: The New Thai/U.S. Dimension

On April 13, 1984, during Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda's visit with President Reagan, officials of the United States of America and the Kingdom of Thailand signed an "Agreement for Collaboration in Science and Technology." The USAID Mission in Bangkok subsequently redirected its "Thailand Country Development Strategy Statement" in order to bring emphasis to the scientific and technological needs of the country so as to help bring this new dimension into focus.

This S&T for Development Project is the first comprehensive effort to assist Thailand to reach newly industrialized country (NIC) status by expanding the government and the private-sector contribution of S&T to the development process. The goal is self-reliance in S&T. The purpose is to enhance the effectiveness and extent of public- and private-sector application of S&T to
Thailand's development. In so doing, the Project will solve specific technology-related problems and create new technologically developable opportunities in three broad high-priority technical areas: bioscience/biotechnology; material technology; and applied electronic technology.

Bioscience/biotechnology was selected because it can build on Thailand's traditional agriculture and enhance agricultural productivity; it can improve the technological base for Thailand's food-processing industries (i.e., bio-product processing and bio-product packaging); it can provide a competitive foundation for developing the health-related industries; and, ultimately, it can further develop the country's natural resources (forestry) and contribute to improvements in the environment (air/water). Traditional approaches are saturated with absorbable support. This Project will utilize new cadres of personnel and new technologies.

Material technology was selected as the second area of concentration because it relates to Thailand's natural-resource base and encompasses the needs of the industrial sector of the country. Classical ceramics are of poor and inconsistent quality, and industrial ceramic technology has not been fully absorbed within the country. Thousands of people are employed in Thailand's underdeveloped ceramic industries. Minerals are crudely extracted in over 1,400 mines, without currently available levels of technology for mining or processing. Crude ores are sold at low prices and imported in refined states at high prices. The metal tool industry is underdeveloped. Hundreds of small machinery manufacturing establishments produce low-level-quality products. Over thirty times more tools are imported than produced here. Sixteen hundred plastic plants produce low-quality products. Several hundred wood processors lack technology, and over a hundred rubber mills are limited to the same low level of processing that they had decades ago. Concentration in material technology will build on these extensive, established industries, which are employing increasing numbers of people.

Applied electronic technology was selected as the third area of concentration because it is an obviously vital area within the country's industrialization movement, considering world competition in general and the more immediate competition from Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore in particular. The focus will be on computer use and application in government to gain efficiency and in industry to improve both efficiency and process control. Basically, it will help industries produce to standard.

**Project Elements**

The four main elements of activity are: (1) strengthening the existing institutional framework; (2) reviewing S&T policy and practice; (3) supporting research, development, and engineering; and (4) supporting industrial development.
**Strengthening the Existing Institutional Framework**

This critical component is needed to bring about more opportunities for interaction between the users and the producers of RD&E. New and effective linkages between industry, the RD&E community, and the Royal Thai Government (RTG) policymakers and regulators are needed. The Science and Technology Development Board (STDB) will be established under the TISTR Act, given autonomy and considerable flexibility, and managed with significant participation from the private sector. STDB will have a public-sector/private-sector Board of Directors. The Chairmanship of the Executive Committee will rotate, on a two-year basis, from the public to the private sector. The Project Director will represent continuity, and will be a person of stature. STDB, under the direction of the Project Director, will administer this Project. STDB will finance such RD&E as is identified by Thai producers and is consistent with Thailand’s development priorities. It will upgrade the capabilities of existing Thai institutions to perform RD&E, provide opportunities for these facilities to engage available trained manpower, and employ them on priority activities. It will promote the use of indigenous RD&E and market the results of its products under an active publicity and sales program. It will facilitate the establishment of a framework which provides and expands opportunities for public- and private-sector cooperation. It will support the RTG efforts in improving the overall policy environment to make it more conducive to investment in S&T activities. STDB will also be allowed to seek other supplemental support.

The character of AID loan funds, the intended uses of the funds, and the existing tax laws would rule out a purely private, non-government organization as borrower and manager. An institution now exists, the Thailand Institute of Science and Technology Research, created twenty years ago by a special Parliamentary Act, that has the requisite legal framework. However, TISTR also has other responsibilities (i.e., the operation of fourteen laboratories) that would create a conflict of interest in its management of the tasks intended for STDB. STDB will therefore be formed as an independent sub-unit of TISTR, entitled to operate with all of the authority and flexibility bestowed on TISTR, yet free from interference in its decision-making.

**Reviewing S&T Policy and Practice**

The Project will assist the Thai public and private sectors and develop a more systematic approach to policy planning and more effective S&T practices. This activity is based on the assumption that careful analysis of problems and the alternate choices of actions leads to sound and reasonable policy decisions. The activities to be considered would: (a) strengthen the capacity of Thai organizations to carry out necessary policy studies; (b) analyze pressing current policy problems through specific studies; and (c) support professional exchanges that will be directly applicable to policy examination.
Supporting Research, Development, and Engineering

The largest component of the Project will support problem-solving RD&E in the three priority technical areas of concentration.

Three different types of RD&E activities to be considered, in each of the technical areas above, are designated, competitive, and company directed. The terms research, development, and engineering are generally self-explanatory, but as we are using them the activities will be designed to help: diagnose or resolve problems; develop processes and products for improved or new industry development; improve quality control; and broaden the base for and use of emerging technologies. In other words, the RD&E activities include development, transfer, application, or utilization of technology. The RD&E activities will be carried out by scientists and technologists in universities, research institutes, government agencies, and private-sector laboratories.

**Designated RD&E** (problems and institutions): These activities will provide resources for work on known high-priority problems. The thrust will be problem-focused institution-building. These activities will serve as reservoirs for ensuring the use of and improvement in the technologies. Numerous long-term working linkages will be created between Thai individuals and institutions and their American counterparts. The conduct of the work itself will simultaneously build the capacities of the designated institutions in areas deemed essential to support present and future industry growth. These activities will enhance the development of state-of-the-art technologies or absorb emerging technologies in various areas and solve crucial problems. All work will be of generic industry for industry, and also be aimed at strengthening the S&T infrastructural base to help sustain industrial growth.

A priority list of technological problem areas has been developed, and the rationale for selecting each problem area has been detailed. Other RD&E designated activities will be identified as the Project is being implemented. The activities are designated both in terms of topics and institutions. The institutions for each problem area will be selected based on needs, qualifications of scientists and technologists, and other situational factors. The criteria and operating procedures to be used have been detailed.

The designated RD&E institutions in specialized fields will be linked with leading institutions (public or private) in relevant fields in the U.S. STDB’s TA contractor will work with the Thai RD&E institutions in identifying the linkage partners and making all necessary arrangements.

**Competitive RD&E**: These activities will have problem-solving as a primary objective. The Project funds will be used to bridge the gap between the RD&E institutions and the continuing generic needs of industry. The projects will be totally driven by the demand side of RD&E. The selection of specific problems and institutions will be made in consultation with the private sector over the life of the Project.
Basically, the solution of competitive RD&E problems should result in new, improved process(es) and/or product(s), create improved state-of-the-art technology in Thai industry, and have relevance to development (employment, export, income distribution, or industrial growth). In selecting the problems for study, special attention will be given to the solutions’ potential spread effect, downstream investment potential, effect on cost-savings, productivity or quality improvement, and whether they have been identified by small/medium-scale rural industries in non-Bangkok areas. The criteria and procedures to be used have likewise been detailed.

**Company-Directed RD&E:** The RTG will establish a special fund to provide loan financing for private-sector RD&E. The RTG will annually contribute 15 million baht to private-industry companies on a loan basis for this purpose. Project funds in an equivalent amount ($550,000) will be made available each year. The Project funds will be made available to private companies on a “venture capital” basis. The Project funds would buy a 25 percent interest in the results of the RD&E work. The company would agree to meet 50 percent of the costs of the RD&E from its own resources. If successful, the company would pay royalties to STDB. If the RD&E work results in failure, the company would have no further obligation to STDB, other than repayment of the RTG loan. The criteria and procedures to be used have been described. Initial experience with the program, in which company demand for such financing begins to manifest itself, may suggest desirable changes in the ratios of the different funding sources. The program will be structured to allow for adequate flexibility to tailor the terms to suit the demand.

This program is intended to stimulate government laboratories and universities to market their skills and capabilities with the private sector. The program is also intended to stimulate the expansion of a private-sector RD&E division. Under certain circumstances, private companies may also undertake in-house research under this program without participation of government or university laboratories. In such instances, AID funding will be restricted to finance only actual cash expenditures for the research performed.

**RD&E Support Activities:** Two types of activities will be funded in support of the RD&E component of this Project: long-term M.S. and Ph.D. training in Thai universities in priority technical areas that are currently in short supply; and financial support for workshops/symposia, conferences, and other professional exchanges in support of RD&E activities.

**Supporting Industrial Development**

This component of the Project is designed to provide support to industrial development in three key areas. First, standards, testing, and quality control will be strengthened in order to make more reliable standards available to industry and to improve quality control in the production
process of industry. Second, a Technical Information Access Center will be supported by the Project to permit industry and S&T institutions to remain current on technological choices available in the international markets, to know how to search for those technological choices, and to assess their comparative benefits and costs. Third, a Diagnostic/Research Design Service will be established to offer well-publicized low-cost technical assistance services to industry to diagnose technical problems and identify requirements to solve these problems.

STANDARDS, TESTING, AND QUALITY CONTROL

This Project activity is designed to support the RTG’s efforts to improve the quality of Thai products as part of its domestic “Buy Thai” campaign, as well as to make its export drive a success. The activities proposed hereunder build upon Thailand’s existing physical and human resources. Specifically, the Project funds will be used to:

1. Coordinate and reinforce the activities of existing standards organizations through the Standards, Testing, and Quality Control Office of STDB;
2. strengthen the capacity of key organizations by training eighteen professionals (for up to one year) in the U.S. in the areas of quality control and in maintenance of standards and associated calibration work in selected areas;
3. sponsor a series of workshops and training courses for the users of measurement standards in Thai industries to be conducted by key standards organizations with the assistance of mostly local and selected foreign experts;
4. establish a national voluntary laboratory accreditation system that will be open to both public and private organizations aimed at improving performance so as to increase the international acceptability of test results. The efforts of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Energy (MOSTE) will be supported through STDB by provision of technical assistance and needed equipment in the establishment of a laboratory accreditation authority within the Ministry;
5. sponsor a series of quality-control workshops both in Bangkok and in other regions on a regular basis to promote quality in the production process;
6. sponsor a comprehensive publicity program promoting concepts of quality in the production process. This program will be developed and launched by contracting media services and needed technical inputs; and
7. finance selected upgrading of metrological equipment in support of the three priority areas of concentration. While many of the equipment needs have been identified, these will have to be carefully scrutinized prior to the commencement of any procurement.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION ACCESS CENTER (TIAC)

A Technical Information Access Center (TIAC) will be established to serve two primary sets of clients: the RD&E community and the business and investment community. It will build on and supplement existing facilities and services to create a modern information service to provide reliable, low-cost, high-speed technical and scientific information to Thai decision-makers, whether they be in the private sector, in the academic RD&E community, or in government.

The existing TISTR National Documentation Center (NDC) will be modernized by utilizing digital and microfilm technology for storage and retrieval of information. It will be linked through an electronic data processing (EDP) and communication network with Thai university libraries to serve the RD&E community. University science/technology libraries will be similarly modernized and integrated into the data network.

The Technical Information Access Center will be located in the private sector and managed by an organization such as the “Association of Thai Industries” (ATI) as an agent for STDB to serve the business and investment community. It will be linked electronically to a TIAC representative in the U.S. which will service requests from TIAC Bangkok and the National Documentation Center for S&T information available in the U.S. and other countries.

DIAGNOSTIC/RESEARCH DESIGN SERVICE

This activity is intended to rationalize and speed up the development of the technical service industry in Thailand. Industrial consultancy services, drawing in part on the personnel of these upgraded facilities, could bring about quality improvement of Thai products. The service will help Thai manufacturers identify production problems that do not require new technologies but can be solved by applying technical or managerial knowledge that is already available. Important areas in which Thai industry required RD&E support will be identified, leading to the design of well-conceived RD&E activities for financing under this Project.

A small service unit, offering well-publicized, low-cost services to industry, will be established and located in the private sector to help producers diagnose technical problems, identify technical needs, structure feasibility studies, and design RD&E projects to solve those problems. The service unit will have only a skeleton staff, but will draw on qualified Thai
technical RD&E personnel at universities, government research laboratories (enhanced through designated RD&E activities), and private consulting firms. These indigenous capabilities will be supplemented as needed with foreign technical advisors.

**Summary**

In the final analysis, this is a Project for industrial development. The project impact should result in increased employment from industrial expansion. The quality of Thai products should improve and become more competitive. New products and processes should be developed to diversify the Thai economy. RD&E activities will be problem-focused and demand-driven, and better choices will be made between acquiring or developing technology—with more indigenous capability for subsequent adaptation. Investments in scientific and technologically based industries will result from improved indigenous technical capacities, improved policy frameworks, and more developed institutional and financial mechanisms supportive of private/public and domestic/foreign collaboration.

From an overall standpoint, the United States hopes to help Thailand launch a national program and process that will mobilize demand-driven efforts across the country. Hopefully, the organization to be established, and the process to be initiated, will attract other support to this effort. But while this goes on, we are also jointly expanding our participation in the NAS/BOSTID (National Academy of Sciences/Board on Science and Technology for International Development) Research Grants Program, the AID/PSTC Research Grants Program, and the Fogarty Medical Fellowship Program, among others. We believe that this truly is a new dimension for Thai/U.S. relations—and one that will follow a mature course and be of mutual benefit. It will reflect pride on both sides, and hopefully will be a hallmark of success—based on interactions between nations.
The Role of External Assistance in Thai Economic Development and Planning: Dichotomies of Security and Growth in the American AID Program

David I. Steinberg

Introduction

The security of Thailand, and by extension that of the United States, in its broadest dimensions has been the motivation for American economic and military support to the Thai government. This general mutuality of commitment, reflected in the continuity of U.S. assistance, masks differences in stress and in the perception of the degree of the external threat and the internal means to meet it. In spite of considerable varied Thai apprehension about U.S. troops in Thailand during the 1970s and perceptions of how the U.S. viewed its role in Asia, the relationship can overall be characterized as close and supportive. This overall harmony, however, belies several internal twists and stresses in the nature and role of American economic aid to Thailand. It raises some fundamental issues concerning the relationship of economic and military aid to each other and to Thai political power and continuity, as well as for the nature of economic development activities under perceived needs for enhanced external and internal security.

The relatively constant U.S. foreign policy support for Thailand is in stark contrast to the changing, almost mercurial, magnitude of the American effort in both military and economic terms. The United States, which first began assistance in 1950 and was at that time the premier foreign economic and sole military supporter of the Thai government, has now become so small an element in concessional assistance—both as a percentage of such aid and as a proportion of Thai gross domestic product (GDP)—that its contribution is fiscally infinitesimal, even if it has potential programmatic significance. Indeed, a major shift of policy direction in the U.S. aid effort in the past year has occurred (see Section 8, below) and reflects joint Thai-U.S. recognition of the disparity between the importance of the U.S.-Thai security and foreign policy relationship and the relative insignificance of recent U.S. economic funding levels. It is, in essence, an attempt to bridge this gap, reflecting by innovative programming what is lacking in fiscal support.
1. Conceptual and Perceptual Problems and Paradigms

A continuous foreign assistance program lasting almost two generations presents inherent problems of analysis. Longitudinal data, which in this case is abundant, is the delight of social scientists, but such enthusiasm is tempered by the problems of torques and shifts in policy and program emphasis, creating difficulties of investigation.

Time is thus the first of several prisms through which this assistance program must be filtered, and one that can distort perceptions of program efficacy and complicate evaluations. There are also differences in the lenses through which aid effort must be viewed. Not only are there internal temporal tensions within the program, but the American perception, even when it is coherent and represents a unified approach among diverse U.S. agencies (a consummation less often achieved than might be expected), may be quite different from the Thai view, which again may be heterogeneous. In both cases, the perceptions of the putative beneficiaries of such assistance may be at some variance from those of both the donor and recipient governments. Although the macro-economic results are clear and variously documented, the donor role in general, and the U.S. role in particular, is less well formulated.

This essay is also written from an American perspective, and thus must await Thai analysis of how U.S. priorities reflected or influenced the Thai programming and budgetary processes. Many of my conclusions, in addition, must be tentative, for although there have been a number of internal and external evaluations of individual projects and programs, there has not been a concerted effort in over a decade to examine the totality of the program in terms of the various (changing) objectives of both donor and recipient, and within each of these categories the varying institutional goals of the participating organizations. The topic of foreign aid is important, not only because of what it might teach about the donor and recipient, but because it might also be a paradigm illuminating the nature of the development process, and thus of use to other nations and generally to the donor community.

This essay must thus be limited in scope. Logically it should be the conclusion to a comprehensive analysis of the U.S. aid program; instead it is the introduction, an initial part of a planned effort to comprehend in its entirety the efficacy of three and a half decades of assistance. It is, in effect, an essay on the difficulty of determining a single methodological means to explore the issue of the efficacy of a foreign assistance program. Therefore, it cannot deal with the effectiveness of the program as a whole, nor with its individual components, the study of both of which must await further work. Given the exigencies of time, the desirable last chapter of a total evaluation of a country program has become the first, with all the intellectual dangers inherent in that inversion.
The prisms through which such a program might be analyzed are as diverse as there are institutional foci or ideological perspectives. It would be traditional in AID to analyze U.S. economic support by individual projects or by sector, such as agriculture or health. These approaches are bureaucratic equivalents of dynastic history, setting forth a chronological record that is useful but not sufficient to understand the dynamics of societal change. Budget categories have their place, but they cannot substitute for a more vibrant classification that could enable one better to extrapolate from the Thai experience for possible application elsewhere.

Among a diverse group of potential approaches to analysis are several that have varying degrees of credibility. Thai development and foreign assistance may be viewed through the prism of dependency theory, or through a Marxist analysis, as has been attempted. A more revealing approach uses the Weberian model of patrimonial societies. Thai development and foreign aid might be seen as a product of private-sector activities, dualistic economies, or ethnic entrepreneurship. It could be considered as sui generis or a product of an inherently unequal relationship.

This paper takes no ideological stance. It endeavors neither to prove efficacy nor to denigrate. To stimulate study of developmental dynamics, it will instead concentrate on five diverse tensions between what on first reflection may seem to be dichotomous extremes of U.S. program emphasis. These torques, which skewed the use of relatively scarce financial and manpower resources, both of the U.S. and Thailand, into certain directions, had profound effects on the results of the program. The appropriateness of these foci may be questioned, for the evidence is not yet in. These emphases, however, are evident in any review of the documentation. How well they withstand scrutiny as the most effective method for program review should be the subject for further analysis.

Furthermore, thought should also be given to those avenues left untravelled. If it is valid to assert that the provision of foreign assistance is a positive effort, then, by conscious omission, the denial of such assistance to certain fields, for whatever motivation, is as well often the result of a positive decision even if it is an overlooked element in aid planning.

These five apparent tensions to be examined are those between: (1) security and development orientations; (2) support to the center and the periphery (in effect, urban and rural); (3) assistance to the elite and the poor; (4) the role of the public and private sectors; and (5) the need for strengthening administrative institutional capacity and the issue of bureaucratic change.

None of these seemingly separate issues, as will be demonstrated, is clear and distinct; each set has ramifications for the other sets. Indeed, each set may be considered to some degree another manifestation or reincarnation of the others, and part of the overarching issue (because of the focus of the program) of the tension between security and development. So,
too, security and development are not necessarily antithetical, nor are they two ends of a single spectrum. The interpretation of each has changed over time, and they may in fact be complementary under certain circumstances. In addition, both new objective conditions in Thailand and earlier programs have affected later activities.

This analysis of the Thai program is so formulated because of its relevance to AID policy at some point in the program. Each element of each set reflects some policy stress at some junction in the U.S. rationale for assistance: security, integration of remote regions, the rural poor, the elite, the private sector, institution-building, and so forth. Thus, this focus may make the study more germane to contemporary U.S. policy issues outside of Thailand. It is not argued that these are the most intellectually germane of categories; it is asserted, however, that they offer more hope for actionable analysis than many other approaches.

The magnitude of U.S. foreign economic assistance, which was subject to internal vicissitudes along a general downward slope, is one of but a number of tensions internal to the program itself. These tensions resulted from shifting Thai and U.S. foreign policy and security interests in the region and in Thailand, internal requirements within the Thai economy and polity, and various permutations of worldwide U.S. foreign assistance policy. There has been continuity of U.S. commitment, but cyclical shifts in program emphasis and levels for diverse reasons.

In a spatial sense, the American aid program as outlined here could be envisaged as two major concentric circles, with security interests at the core, and developmental considerations emanating centrifugally from it. This second concentric circle, itself divided into two concentric circles, has in its inner element the four components most closely connected with a security focus: public sector, elite, center, and strengthened institutional capacity. The outer rim contains the other components of the program: the private sector, the poor, the periphery, and the capacity for institutional change. There is tension between elements of all of these circles.

This paper will raise many issues that cannot be explored in the present context, but yet that cannot be continuously ignored. Of primary importance is military aid. The contribution of military assistance to economic development is a problem that should not be overlooked in a variety of countries, and especially in Thailand with its history of military leadership. It has political, policy, and economic ramifications. One critic has argued:

Politically, it appears that military aid tends to improve the political position and capacity of the national army to the point that it becomes an independent source of political strength. By strengthening the military capabilities, U.S. military aid produced an internal disequilibrium among the political forces contending for domestic power.

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Figure 1: U.S. AID Program in Thailand

Tensions =
The influence of U.S. military aid on the key Thai actors who formulate economic policy may have been as important as the magnitude of assistance or the fungibility of foreign economic and military aid. The economic contribution (or dislocation) caused by some 50,000 U.S. troops in Thailand at the height of involvement in the Vietnam War and the operation of the air bases no doubt had a variety of economic impacts, some of which are beyond the scope of this paper, but should at least be mentioned in any attempt to provide an overall analysis of the U.S. economic role in Thailand. Estimates on military-related spending in the Thai economy for fiscal years 1966–69 were $670 million, and $450 million for base and logistic construction alone from 1950 to 1975. An AID-sponsored study noted:

In the 1960’s, however, the sizable trade deficit was comfortably cushioned by high service and transfer balances associated with the American presence in Indochina. . . . Their loss, even more than the trade balance deficit, contributed to the growth of current account deficits. (The service balance was 4.9% of GDP in 1969, 0.5% in 1976.)

It has also been argued that such military spending, resulting in easy foreign exchange generation, reduced the incentives for exporting, thus retarding economic growth.

Support by the U.S. government through AID or predecessor agencies but separate from the Thai mission are excluded from figures used here, as are Peace Corps contributions, the private activities of the Ford, Rockefeller, Asia, and Fulbright foundations, a variety of private and voluntary agencies, and refugee assistance. These were often significant in programmatic content (especially in training) and in the aggregate. The critical issues of trade and investment are the subject of separate papers, and so will be omitted as well, although analytically their inclusion would be desirable.

First, however, it is important to consider the changing magnitude of the U.S. effort in Thailand, for such funding levels may have influenced policy and programs as well as Thai perceptions of the U.S. commitment to Thailand.

2. Changing Magnitudes of American Assistance

American military and economic assistance to Thailand had its genesis in the aftermath of the Communist takeover in China in 1949, and in the spread of internal Communist insurrections in the same period in Burma, Malaya, and the Philippines. In response to this problem, the Allen Griffin Mission was dispatched to Asia in 1950 and made recommendations for economic assistance to Thailand under the Point Four program. On March 31, 1950, President Truman authorized $10 million in military assistance to
Thailand under the unexpended China Aid Act of 1948; and on September 19, 1950, the Thai-American Economic Accord was signed, which was the basis on which future economic support was provided.

Since that time, the United States has supplied some $874 million in economic aid through U.S. fiscal year 1983, of which $23 million was under PL-480 (Public Law 480, which provided surplus agricultural products). In contrast, U.S. military assistance only through 1969 totalled some $808.6 million; during that period, it averaged 60.4 percent of the total Thai military budget. In one year—1953—it was 257 percent of that budget. Cumulatively, through 1985, military assistance reached almost $2 billion.

Foreign assistance overall has fluctuated almost annually, both as a percentage of GDP and of total government expenditures. It has ranged from 0.3 percent of GDP (all U.S.) and 2.6 percent of government expenditures in 1951, to 3.4 percent of a vastly increased GDP and 22.4 percent of total government expenditures in 1962. In the two decades between 1950 and 1970, Thailand received $615.7 million in foreign loans, of which the World Bank (56.3 percent) was the largest donor, and the U.S. ($97.6 million, 5.9 percent) the largest bilateral supporter. On the other hand, technical assistance (grants) from the United States for the same two decades was $403.6 million, or 78.2 percent of all grants. Thus, in total support during that period, the American contribution was paramount.

In the recent past, the sources of ODA (official development assistance, i.e., concessional or grant aid), the amounts, and the volume of commercial credits have dramatically shifted. In fiscal year 1983, ODA was the major source of external capital (19 percent) and accounted for $1.2 billion in loans (plus $160 million in grants) of the Thai Government development budget of $3.1 billion, while commercial flows totalled some $305 million. Of the total ODA, the World Bank provided 38 percent; Japan, 33 percent; the Asian Development Bank, 18 percent; and the United States, through AID, 2.7 percent (1.6 percent of loans, 10.1 percent of grants). By 1983, Japan had overtaken the U.S. in grants as well as loans.

The fiscal year 1985 AID program in Thailand totals some $21.5 million, of which one-fifth is for anti-narcotics activities. This comparatively small amount stands in contrast to the mutual treaty obligations of the United States and Thailand, Thailand’s position as an ASEAN “front-line” state, and the paramount concern of the non-Indochina nations of the region with the Thai-Cambodian border crisis.

These modest resources, when contrasted with continuing political and security concerns in the region, have prompted the United States to reassess further support to the traditional U.S.-sponsored activities in Thailand, such as assistance in agriculture, health, family planning, and (earlier) development or public administration. (See Section 8, below). In a
sense, strategy reformulation has inspired new programs, but has also been reactive to U.S. fiscal reality and Thai macro-economic needs, which have markedly changed.

Although this is not the proper forum in which to recount the remarkable growth of the Thai economy since 1950, which in any case has been well documented, it would be remiss not to mention the overall growth rates, averaging about 8 percent per annum until the late 1970s, that have irrevocably changed Thai society. Until the oil crises, the foreign exchange resources were sufficient, and assistance for that purpose was considered unnecessary. The Kennedy administration in the early 1960s was looking for "success stories" of foreign aid, and at that time (and again in the mid-1970s) Thailand's economic successes were to be a model, and there was discussion of "graduation." In the first instance, the program was soon expanded on security grounds.

3. The Tension Between Security and Development

Security considerations have been paramount in the inception, continuation, and composition of the U.S. aid program in Thailand, although the foci have sometimes shifted over time—from regional, to internal, to international. The United States has been concerned by invasion from the People's Republic of China, regional security after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, deterioration of conditions in Laos, the incipient and then active Communist insurgency in Thailand, Thailand as a base for action in the Vietnamese War, the international trade in narcotics, and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. At their most naive, these considerations have been justified by the "domino theory"; at a sophisticated level, they have helped the Thai authorities establish productive sovereignty over their periphery.

These various goals under the security rubric have been articulated consistently since the early period of the program, and seem to represent both executive and legislative branch concerns. In 1963, for example, U.S. policy was described as follows:

The basic U.S. objectives to be served by the A.I.D. program are (1) to increase Thailand's capability to defend its independence against communist subversion and insurgency, (2) to assist Thai efforts to alleviate, especially in security sensitive areas, the economic and social conditions which impair the nation's internal security, and (3) to assist Thai efforts toward long-range social, political, and economic development until an adequate rate of self-sustaining growth has been achieved. Thailand provides the most important secure base for major U.S. military operations on the mainland of Southeast Asia; it is essential to maintain U.S. access to that area.

The General Accounting Office, reporting to the Congress in 1961, indicated that, after 1954, assistance was "designed to promote Thailand's economic growth and to strengthen its military and internal security
In June 1961, AID determined that supporting assistance would end and Thailand would move to a development loan program. There was a shift in program emphasis shortly thereafter, however, and a concentration on counterinsurgency efforts with a large program expansion. "The most plausible explanation for the rapid increase in aid is that it represented a form of rent for American use of the air bases in conjunction with the Vietnam War." Although this was denied by Ambassador Martin at the time, "the circumstantial evidence to the contrary, however, is impressive," even if it was an informal understanding, perhaps a *quid pro quo* for their use.

In 1967, an evaluation of the AID program stated: "It is identified with the suppression of insurgency and the elimination of subversion and with the institutional changes which these necessitate." In 1968, the Senate indicated that "in view of the fact that Thailand now has almost $1 billion in foreign reserves, U.S. efforts should be directed towards the insurgency. General economic development within the capacity and capability of the Thais."^^

AID estimated in 1969 that 75 percent of the program in Thailand was for counterinsurgency activities, and 68 percent of it was physically in the security-sensitive provinces of the Northeast and the North. In 1973, the AID mission director could characterize the program as of two types: "security with development aspects" and "development with security aspects." He felt that 54 percent of the program was primarily security.

It was not only the assistance program that was security oriented, but "the critical conclusion of this study [is] that, since 1954, American policy toward Thailand has been determined primarily by security considerations." The distinction between development and security is in some instances arbitrary—a matter of emphasis and conceptualization; and indeed there is considerable room for debate over the relationship between internal stability and developmental progress. It is evident that both are necessary for economic growth, and emphasis on one aspect will no doubt have an effect on the other. Since the program was justified to the Congress as one focused on security, it is likely that there was a certain amount of security "salesmanship" in project documentation, a phenomenon known to be widespread at any point when policies change and projects must be approved. It may also be that Thai officials interested in development used their own security "salesmanship" to get developmental projects approved under security auspices.

Although AID and predecessor agencies viewed themselves and were viewed by others essentially developmentally oriented (even if program purposes were occasionally related to security), and although military assistance was administered by a different department, in the earlier period, at least, the already indistinct line distinguishing military from economic...
assistance became further blurred as economic funds were used for obvious military purposes. Aviation fuel storage depots were built (at a cost of $1.7 million), improvements were made to a naval base ($1.2 million), and there were even purchases of uniforms and field equipment ($1.1 million).\(^{28}\)

More important, however, were the major projects that were aimed at improving government control and security over the more remote, poorer regions that might be or already were subject to insurgency. These included support in the early period to the Thai Border Patrol Police, who were in charge of the frontiers, and later to the police in provincial areas. The former program totalled some $6 million, but the latter, until AID (under legislation in the 1970s) was no longer allowed to provide "public safety" support, was $77.2 million ($59.2 million from 1967 to 1972, or 27.6 percent of U.S. grant assistance.)\(^{29}\) Over 11 percent of participant trainees for the two decades ending in 1971 came from the civil police.\(^{30}\) It should be noted that Thailand was by no means unique in having such programs, which were widespread throughout the world.

Support for road construction was justified in terms of security as well. The "Friendship Highway" to the Northeast was a major security link to which AID provided over $20 million, and which opened up a large section of the nation to easy communications with the capital, and to economic development of the region as well. The East-West Highway ($14.6 million) through north-central Thailand was designed to provide the country with its first good lateral communications in that area of the nation. Other major highways were also constructed and still more surveyed. There is a widespread view that highways are better avenues of economic development than railroads,\(^{31}\) although AID did support the construction of the Udorn-Nongkai line ($1.3 million, improving links to Laos) and some rolling stock; and both academic and more impressionistic observations have convincingly demonstrated that these roads had important economic consequences in spite of the primary security motivation for their construction.

A major security effort supported by AID was that of the Accelerated Rural Development program (ARD), into which $63.6 million dollars were spent for an innovative program of rural feeder roads and village potable water systems for the security areas of the Northeast and North, with some additional work in the South.\(^{32}\) Designed to integrate regions both remote and ethnically diverse with the central authorities and to allow the government to exert control over the areas, it was established to avoid programming with a rigid and ineffective Ministry of Highways. The results were economically beneficial over the longer term.

ARD was not without its critics, both within the Thai bureaucracy and among foreign observers. It was described as "an ambitious direct action, paternalistic, government-service program, frankly aimed at winning friends for the existing political order,"\(^{33}\) and one that delivered to the
villages what the central government thought they needed, rather than what the villagers may have wished.

The formation of the ARD program, however, raises the generic question of whether, and under what conditions, it may be wise for foreign aid organizations to assist in the establishment of new institutions whose functions are specifically designed to bypass existing ones—thereby, perhaps, further weakening line agencies. This is a developmental variant of the classic question of whether shorter-term exigencies should have priority over longer-range issues.

Closely related to the internal security program was the early regional communications project of $18.1 million (of which $14.1 million was in foreign exchange), which was designed to link Thailand with Vietnam and Laos. Support was also provided for improvements in Thai Airways and in landing facilities, which were originally intended as post-strike landing strips for possible B-47 bombing raids on mainland China that emanated from Guam.34

To what degree can an assertion be made that security programming did have a positive economic impact, at least in the case of rural infrastructure? If that response is generally positive, would such projects have been pursued without security motivation, to what degree, and would appropriate services together with supportive Thai rural development policies and budgets have been in place or provided? Did the effort build economically unnecessary or irrelevant roads, for example, or could these funds have been better used for other types of projects? Did the predilections or experience of the donor staff in effect dictate the type of program? (Were roads, for example, easier to conceptualize or build than rural health centers?) These issues may be explored in the further evaluative work to be undertaken by AID and the Thai government, for although the answers may not now be attainable, it is already evident from other studies35 that without such infrastructure the best rural development programs often go awry.

4. Center and Periphery

The Thai frontiers were stabilized after British and French colonialism had run their course in the region. Yet the concept of discrete, defined boundaries was new to Southeast Asia. The state was defined by its capital, the magical center of the universe of power, and the number of people under its control, and not by lateral power extending equally to the periphery.36 These peripheral regions, which had at various periods been subject to the suzerainty of other states, were only titularly incorporated into the Kingdom of Siam, for most of the peoples were different from the ethnic Thai of the central plain. The Northeast was inhabited by the Lao-speaking linguistic cousins of the Thai and by ethnic Khmer, the far North by hill tribes driven south by the Communist takeover in China and unrest in the
Shan States of Burma, and by retreating Chinese Nationalist forces. Ethnic Karen tribes lived on the eastern frontier, and Malay-speaking Muslims in the South. Thailand was far from a homogeneous society.

One objective of the security and development program of the United States was the integration of the outlying regions under central Thai control—in fact, the establishment of the physical attributes of Thai sovereignty over these regions, for they were not only ethnically and linguistically distinct, but physically isolated, with Thai government presence only in the towns. The administrator of AID in 1963 articulated this strategy:

(1) . . . Help Thailand to increase its national unity, by strengthening the political ties of remote areas and minority groups with the Thai nation, and improving the capability of the Thai Security Forces to reach areas of particular sensitivity and to identify and counter potential insurgency problems. (2) Assist the Thai government to accelerate rural development in the Northeast and other areas of vulnerability, through positive measures to increase agricultural productivity and income, to stimulate an active self-reliant village development effort, and to raise the standards of rural health.37

The security and sovereignty issues were thus very closely intertwined—indeed, were inseparable. The focus on the Northeast, the largest, most isolated, and most exposed of the major peripheral areas, was significant, for it was the site of most of the air bases that were used by the United States, as well as the seat of the early organizing for a Communist insurgency and later armed insurrection.

Not only did the United States contribute to the construction of major highways in and to the region, and fund village access roads, the latter under the Accelerated Rural Development program, but it also paid for Border Patrol and provincial police as well. Other projects were also part of this effort to provide central government access to these distant regions. These included a remote area security program ($6.7 million), a mobile unit development program ($5.7 million, the nucleus of which was the National Security Command), and a community development effort for isolated areas ($3.9 million). Other projects, such as irrigation, were centered in that area. In the 1960s, AID agreed to fund the construction of 854 police stations, of which 499 were to be in the Northeast.38 There were also programs to train local government officials and to improve the efficiency of local administration.

These and other foreign-supported efforts (such as malaria control, at a cost of $18 million) were designed to compensate for a lack of Thai interest or capacity at that time in such activities. The programs not only provided needed facilities and demonstrated government concern, but they also served to strengthen most of the central institutions of the Thai government, much as military assistance did for the armed forces. Indeed, it
has been argued that Bangkok benefited most from foreign loans (24.18 percent), but also from national projects, such as electricity generation.

Where such institutions were deemed too weak to deliver immediately the type of local projects that were thought necessary to demonstrate central Thai sovereignty over the periphery and to give the center access to that region, new institutions were created. The Accelerated Rural Development office was one such critical institution.

In addition to improving the programmatic aspects and agencies of the central government, other national functions were supported, such as central planning and review mechanisms, the budgeting process, development administration, and the civil service. There was also an attempt to improve the efficiency of local governments, but these projects may have increased their efficacy without strengthening their autonomy.

The result of the AID program, then, was to markedly dilate a tendency toward centralization in a bureaucratic atmosphere that was already widely noted for the autonomy and self-reliance of central government institutions. The short-term effects were generally positive, and although individual projects may have fallen short of some of their objectives, overall these activities, together with general improvement in the economy and greater mobility to partake of it, did improve both the security and well-being of the peoples of these regions.

Charles Keyes has argued (in a personal communication) that American aid prompted the introduction of more central government personnel into the countryside. "In turn, these Thai officials asserted central government dominance more often and in a greater number of ways, thereby actually stimulating a growth of ethnic and ethno-regional movements, increasing ethnic consciousness. The commitment to Thailand was never in serious doubt among most groups, except the Malay south and some of the hill tribes."

The vicissitudes of overall U.S. foreign assistance policy, however, have sometimes created problems in Thailand because of sudden shifts in policy emphases, conflicting components of legislation that contains exceedingly heterogeneous elements, and simply because of the successes of earlier efforts.

The passage of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973, focusing attention on the rural poor, would seem to have reaffirmed earlier AID efforts in peripheral Thailand, since the Northeast is the poorest region of the country. The Act also called for more local participation, related to activities under Title IX of the earlier legislation, which had been a major concern of the previous AID administration. The present AID policies, which stress decentralization and local autonomy together with a diminution of central government authority, in essence continue the earlier policy emphasis, often ignored in practice, on local decision-making.
Thus, for the first two decades of U.S. foreign assistance in Thailand, efforts were made to build up centralized authority and power, while in the past decade attempts have been under way to diminish that power (at least as it relates to economic activities) and to decentralize authority.

AID is not monolithic, and the stress between centralized and decentralized administration became apparent very early, with one report noting:

There are occasional references in USOM [U.S. Operations Mission] documents and conferences to "our policy of promoting decentralization." It is urged that USOM and Embassy clarify the concept and intentions. The evaluators suggest that "decentralization" should not be interpreted or risk interpretation as delegation of significant powers to provinces or districts. It is unlikely that Thai officials envision any such departure from the present unitary system during the next few developmental years. Meaningful villager participation in development and effective coordination of activities at the provincial level and below will be a large and adequate achievement.

In spite of the now proverbial, but often debated, description of Thailand as a "loosely structured social system," since 1950, bureaucratic decentralization has continuously seemed unlikely. The problem of foreign assistance in this context, where donor and recipient have somewhat divergent views of project purposes and each pursues its own predilections, is nowhere more dramatically illustrated than in a current AID-supported project, which in the English-language version was designed to encourage decentralization. In the Thai documentation, however, the objective was stated to be the improvement of local administrative efficiency.

It can be cogently argued that this attempted American shift in emphasis to more local authority over time was responsive to changing objective conditions in Thailand, and that a balance is required between central authority and local initiative. Although this is evident, the earlier successes in strengthening the center now call into question the possibility that in the near term its power can be significantly diminished.

There are those who would argue, however, that this center-periphery dichotomy essentially evades the real question: the continued functioning of a patrimonial system in which foreign aid allows the government "the opportunity to escalate services beyond local capacity without unduly dislocating the existing patrimonial economic system." Local government, it is claimed, is "periphery authority subordinated completely to national direction and interest." In effect, there has been deconcentration of central power, not decentralization to the periphery, and on terms solely determined by the center.

How much the flowering of political action following the student revolution in 1973 may have changed this analysis for that period or thereafter is a question for further study. The development of representative government and local constituencies since that period may have created new
and powerful pressures for decentralization that should be measured. The concept of providing real authority to outlying regions, however, has been a recurring theme of foreign aid organizations over the past decade.

If Thailand has moved to incorporate its physical perimeters, it has also attempted to do so on its social periphery—that is, with the important Chinese minority, a large portion of which is concentrated in Bangkok.

Early AID efforts to assist the private sector came in a period when there were considerable doubts in the Thai bureaucratic community over the political intentions of many of the resident Chinese; and few Chinese, who in the past had permeated the business community and provided much of the entrepreneurial talent, worked in close consort with the Thai authorities.

Although AID did not attempt to work directly with the Chinese community (the Asia Foundation, however, did), and it is doubtful that the Thai government would have approved if in fact this has been suggested, early efforts to assist the private sector in Thailand ($2.8 million) probably benefited that group most. In fact, the gradual integration of Chinese entrepreneurial activities and the Thai bureaucratic culture has proven of benefit to both groups, with the result that it has strengthened the center in the process.

Urban and rural contracts are another aspect of center and periphery relations. Urban in the Thai context essentially means the metropolitan Bangkok area, perhaps the world’s primate city par excellence. Few projects have been formulated to help the Bangkok region, already the richest area of the nation and one in which security is not deemed a particular problem, although there has been one project on urban planning, and some early electrical-generation projects now provide power for the Bangkok grid.

There is a natural tendency for resident foreign assistance programs to be centered on and resident in the capital, thus strengthening the center, for however much funds are to be allocated to rural areas, negotiating, planning, and much administration take place at the nexus of government power. In Thailand, as in many other countries, visibility, promotions, and power in the civil service and in the private sector, as well as the most desirable educational opportunities, are often located at the center. It is not surprising that an early evaluation of the participant training program indicated that 97 percent of the trainees were resident in Bangkok at the time of their selection.

Rural in the U.S. foreign assistance context in Thailand has primarily meant the poorest area of Thailand, the Northeast, which is also the greatest security problem, and then the North. More modest efforts have been devoted to the East and to the South. Rural wealth, however, is in large part located on the central plain, the irrigated rice bowl of the nation. Aside from programs that have included this region as a matter of national geographic coverage, the area has been ignored.
These priorities were reflected in the physical distribution of AID personnel when the program was near its height. In 1969, out of a total U.S. staff of 372, 273 were in Bangkok, 60 in the Northeast, 24 in the North, 7 in the South, and only 6 in the Central Region. The central plain, by far the wealthiest rural region, ethnically Thai, and physically integrated into the country, needed the least amount of assistance.

The problem of attracting the most competent and motivated staff to serve in rural areas, when the psychic and monetary rewards were in the capital, has been a major deterrent to rural progress and has impeded a number of AID projects. When incompetent staff has been so assigned, progress may have been thwarted or even reversed. Conversely, the employment opportunities in Bangkok have siphoned off adventurous talent from the rural areas—especially the Northeast, with one-third of the national population—so that agricultural labor shortages have sometimes occurred where there had been traditional surpluses. In some sense, the Middle Eastern labor market, employing some 300,000 Thai, is intensifying this trend.

The incorporation of the periphery under state control, of course, has had an expected reverse effect: not only has it given government access to those areas, but it has enabled the population of those regions to leave and seek urban opportunities on a permanent or temporary basis, exacerbating the problems—economic, social, and political—of Bangkok. Few countries have been able to deftly balance urban migration and the creation of employment opportunities in rural areas.

U.S. assistance in agriculture has sometimes been national in scope, such as in training, seed production, and research, but insofar as location-specific infrastructure and other projects have been supported, such as those in irrigation and dry-land agriculture, they have been concentrated in the Northeast (with the exception of anti-narcotics activities, which are in the North), and still remain so, for if the insurgency has faded, that region is still the poorest area of the nation.

In some sense, the formation of military bases near market towns in the Northeast has created entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, albeit often of the unsavory kind, but the growth of these towns has attracted other capital, so that many of them have continued to expand even with the closure of bases. The entrepreneurial talent given vent in those areas in a widespread phenomenon in a variety of countries where U.S. bases exist.

The new strategy of AID, discussed below, is not articulated to mitigate the problems of rural and urban income disparities, and any modest program such as that proposed will probably be neutral on the issue overall, attempting to support both rural and urban activities.
5. Elite and Poor

A foreign aid agency faces the tension between helping the masses, those impoverished rural poor susceptible to the appeals of an anti-establishment émeute or insurrection, and working for them through a government that has not been historically prone to sharing power. This remains an unresolved dilemma, vitiating the attainment of many of the goals of the program, and is especially acute if under foreign assistance legislation the beneficiaries are to be the rural masses of poor.

The year that the legislation focusing AID programs on the poor came into effect, the Mission Director wrote:

It is a known fact, disputed only in degree because of the inadequacy of the information available, that during those twenty-three years [of U.S. assistance to Thailand] the poorest segment of the population has benefitted least from all those expenditures.46

Yet it is evident that much was done on behalf of and in the name of the poor, as well as the state, and that Thai planning documents from the beginning noted the need for strong action to assist the poor. Still, as late as 1979, the assessment of the provincial development program, designed to assist the poor, noted that in the first year the benefits to the poor were restricted, that rural people’s participation was “minimal and ill-defined,” and that there was no significant increase in it by the rural population, although there was improvement at the provincial government level.47

The natural tendency for bureaucracies to retain power is in part explicable by applying the concept of limited power (that is, power delegated is power diminished) to the Thai scene.48 The rigidity of Thai bureaucratic institutions has been well documented,49 but the strengthening of such institutions so that they are capable of dealing autonomously with development issues requires the training of people with sufficient backgrounds to use such skills effectively, induced either through in-country programs or abroad. In the Thai context, it is not surprising that such training probably has reinforced the existing social and regional distortions in the country. In spite of a number of detailed evaluations of participant training programs and internal educational efforts, we have little information on the socio-economic backgrounds of those trained, and their classes or place of origin. The assumption was made that these trainees were from the wealthy families, and that this type of investment was required for Thailand’s future development.50 There are massive materials on the efficacy of the training itself and the preparations for it, as well as the uses to which it was put, but on socio-cultural issues little seems to be known, as these questions probably did not seem germane at the time.
AID has, however, attempted to impart skills more consonant with the needs of artisans and farmers through various in-country training projects and activities, but without further evidence it would be premature at this stage to attempt to gauge whether a balance has been maintained or the degree to which such programs provided both social and economic mobility.

It is evident that AID has affected an extremely large percentage of the elite bureaucratic structure in Thailand in a variety of fields. Not only have key institutions been strengthened and expanded, but the numbers of individuals assisted has been vast. "The United States has provided foreign training experience to one in every four of more than 26,000 officials in the four highest classes of the civil service up to March 1974. In the top 'special grade,' two-thirds of officials under age 56 had foreign graduate degrees (mostly from the United States)." An additional 14,000 military personnel were trained with U.S. assistance.51

There is no question that there has been a substantial reduction in the percentage of those living below the poverty line, however that is defined in Thailand. The degree to which this was a product of foreign assistance, economic planning, wise policies, or a general nonspecific improvement in the economy overall is still a matter of speculation and awaits further study.

As a general phenomenon, rapid economic growth, such as Thailand has experienced, is usually accompanied by widening income disparities, although beginning from a higher base. This may be the situation in Thailand, and some of these growing inequities may be attributed to U.S. (and other foreign) aid and capital flows, for such funds are programmed through the central government, and private economic benefits accrue to the capital and to the wealthy as well as to the ultimate (poor) beneficiaries to whom programs are directed.

Although foreign assistance evaluations normally provide evidence of economic change, they usually do not deal with issues of both social and economic mobility—a surrogate, perhaps, for attempting to measure hope in a society. Although such endeavors are difficult to quantify, the issues are sufficiently important and should be assayed in any overall analyses of Thai development.

6. Public and Private

The recent stress in the U.S. foreign aid program on private-sector activities has called into question in some circles earlier programs that placed emphasis on the public sector. In fact, the present, albeit stronger, activity in support of a wide variety of private-sector projects should not obscure the fact that this interest, long embedded in foreign aid legislation, is a recurring emphasis, although one now more strongly postulated.

AID has in the past in Thailand supported the development of both the indigenous private-sector and foreign investment. AID's activities
included a separate private-sector initiative ($2.8 million), technical assistance to the Board of Investment, as well as Cooley loans for joint ventures between U.S. and Thai firms or U.S. subsidiaries in Thailand.

Although the vibrancy of the private sector is recognized by many observers of Thailand, there was in the earlier period of AID’s efforts considerable skepticism both about the effectiveness of past efforts and the future. One observer noted: “The overall record, then [of USOM assistance to the private sector], remains somewhat dismal.” Another writer, in a minority opinion, commented:

The Americans should not exaggerate the advantages of a free enterprise system . . . ; its use in Thailand at the present time will not lead to an equitable and just distribution of the new wealth that will come from economic advancement. As in the past it will merely increase instead of decrease the economic and social gap between the wealthy and lower income groups.

More attention, however, was given to the issue of the Chinese entrepreneurial talent. Riggs felt that Thais could not effectively compete in cost terms with Chinese businessmen, and noted with extreme skepticism what he regarded as the overly optimistic following comments of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) planning team in the late 1950s:

Some Thai leaders have a very real fear that an indiscriminate policy of encouraging industry might lead to dangerous predominance of the Chinese community in this field. The problem is a difficult one. It is clearly desirable to encourage greater participation in industry on the part of Thais. At the same time, any attempt to do so by excluding Chinese from the benefit of Government help is unlikely to produce the economic results which Government industrial policy should aim to achieve. Thailand has been very successful in the past in the assimilation of Chinese into the Thai community, and the most hopeful solution of the problem would appear to lie in encouraging the acceleration of the process.

It is evident that in the earlier period of the AID program in Thailand, the mutual suspicions between the Thai bureaucratic and social elite and the Chinese entrepreneurial community were exacerbated by fears in the Thai bureaucracy that the Chinese in Thailand would be used to help subvert the regime. Although, as the World Bank noted, the Chinese community was better integrated into Thai society at that time than in any other state in Southeast Asia, it was, as one writer put it, “differential assimilation.”

During that period, therefore, most efforts in the private sector would probably have increased the economic advantage of the Chinese community, strengthening antipathies between the two groups, or expanded the role of foreign investment. Unfortunately, the AID project records that are available fail to provide information on the ethnicity of those involved in earlier efforts.
Today, however, what may have been the "overly optimistic" recommendations of the IBRD have turned out to be more nearly accurate than the dire predictions of Riggs. The relationships between the two communities have changed, and indeed there is a degree of integration that promises great advantages for the development of Thailand. There is now, at least in part, a symbiotic association between the two groups, which is even reflected in greater assimilation among the younger members of the same families. The time has never been so propitious in Thailand for private-sector activities that will redound to the benefit of both groups.

The role of the Chinese community in private-sector activities in Thailand should not obscure more general, and indeed controversial, views of the genesis and stress on private economic forces and Thai growth. The Marxist interpretation argues that foreign aid and foreign capital have been the two critical elements in limiting Thai ability to "rationalize," and attributes the private-sector stress to World Bank activity (backed by the U.S.) during the 1957-58 mission, which produced a report recommending that 150 state enterprises be dismantled to stimulate the private sector. The report "was as important in its impact on Thailand's political-economic development as the Bowring Treaty of the mid 1800s."

Although most Western economic specialists writing on Thailand view Thai development and the private sector positively, some argue that the intimate personal ties between government officials and private industry, which are well known, and under Thai law are quite legal, make this public-private dichotomy false.

Under the patrimonial paradigm, the very distinction between the public and private sectors is considered irrelevant:

Hence, all enterprises, with the exception of those which are exempt because they provide the fiscal and national defense base of Thai society, must react substantively to universally valid patrimonial goals. In this interpretation, the old chestnut of whether the public or private sector offers the better prospect for economic development has little relevance, let alone meaning in patrimonial societies (least of all in the Thai patrimonial society).

Another approach that questions traditional thinking about the public-private dichotomy is that related to issues of confrontation and ethnicity in commerce in societies that put a high premium on nonconfrontational social relations. In Thailand, the role of the Mons or the Chinese might be partially explained in the traditional period, or in non-Westernized settings, by this phenomenon. The issue is one that is worthy of more exploration.

The issue of the public versus the private sector in Thailand warrants both further study and a willingness to look beyond traditional sectoral analysis to determine the dynamics of Thai growth and economic success.
7. Administrative Change and Continuity

The continuity of the Thai bureaucratic tradition and its strong cultural roots, as many observers have noted, have made administration and its reform a rather special case among developing countries. Much of the academic literature on the subject in English, now almost two decades old, is subject to revision. With the reorientation of the AID program from public (or development) administration as a whole to problem-oriented issues such as decentralization or provincial development, there seems to have been less theoretical analysis of administrative characteristics.

AID’s contribution to the administrative reform process has included three general categories of support: training (both abroad and in Thailand); the strengthening or creation of institutions that deliver services; and assistance to the centralized support and planning functions of the government.

The first category, in addition to participant training abroad, has included work with the police, academic public administration at Thammasat University, and training for provincial officials. The second has encompassed support for a variety of development agencies and for academic institutions that provide the staff for those agencies. The third, less obvious but important, has included the strengthening of such critical Thai organizations as the Bureau of the Budget, the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Civil Service Commission, and various elements of the planning agencies.

By strengthening the central administration to deal more effectively with development problems, AID increased the already considerable power of the center (albeit by attempting to work with progressive forces), reinforcing traditional bureaucratic values already strongly entrenched, even while it was attempting to change such values. It is not possible here to evaluate the effects of such assistance, and whether the institutions so assisted function along the lines that the donors anticipated, or whether they are “pseudomorphic,” seemingly similar but functioning differently. It is probably safe to assume that AID support enabled those organizations to increase their efficacy within the Thai bureaucratic context, but perhaps in manners that the donor did not imagine.

Thailand has had a long history of autonomous administrative institutions, in contrast to the newly independent states of the region. It is likely, therefore, that increasing the effectiveness of these institutions was much easier than beginning anew in societies without this long, royally sanctioned tradition.

The attribution of change to the influence or support of any one of a number of donors must await study by the Thai academic and bureaucratic communities themselves, for these were and are where such decisions must be made. Funding levels themselves are not necessarily indicative of what has been called “leverage” in either policy or programmatic change. “The
Royal Thai Government has recently demonstrated its willingness to reject external assistance if an alternative course appears better to serve its interests. Thailand seems to be unusual among developing countries in its relative lack of preoccupation with the level of aid. In fact, it is claimed that the Thai "minimize[d] the importance of advice while maximizing total accounts of aid," and put up with some assistance to receive others.

One author doubts that it is objectively possible to judge how much economic planning contributed to growth, but, he notes, "at least it is not claiming too much to say that considerable wastes have been prevented through planning." AID's role in policy formulation is also unclear. "It is not possible to establish direct links between past AID activities and the development of Thai Government economic policies, but there is no question that AID programs have contributed substantially to Thai economic development." Further study jointly by the Thai and foreign development community is required before the effectiveness of these issues can be assayed.

8. The Reorientation of the U.S. Strategy

The recognition of the continuing mutual U.S.-Thai security interests, together with the history of an association that has been built over the years, as well as the development of a more mature relationship between the nations, prompted a reconsideration of the traditional foreign assistance program with Thailand. With excellent economic growth over the past two decades, Thailand was beginning to be classified as an "emerging middle income" state, with a per capita GNP of $790. Thus, it was inevitable that it would become harder for the U.S. to provide grant assistance (which naturally the Thai government wanted for various types of activities, especially technical assistance), and loans would have to be less concessional.

At the same time, financial stringency was causing the U.S. to reduce its aid to many nations in the light of perceived security problems elsewhere that required more support. The problem from a U.S. vantage point was how to demonstrate U.S. concern for Thai growth and a continuing commitment to that nation, and how to do it within reasonable (again, from an American perspective) financial limits, and contribute something that the U.S. was uniquely capable of providing.

At the same time, Thailand had two major economic problems that were of continuing concern. Although it had sponsored an eminently successful family planning program and had cut the birth rate virtually in half, entrants to the labor market were still seeking employment at the earlier rate, and would continue to do so for at least a decade. With the reaching
of the arable land frontier under present financial and technological constraints, there were too few new rural employment opportunities available. Bangkok seemed incapable of gainfully absorbing many more migrants, and the safety valve of Middle East employment might at any time be shut off and had to be considered ephemeral.

Thailand was also facing difficulties in exports. The value of its primary exports, such commodities as rice, tin, rubber, sugar, and cassava, had dropped on the international market, and Thailand had little value-added in its export produce. Unless Thailand could increase its nontraditional exports or significantly increase the volume, quality, and sophistication of its historical exports, it would continue to face severe foreign exchange difficulties as import costs continued to rise.

Concurrent with the signing of a treaty on science and technology between Thailand and the United States in 1984, AID and the Thai government worked out a new strategy for developmental assistance, one that would focus on two of Thailand’s major problems—rural employment and value-added in exports—and would at the same time draw upon the policy initiative in the private sector in the United States while working with the now more closely meshed Sino-Thai private-sector community.

A three-pronged strategy was articulated and approved. Since there were certain to be unanticipated problems in Thai development, a fund was created to allow the United States to respond to these issues through provision of technical assistance or funds to enable the Thai government to address these problems. A second approach, currently in process of project formulation, was to assist the creation of agro-business industries in rural areas to absorb rural entrants into the labor force and provide more value-added for Thai exports. The third approach was to sponsor a major effort in industrial science and technology research, building research capacity and utilization for use by the Thai private sector. The focus of such industrial research would be on export-oriented industries.

The concept is to provide assistance where the United States has something special to offer. It is appealing, but it has met with some resistance within the AID bureaucracy because it is untraditional in approach, in fact depriving some American technical specialists of the possibility of employment in Thailand with AID.

The approval of the strategy is probably the most important developmental conceptual change since the United States first provided assistance to Thailand in 1950. It will take dedication and flexibility on the part of both the Thais and the Americans to make it work, for each in their own way are bound by their own sets of conventions. It is the most promising opportunity yet afforded the United States to assist Thailand in developmental activities without being constrained by issues of security.
9. Unanswered Questions

This short essay has set out a series of issues, but does not attempt to answer them. It has dealt with twists and tensions inherent in the U.S. foreign assistance program, but must, with the time and material available, leave more detailed analysis to later. It has, in addition, not been able to raise a broad range of related issues that should be explored in any credible effort. These include the role of other donors in the process, the actual effects on intended beneficiaries, and the all-important (yet often irresolvable) issue of attribution of results. Many other problems remain to be explored. Whose priorities were paramount (if either were), donor or recipient? Is it in fact possible to deal with economic planning and development separate from military assistance in the Thai case? How has assistance affected the Thai budget and Thai politics; conversely, how have Thai politics influenced the aid program? Has the United States contributed anything that other donors could not? Has the U.S. enabled results to occur commensurate with the level of support?

These and many other issues must await a country study, a joint effort by both Thais and Americans to determine what the lessons are for future relations between the two nations, as well as what this experience teaches us about the development process.

NOTES

I would like to thank participants at the conference for their thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Laurence Stifel was especially helpful. In addition, the detailed comments of Professor Charles Keyes of the University of Washington were provocative and helpful, and many of his ideas were incorporated into the paper. I wish to thank my colleagues in evaluation in A.I.D. for their helpful critiques of the earliest draft.

2. Norman Jacobs, Modernization Without Development: Thailand as an Asian Case Study (New York: Praeger, 1971). In this work, "modernization" is viewed as economic progress within the overall socio-economic structure and bounds of the society; "development" is the realization of the society's potential without reference to such limits.
4. See Permtanjit, op. cit., p. 87, who refers to "strategic non-lending" in which efforts were made to avoid competition with private capital. Whatever the merits of his particular reference, the general point that under scarcity of resources, assistance to a certain field is a type of "developmental triage" is valid in terms of what is omitted. See David I. Steinberg, Irrigation and AID’s Experience: A Consideration Based on Evaluations (Washington, D.C.: AID Program Evaluation Report No. 8, August 1983).


9. See Thompson, op. cit., p. 128: “Thailand lost the incentive to export; the military spending partly replaced the growing export sector, rather than adding to it.”

10. In addition to the AID mission, previously called USOM, U.S. foreign assistance was provided through the Regional Economic Development Office in Bangkok, which funded projects such as the Mekong Committee (UN), the Asian Institute of Technology (also in Bangkok), and other regional institutions contributing to Thai development. AID also centrally funds from Washington, through American institutions, a variety of research projects that have field components. There are, in addition, activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that are developmental. The Export-Import Bank, the Peace Corps, and relief and refugee agencies work through private and voluntary organizations and directly as well. This support does not include U.S. assistance to the multilateral developmental organizations. Statistics are further complicated by different methods of calculation, e.g., obligations as opposed to disbursements, different fiscal years, concessional flows ignoring or capturing loan repayments, etc.

11. Laurence G. Pickering, “The Background to Thailand’s Decision to join SEATO” (Foreign Service Institute and the University of California, Berkeley, June 1, 1960, mimeographed). The Griffin mission visited Thailand during April 4–12 after that authorization. Ten million dollars were also supplied to the French in Indochina. See Randolph, op. cit., pp. 23, 27–29.

12. AID Thai Desk figures.

14. See Table 7 at the end of this article. The figures of U.S. military assistance to Thailand vary considerably, depending on the sources.
18. For detailed studies, see various World Bank reports, such as Thailand Toward a Development Strategy of Full Participation (March 1980). Academic studies lag by at least two years behind IBRD documentation. For a bibliography of English-language studies of the Thai economy to the period of publication, see David Feeny, “Economic Studies of Thailand,” in Eliezer B. Ayal, ed., The Study of Thailand: Analyses of Knowledge, Approaches, and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History, and Political Science (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Papers in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series No. 54, 1978).
19. NSC/64 of February 27, 1950 (quoted in Randolph, op. cit, p. 24) noted that Thailand and Burma “could be expected” to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist regime.
22. Caldwell, op. cit.
24. Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, United States Senate, “Report Regarding Matters in Vietnam and Selected Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern Countries” (May 1968). The academic community often shared this view. For example, see David A. Wilson, The United States and the Future of Thailand (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 147: “In Thailand, U.S. assistance is justified mainly on grounds of security. This kind of justification was appropriate, because, on the one hand, although Thailand’s economic strength is relatively great, on the other hand, the Kingdom is threatened by hostile external powers brandishing the weapons of revolutionary war.” See also Girling, op. cit.
27. Randolph, op. cit., pp. 42–43. In 1954, the program was divided into “technical cooperation” and “defense support.” In the 1955–1959 period, the latter was over five times the former. Ibid., p. 47.
28. GAO, op. cit., p. 18; and AID accounts.
29. Baldwin and Maxwell, op. cit., p. 29, quoting the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC). Randolph, op. cit., pp. 58–59, indicates that support to the Thai police from 1951 until 1957 was in part funnelled through Sea Supply Cooperation, a CIA conduit.

32. AID has conducted two published evaluations of aspects of the ARD program, in addition to those done internally by the Mission. These are: *Rural Roads in Thailand* (Project Impact Evaluation #13, December 1980); and the *The Potable Water Project in Rural Thailand* (Project Impact Evaluation #3, May 1980).


35. For example, see the AID evaluation studies conducted on aspects of Korean rural development, specifically *Korean Irrigation* (Project Impact Evaluation #12, December 1980); *Korean Agricultural Services* (Project Impact Evaluation #52, March 1984); and *Korean Agricultural Research* (Project Impact Evaluation #27, January 1982).


42. Jacobs, op. cit. p. 166.

43. Ibid., pp. 56–57. Even in the ARD program, although its internal organization and functions were designed to assist local decision-making, only one-third of its staff were in Bangkok. Only 13 percent of Thai graduates trained abroad by AID in agriculture were located in rural areas. Randolph, op. cit., p. 222.

44. U.S./AID Program in Thailand, op. cit.

45. This issue of "boom towns" around military bases in the Philippines has been the subject of research for AID by Professor Felix Moos, University of Kansas.

46. Hill, op. cit.


50. Hill, op. cit.

51. Girling, op. cit., pp. 96, 97. Randolph, op. cit., p. 460, indicates that from 1950 to 1975, 14,755 Thai military personnel were trained abroad, of whom 10,276 were trained in the U.S.

50. Hill, op. cit.
51. Girling, op. cit., pp. 96, 97. Randolph, op. cit., p. 460, indicates that from 1950 to 1975, 14,755 Thai military personnel were trained abroad, of whom 10,276 were trained in the U.S.
52. Caldwell, op. cit.
55. IBRD, in Riggs, op. cit., p. 390.
60. For this point, see Brian L. Foster, Commerce and Ethnic Differences: The Case of the Mons in Thailand (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Series No. 59, 1982).
62. See Mosel, op. cit.
63. Operations Evaluation Staff, op. cit.
64. Thompson, op. cit., pp. 29, 18-19.
65. Saeng Sanguanruang, Development Planning in Thailand: The Role of the University (Singapore: Regional Institute for Higher Education and Development [RIHED], 1973), p. 94.
67. Randolph, op. cit., p. 221, argues that ARD succeeded in altering the distribution of Thai government expenditures. In 1962, 36 percent of the Thai government budget went to Bangkok and the Central Plain, and 28 percent to the Northeast. In 1974, the figures were 30 percent and 36 percent respectively, but ARD was only 2 percent of the government budget. Thus, ARD was instrumental in shifting other central government expenditure patterns.

TABLES

Table 1: Total Technical Assistance to Thailand by Source and Type
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Table 3: Technical Assistance by Sector and Source, 1972–1976
Table 4: Technical Assistance to Thailand by Year and Sources, 1951–1982
Table 5: Foreign Assistance
Table 6: Colombo Plan Assistance by Country
Table 7: U.S. Military Assistance to Thailand.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<th>Fellowships</th>
<th>Equipment</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T.C. &amp; NGO</td>
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<td>1,746.8</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>37,281.3</td>
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<td>62,134.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>12.3</td>
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<td>42,041.1</td>
<td>151,034.8</td>
<td>301,897.3</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
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SOURCE: Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC), Royal Thai Government.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>United States Amount (U.S. dollars, in thousands)</th>
<th>United Nations Amount (%)</th>
<th>Colombo Plan Amount (%)</th>
<th>Third Countries Amount (%)</th>
<th>Volunteers Amount (%)</th>
<th>Total Amount (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>5,466.6</td>
<td>4,511.1</td>
<td>4,425.5</td>
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<td>30,341.4</td>
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<td>3,969.5</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>8,071.9</td>
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<td>376.2</td>
<td>376.2</td>
<td>104.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2,132.7</td>
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<td>31,421.4</td>
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<td>5,053.0</td>
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<td>1,801.2</td>
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<td>24,067.1</td>
<td>28,993</td>
<td>20,971.1</td>
<td>8,588.6</td>
<td>280,566.8</td>
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Source: DTEC, Royal Thai Government.
Table 3
Technical Assistance by Sector and Source, 1972–1976
(U.S. dollars, in thousands)

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<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>United States Amount</th>
<th>United Nations Amount</th>
<th>Colombo Plan Amount</th>
<th>Third Countries Amount</th>
<th>Volunteers Amount</th>
<th>Total Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>230.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>61,360.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>36,732.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>32,009.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>34,586.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,728.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>173,416.6</strong></td>
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SOURCE: DTEC, Royal Thai Government.
Table 4
Technical Assistance to Thailand by Year and Source, 1951–1982
(U.S. dollars, in thousands)

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<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>UN</th>
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<th>ASEAN</th>
<th>Other Countries</th>
<th>EEC</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>2,265</td>
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<td>460</td>
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<td>11,488</td>
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<td>3,102</td>
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<td>684</td>
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<td>1,425</td>
<td>868</td>
<td>26,975</td>
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Source: DTEC, Royal Thai Government.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP Current Prices (a)</th>
<th>GDP Constant 1972 Price (c)</th>
<th>Total Government Expenditure (c)</th>
<th>Total Foreign Aid (d)</th>
<th>% (d) of (c)</th>
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**Table 5**

**Foreign Assistance**

*(Baht, in millions)*

*Source: DTEC, Royal Thai Government.*

[ ] = Calculated from data, not given in source.
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**Source:** DTEC, Royal Thai Government.

[ ] = Calculated from data, not given in source.
Table 7
U.S. Military Assistance to Thailand*
(U.S. dollars, in thousands, per fiscal year)

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TOTAL 1,824.2 337.6 1,486.6

SOURCE: U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants-Obligations and Loans Authorizations. A.I.D.

*MAP grants, credit financing, education, transfer of excess stocks, and other grants. These figures are at variance with others published and must be considered conservative.
Thai-U.S. Economic Relations

Sunthorn Hongladarom

Historical Background

It could be said that Thai-American economic cooperation did not really begin until 1950, when the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement was signed by the two governments. The first phase of American technical and economic assistance focused on the improvement of the infrastructure—roads, bridges, ports, and dams—and included the necessary human resources, as skilled technicians were still in short supply in Thailand. The same emphasis was also made by the Thai Government in its first, second, and third Five-Year Economic Development Plans. It was during the period 1950–1965 that the United States began to offer technical training to the Thais in America as well as in Thailand. More than 11,000 Thais have completed such U.S.-sponsored training over the years.

For the next two decades (1965–1985), until major multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) began to supply the capital for major development projects, the United States was the key support for Thailand’s development programs. During this period, nearly $200 million in direct U.S. economic assistance helped to build highways, dams, airports, hospitals, and schools, and to repair war-damaged railways. Additional millions in American aid supported other activities—mostly local public works such as secondary and primary roads and water facilities built by the Office of Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) and Military Mobile Development Units (MDUs).

Beginning in 1950, some American military aid indirectly assisted the building of the Thai economy. Two important examples are the multi-million-dollar Sattahip naval installation, where civilian freight is now containerized in one section of the Royal Thai Navy facility, and the vital Sattahip-Korat highway, which provides easy and rapid access to the Northeast for industries being sited in the Rayong area under the Eastern Seaboard Project.

American assistance to Thailand’s physical development in the 1950s and 1960s was viewed by both Thai and U.S. officials as a wise investment for the future. Greatly reducing the isolation of the countryside, the expenditures on highways, dams, airports, and the like made possible today’s spreading network of rural roads, allowed access to the villages, brought much needed water to the land, and enabled the inflow of teachers, medical workers, and policemen. The early economic programs, which involved several sectors of the economy, also included malaria control and
rinderpest eradication. An attempt was even made to get rid of some endemic maladies such as intestinal diseases prevalent among the Thai population in the Northeast.

Of all the infrastructure projects undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s, those in the fields of water supply and highway construction have probably had the greatest impact. As a result, the yields of rice, the country's most important crop, have substantially increased; and maize, which formerly was grown mainly for domestic consumption, has become a major export commodity for Thailand.

Among the several highways that the American aid program has helped to build in many parts of Thailand, the Friendship Highway deserves special mention. It provided a vital road link and a great outlet for the long-neglected Northeastern region, which has the lowest per capita income and the highest birth rate in the country. While building highways, American contractors trained thousands of Thais in various aspects of engineering and construction. Thai road-builders were enabled to bid on large projects without heavy capital investments through a highway equipment pool established with U.S. aid, which lent them expensive construction machinery.

Air transport was advanced by extensive improvements at seven airports, including Don Muang, Chiang Mai, and Phuket. The funds paid for navigational aids, power supplies, approach and runway lighting, and civil aviation training. American aid also went into the 60-kilometer rail extension from Udon to Nong Khai, completed in 1957, and provided 125 boxcars and a rail traffic control and communication system for the Northeast. By the end of the 1950s, the transportation infrastructure had been greatly improved.

The year 1960 was an important milestone in the political and economic history of Thailand. It marked the beginning of the administration headed by Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who introduced, among other things, the first comprehensive economic development plan for the nation, which aimed at rapid and stable progress of the Thai economy, with special emphasis on the Northeast. This coincided with American strategy both from the economic and security viewpoints.

No region of Thailand bears a stronger imprint from American assistance than the Northeast, which has long been and remains a focal point of U.S. support. The region lacks the fertility of the Central Plains and the abundant resources of the North or South. Its farmers have long been vulnerable to floods and droughts and hampered by land that produces the lowest rice yields in the country. Today, many problems remain in the Northeast, still the country's poorest area, but there have been dramatic strides forward, too. Measured against the conditions of thirty years ago, there is cause for pride in what has been accomplished, and encouragement for future prospects.
In 1950, there were fewer than 800 kilometers of paved highways in all of Thailand. Similarly, electricity was almost nonexistent there except in the big towns. There were scarcities, too, of schools, health care, and other basic needs.

The roads were an essential part of the infrastructure, making it possible for the government to sustain a development effort that brought health care and agricultural services to formerly inaccessible villages. Without the roads, for example, delivery of equipment, training, and information that has made Thailand's family planning so successful would not have been possible.

During this period, too, police stations were established for the first time in many rural areas to provide the security required for development. From 1965 to 1970, the number of such stations at the tambon (subdistrict) level rose from 150 to more than a thousand. U.S. funds helped to finance a 50 percent increase in the number of policemen, as well as improvements in communications equipment, education, and training.

ARD offices were set up in all the provinces of the Northeast, as well as in scattered provinces in the North and South. The ARD effort has helped to bring economic progress and increased security at the village level. Increased resources have made it possible for provincial governors and other local officials to respond to demands for dams, wells, road, and other small-scale construction projects. The stepped-up capacity of the government to deliver such services has given rural Thais more confidence in the ability of the government to project them and provide for their welfare, a particularly urgent consideration, given efforts by insurgents to undermine the trust between the government and the people.

Mobile Development Units (MDUs) were a similar U.S.-supported, security-related activity in the 1960s. Teams of about 120 military and civilian officials were sent to the most remote areas to bring a government presence and help with the compelling economic needs. For many villagers, seeing an MDU in action was the first time they perceived the government as an entity ready and able to help them. And for many officials, their work on these programs gave them their first real understanding of the realities of rural poverty. As these officials moved on to more senior positions in the region, or nationally, they took with them a better appreciation of what needed to be done and how it could be accomplished.

Three decades of hard work in the Northeast have improved the lives of millions of people in ways that cannot be measured. How does one calculate, for example, the value of a bright child getting the schooling he might otherwise have been denied? But clearly, the people and the nation have benefitted from all that has been done. Now there is a base on which to build; the past improvements in basic infrastructure, human resources, security, environment, and governmental capacities make further improvements possible.
Today, development continues in the Northeast in a wide variety of ways, involving both the government and private industry. As in the past, the U.S. government is actively supporting these efforts. For example, USAID has committed some $10 million for "Northeast Rain-fed Agricultural Development" and more than $8 million in grants and loans for small-scale irrigation in the early 1980s. As the Thai Government continues its efforts to help the people of Northeast Thailand better their lives, the United States continues to give its strong backing.

**Human Resources Development**

It is no exaggeration to say that without well-qualified personnel, development efforts will meet with little success. This has been realized by both the Thai Government and the United States, and American aid in this area has been active since the beginning. As a result, by the end of 1982, according to the records of the Thai-American Technical Cooperation Association, some 10,904 Thais had completed degree courses of training programs in the United States or third countries.

Recipients of U.S.-sponsored education and training are now to be found in virtually every branch of the Royal Thai Government, with many in positions of leadership. Perhaps the best gauge of the impact of American-sponsored training is the comparative independence and self-reliance with which most government development-oriented organizations now operate.

Thais have received degrees in everything from public administration to medicine. Thai candidates for degrees in the United States are chosen jointly by USAID and the Thai Government. Degree programs and special training are not new; before 1973, USAID supported the foreign training of 1,100 Thai officers of the Civil Police Administration, about 2,100 Thais for advanced degrees in agriculture-related subjects, and some 1,800 in the field of education. Many others were sent abroad for studies in health, population, and public administration. The length of degree and training programs varies from three weeks to two years, depending on the nature of the study. All recipients of USAID-sponsored studies must serve the Royal Thai Government for a period twice the duration of the study time.

In recent years, fewer Thais have been going to the United States for university study under government-sponsored programs, partly because of the cost of such study and also because of the improvement in institutions of higher learning in Thailand and elsewhere in the region. The current trend is toward more on-the-job training, observation programs, and use of regional institutions such as the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Thailand and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines.
Once recent Washington-funded training project—the Conventional Energy Training Project—is attempting to answer Thailand's need for more know-how in the field of energy. This project offers energy professionals practical firsthand experience at U.S. universities, corporations, and training institutes. Along with academic training, the project includes industrial or research internships with U.S. companies to provide practical engineering, management, and analytical experience in conventional energy specialties.

Concerning family planning and health care, AID's recent emphasis has been on assisting the government with financing training and supplies needed to expand and upgrade the existing service delivery system. Because Thailand now has extensive supplies and implementors, the need for external assistance is limited mainly to the introduction of technology in a few specialized fields. Many of Thailand's foreign-trained doctors, nurses, specialists, and administrators in the public health field received U.S. financial help for their study abroad.

The National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) was set up in 1966 as an offshoot of Thammasat University's Institute of Public Administration, which had been established with USAID support to upgrade and modernize the government's civil service. NIDA plays a crucial role in training Thailand's future leaders in both the public and private sectors. Masters degrees are offered in public administration, business administration, economic development, and applied statistics. Many of the NIDA faculty received their higher educational training in the United States under USAID programs. The establishment of such institutes as NIDA, founded with help from the Ford Foundation, goes a long way toward meeting Thailand's own technology needs. Although most of NIDA's original faculty members were educated abroad, subsequent leaders have been trained only at NIDA. It is another significant measure of Thailand's growing self-sufficiency that the required education and training can increasingly be obtained at home.

In the meantime, American aid has been extended to the improvement of general administration, with an emphasis on fiscal management of the large Thai civil service. However, the Kingdom's governmental organization was not fully prepared for the enormous complexities of development and modernization. Since 1957, USAID has been quietly assisting Thai government efforts to strengthen administrative capacities in such fields as fiscal management, budgeting, statistics, and customs collection.

A wide array of reforms, innovations, and other institutional improvements has been put into effect over the past quarter-century with the help of U.S. technical assistance and training. This American support, coupled with Thai determination to modernize and accept new ideas, has contributed significantly to the government's improved financial controls and its ability to identify, formulate, carry out, and evaluate development policies and programs.
A two-pronged aid approach—involving expert advisory assistance and technical training courses and providing advanced studies in various aspects of public administration, usually in the United States—has served to bolster the capabilities and efficiency of a number of government departments and agencies. Over the years, these have included the National Statistical Organization, the Bureau of the Budget, the Civil Service Commission, the Customs Department, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), the Department of Labor, the Department of Local Administration, the Community Development Department, and units under the Office of the Prime Minister. In some cases, as with the Community Development Department, the National Statistical Organization, and to a large extent the NESDB, American advice and groundwork were key factors in their establishment.

In this long-term aspect of the U.S. assistance program, dealing with inherently sensitive areas where foreign aid is rarely invited, American and Thai officials have shared the conviction that, for projects to be fully effective and overall development hastened, an upgrading of government administrative systems and skills is required. With advances in economic planning, budgeting, accounting, and other fields of management, Thailand has come a long way toward achieving self-sufficiency in administering the multifaceted operations involved in development. Unlike the early days, when most aided projects were initially recommended by foreign agencies, many project proposals now originate with the government itself.

In the beginning stages, the main emphasis was on training and technical assistance to improve the government’s ability to carry out basic operational tasks. In recent years, the main focus has shifted to organizations and processes as close to the development action as possible. This shift coincides with the government’s own efforts to decentralize the decision-making process in development work to ensure more participation at the rural level and more responsiveness to local needs.

Decentralization means allowing more decisions to be made closer to the locations where projects will ultimately be carried out. Specifically, this involves supporting the government’s efforts to increase the role of the tambon councils, strengthening the capacities of district-level officials, and establishing a support system at the local level to better assist and communicate with the rural farmers. A USAID project to support this government initiative, launched in September 1981, will strengthen ability at the tambon and amphoe levels to plan, design, and implement projects and programs based on local needs. Consistent with enunciated Thai government policy, the project seeks to forge closer links at the rural level, with the tambon as the operating project implementor and the district office as the coordinating and supporting pivot. The Decentralized Development Management Project will receive $10.6 million in USAID grants and loans, while the Thai government earmarks an additional $14.2 million. The pro-
ject is initially centered on ninety-seven tambons in ten districts within five Northeastern provinces. Its aim is to provide a successful and easily duplicated model for self-sustaining local development by means of local management of resources, with effective support systems.

Other U.S.-supported rural development projects now under way, such as the Land Settlements Project and the Lam Nam Oon Integrated Rural Development Project, also incorporate various forms of system strengthening. As in the Decentralized Development Management Project, efforts are targeted on strengthening the established frameworks and systems rather than on creating new ones.

In the Land Settlements Project—an attempt to maximize the use of land in eight target settlements—a new approach is being pursued. Extension agents are trained to help organize groups and assure farmer participation in selecting, implementing, and maintaining project activities. Agents also provide guidance in obtaining and making productive use of credit. The project represents a significant innovation for the Department of Public Welfare, which is responsible for carrying it out.

The Lam Nam Oon Integrated Rural Development Project aims at increasing dry-season farm output by means of irrigation in the Lam Nam Oon area of the Northeast while strengthening the concerned Thai agencies and institutions. Multi-agency cooperation—a team effort—is called for at both the national and local levels.

Although U.S. support focuses on the strengthening of institutions at the rice-roots level, USAID also responds to requests for backup assistance in other sectors of government. In 1980, the Bureau of the Budget in Thailand asked for a public administration team to assist with innovations in the planning, budgeting, and accounting system. The U.S. Public Administration Services (PAS) was chosen by the Thai Government and funded by AID in a project beginning in 1980 and ending in 1984.

PAS has a long history of assisting in Thailand’s administrative improvements, having had a major advisory team there for numerous administrative reform projects carried out during the years 1954–1970. Under the present PAS project, the team is working with the government on a system to better link the annual budget with the government’s five-year social and economic development plans. The system would allow the government to assess what has already been accomplished and judge which directions should be followed in the future.

Agricultural Development

In the last two decades, Thailand has embarked upon its industrialization program with some success, but agriculture still remains the economic backbone of the country, and the two sectors have been promoted in parallel. More than three-fourths of the people earn their living from the
land. Rice, corn, tapioca, and a few other agricultural products are the country’s biggest source of foreign exchange earnings. The American aid in this sector has been significant and has helped the country become a leading exporter of agricultural products, especially rice and corn.

Beginning in 1950, assistance to the agricultural sector is one of the earliest and most successful parts of American aid to Thailand. Although the program’s main emphasis in the 1950s and 1960s was on helping to ensure security and stability and on developing the country’s physical infrastructure, which were prerequisites for rural development, the seed improvement efforts in rice and other crops are widely seen as important contributions to Thailand’s agricultural success. The returns were both timely and tangible, to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars in greater export income to help finance the country’s progress. The concerted drive to boost rice yields was especially significant in a country where the growing of rice has always been the most important aspect of rural life.

Despite its critical economic importance as a major export even then, however, Thailand’s rice production in 1950 was confronted with many long-standing problems. Overall output had generally recovered to pre-war levels, but rice yields were low and had been declining since the early years of the century. A Food and Agriculture Organization mission in 1949 estimated that Thailand’s total rice production could be increased by at least 10 percent simply by replacing existing rice varieties with improved breeds.

A central figure in the ensuing effort to do so was American rice-breeding expert Dr. H. H. Love, who was sent to Thailand in March 1950 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the personal request of Insee Chandrastitya, then Director-General of the Department of Agriculture. Dr. Love spent the next seven years in Thailand, first researching local rice seed breeds and then carrying out a rice improvement program that gradually embraced much of the countryside.

By the mid-1960s, almost a third of the area planted was devoted to improved rice varieties. The new breeds not only increased yields by from 10 to 80 percent, but the rice also improved in quality by 10 to 30 percent. The program is generally credited with reversing the trend of declining yields, for after 1950 they began to climb.

While especially valuable in terms of dramatic results, U.S. help in boosting the output of this major food crop was not the only American contribution to Thailand’s agricultural progress. By 1973, the United States had provided a total of $36 million for participation with the government in various farm-level programs and projects, including irrigation, soil and water management, agronomic development, and agricultural credit and marketing.

Work on improving the seed breeds for all of Thailand’s major crops also continues today with the assistance of USAID, in line with the government’s aim of upgrading productivity through across-the-board increases in
yields. Behind this effort lies the government’s priority goal, as stated in the Fifth Five-Year Plan, “to reduce absolute poverty and accelerate rural development in backward areas”—that is, much of the countryside. America’s current assistance in agriculture and rural development is concentrated in the impoverished Northeast, where many of the struggling farmers lack irrigation and must rely on the vagaries of rain-fed cultivation.

A special project called the Northeast Rain-fed Agricultural Development Project (NERAD) was set up, which stresses a multi-disciplinary approach to increasing local farm productivity and income. One of NERAD’s goals is to relieve farmers of their traditional dependency on one cash crop, so that their farms may become more productive and profitable. The NERAD approach has been to use a multi-disciplinary group of primarily Thai Government specialists in agronomy, animal husbandry, forestry, soil, and water management who are best able to advise the farmers on improving their lot. Included are representatives from key departments within the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

These teams expose the farmers to a broad range of new agricultural practices from which they can choose. For example, NERAD encourages farmers to use part of their holdings for cash crops, to section off areas for pastures for livestock and for small fisheries, and to plant fast-growing trees along their property boundaries as sources of cheap energy and as a soil conservation technique.

Crucial to the project’s success is the availability of skilled government personnel to provide quality on-site advice and to convince farmers to adopt alternatives to the traditional single crop. The project thus builds on earlier efforts, particularly training programs.

Other current USAID agricultural projects tend to complement the broad goals of the cornerstone NERAD effort. In fact, NERAD’s approach was influenced by experience gained in USAID’s Agriculture Extension Outreach Project, which was initiated as part of the National Extension Project in 1976, jointly supported by the World Bank, USAID, and the Royal Thai Government, to strengthen and expand the farm services of the Department of Agricultural Extension. The result was the placing of a trained extension agent in every tambon in Thailand.

A vital part of both the Agriculture Extension Outreach and NERAD projects is convincing the farmers of the benefits of experimenting with new farming practices and improved methods of intensifying crop yields and boosting productivity. Agricultural intensification will become more important as Thailand reaches the limits of new arable land, meaning that the larger yields necessary for a still growing population will depend on the farmers getting more production out of their present land.

One of the most important factors in crop intensification is better seeds. After the milestone work of Dr. Love and his staff in the 1950s, USAID’s next Seed Development Project, the first stage of which was com-
pleted in 1982, led to the establishment of four modern seed-processing plants and the training of project personnel. They are now turning out improved seeds for six major Thai crops—rice, maize, sorghum, peanuts, mung beans, and soybeans—which spurs gains in other agricultural projects. The second phase of the Seed Development Project seeks to upgrade management efficiency in the seed industry, introduce farmers to the new seeds, and respond better to farmer and market needs. The project also stresses private-sector involvement in seed production.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of USAID’s agricultural efforts is the Mae Chaem Watershed Development Project. USAID has allocated $10 million to the Mae Chaem project, with the Thai Government providing another $11.8 million. The slash-and-burn migratory farming methods of the northern hill-tribes and their occasional participation in opium growing have long posed problems. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej originally proposed the sensible long-term solutions of crop substitution and an improved standard of living for the hill-tribe people, so as to pave the way for their integration into the social and economic mainstream of Thai society.

Public Health and Family Planning

All the development efforts made by Thailand with the active support of the United States would have been of little avail if the ancillary measures in the fields of public health and family planning had not been taken at the same time. In addition to big budget funds allocated by the Thai Government, the U.S. has helped to finance a wide variety of health activities over the years, ranging from basic sanitation projects at the village level to the establishment of the Medical School at Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand.

Two crucially important efforts receiving the most substantial American help are the government’s anti-malaria drive and its highly successful population planning program. Between 1951 and 1969, USAID allocated some $21 million to malaria control in the provinces, though results were uncertain due to uncontrollable factors. The startling increase of malaria cases in Thailand in the late 1970s sparked renewed concern and prompted a new USAID project that began in August 1979 and ended in September 1983.

USAID’s malaria control project, which received a $4 million loan and a $500,000 grant, emphasized the early interruption of the parasite transmission in the human host rather than malaria eradication through environmental means. A network of 250 malaria treatment clinics, with a cadre of 20,000 village malaria collaborators, was in operation by the end of the project. The strategy allowed villagers with malaria symptoms to receive immediate treatment from either the village collaborators or from the malaria clinics.
Thailand’s family planning program, one of the most successful in the developing world, has long been a USAID priority. Since adopting population control as a national policy in 1970, the Kingdom’s population growth rate has declined dramatically, from more than 3 percent annually to less than 2 percent by 1982. But even at this current rate, Thailand’s population will double in thirty-five to forty years. Better family planning methods continue to have an important place in the country’s overall development strategy, since a rapidly expanding population is a major barrier to economic gains.

The need for continued family planning program support from USAID has been made more pressing by a reduction in aid from other foreign sources. At this crucial juncture of Thailand’s family planning program, only USAID and, to a limited extent, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and Japan appear to be likely sources of funding for contraceptive supplies and related assistance.

Concern over Thailand’s growing population prompted the Thai Government in 1970 to declare family planning a necessity and to adopt it as national policy. Programs were initiated in 1971 and written into the Third Five-Year Plan for 1971–76. After some limited success, the Thai Government increased its commitment to family planning, making available more than $20 million during the Fourth Five-Year Plan (1976–81).

Total spending on family planning during this latter period was $55.7 million, with the balance of funds coming from USAID, UNFPA, and a number of intermediary agencies. This sizable sum, plus the socio-cultural and religious factors that have combined to make the Thai populace unusually receptive to birth-control activities, accounts for the notable success in reducing the population growth rate to less than 2 percent by 1982, ahead of target.

USAID has actively supported government efforts to reduce population growth since shortly after the national program began. During the first five-year project (1971–76), USAID financed oral contraceptives participant training, technical assistance, and medical kits, with total project expenditures amounting to about $48.3 million.

In accord with the government’s subsequent stepped-up commitment to population planning, USAID contributed substantially to renewed efforts during the Fourth Five-Year Plan. Following up on the earlier project, U.S. assistance financed the procurement of oral contraceptives, medical kits, and the training several categories of village-level health workers. In addition, USAID helped in a major effort to expand voluntary surgical contraception (VSC) services by providing institutional reimbursements to VSC service hospitals and support for VSC mobile information and service teams. Total support for this project, completed in 1982, was $16.5 million.
The government emphasized its commitment to population control by hiking the family planning budget eightfold in fiscal year 1982. Another 10 percent increase was set for fiscal year 1983, in support of a national goal of lowering the annual population growth rate to 1.5 percent by 1986.

One emphasis during the 1980s has been to extend and strengthen family planning information and services nationwide, particularly in remote rural areas. USAID family planning support is to total $18.5 million for fiscal years 1982–87. USAID helps to provide contraceptive supplies and medical kits, training support, technical assistance, and financing for program research.

Another major health program receiving American aid in the 1980s is the Rural Primary Health Expansion Project, which is jointly financed by a consortium of the Royal Thai Government and USAID with the World Bank, Norway, Australia, and Canada. With a substantial total budget of $68 million, the project is aimed at a nationwide expansion of Thailand's rural primary-health care system.

USAID's contribution of a $5.5 million concessory loan is helping to train 97,000 auxiliary health workers in twenty of the poorest provinces. Instead of assisting in construction and equipment, the consortium decided that USAID's most valuable contribution to the project would be in the field of training, capitalizing on its many years of experience with Thailand's rural health-care network.

Under this program, USAID has been financing the training of hundreds of nurse-practitioners who perform routine medical services at district hospitals and hundreds of auxiliary midwives and junior sanitarians who staff health centers, as well as health assistants who are assigned mainly to family planning units. Thousands of health volunteers were also trained in basic preventive and curative health; and 100,000 village health communicators were trained in essential public health measures.

The end result of this ambitious effort will be measurable improvement in the health and medical services available to the rural population.

An Analysis

Thailand's economic development during the last three decades has been called a success story. To this end, American aid has made a significant and direct contribution, and at the same time it has also indirectly helped to promote the security of the country and the region.

As mentioned earlier, the first phase of the aid touched upon several sectors of the economy at the same time. The total funds available each year were substantial, but as the problems were also quite numerous and serious, one wonders whether the aid might have had greater impact if efforts had been concentrated on the most urgent and major problems first. Take, for example, public health, which rightly has been a project of high priority since
the beginning. But public health in its widest sense is a vast and long-term program. An attempt was made from the beginning to tackle even such endemic maladies as intestinal diseases prevailing among the people in the Northeastern region of Thailand due mainly to malnutrition, but the solution of this problem lies primarily in the improvement of general education and the standard of living rather than on a quick direct attack.

In addition the annual allocations of American aid have fluctuated from year to year and period to period. For instance, during the period from 1967 to 1971, the amount of assistance decreased considerably, and the figures between 1980 to 1983 rose sharply, doubling in four years. This has made it somewhat difficult for the Thai authorities, because once the budget allocations are approved by the National Assembly, there is not much room for the various Thai agencies concerned to make quick adjustments. It would of course be of greater benefit if the aid funds were steady, even if the yearly increase were not very big. The prospects are that the yearly increase will be about 10 percent a year for the next four years.

It is good to be innovative and flexible, and it is encouraging to note that the American authorities concerned with the aid programs in Washington as well as in Bangkok possess such qualities. However, it is also very important that the efforts be persistent and sustaining. Thailand is in a developing stage. Certain basic programs such as land reform, seed multiplication, family planning, and primary health care are absolute necessities. To achieve success in these fields, vigorous and sustained efforts are indispensable, and therefore the necessary funds both from the American aid program and the Thai Government budget should be available without any disruption over a long period. There are good reasons to believe that the Thai Government will not relax its efforts in these vital projects, which enjoy a high priority in its national development plan.

Another important aspect of the aid program which should be taken into account is the composition of the aid funds. These are three main components—namely, office expenses, including salaries; technical personnel; and equipment and commodities. A good balance in the weight of these three categories of expenditure is of great and lasting importance and should be attempted. As pointed out earlier, over 11,000 Thai officials have been given technical training in the United States as well as in Thailand in the special institutions of higher learning which the United States has helped to set up. It is probably timely that less funds be spent on technicians from abroad so that more funds will be available for the much needed equipment and commodities. In fact, the task of recruiting technicians now is the sole responsibility of the Thai Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation.

This brings us to the vital question of the best composition of the two main components of U.S. cooperation—namely, the so-called grant aid and capital assistance. At present the grant aid percentage is declining and that
of capital assistance is growing proportionately. This means that the Thai Government will have to bear an increasing burden in repaying its debt, though one must admit that the terms are not stringent. As the overall economic policy of the Thai Government is to develop as fast as possible and maintain stability at the same time, which I believe is good for all concerned, it will be a great help if the Thai Government is not required to siphon off too big a chunk of its budget to service foreign debts from different sources, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It seems to me that to help lighten the burden of debt repayment, the assistance in, for example, the field of technology transfer, should be purely grant aid.

During the last thirty-odd years, Thailand has adopted a cautious and prudent financial policy, and as a result the rate of inflation has been under control and a satisfactory degree of stability has been maintained. At the same time, a reasonable rate of growth is also desirable, and accordingly a system of priorities has been set up. As pointed out earlier, the first phase of planned development focused on the improvement of the infrastructure, and later the emphasis changed. All this is now embodied in the present national Five-Year Economic and Social Development Plan formulated under the direction and supervision of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board.

In the process of formulating these plans, NESDB has sought the cooperation of both American and Thai experts from several institutions, backed up by several studies on several specialized subjects conducted by qualified consultants. One can say, therefore, that the plan by and large reflects the real needs of the country and pinpoints the problems involved during the period that the plan is designed to cover. It would therefore be to the benefit of the interested parties to give due consideration to the plan; and as the total funds available from the national budget are limited and controlled for the sake of stability, additional funds available for the implementation of the plan undoubtedly will be a great help.

No one can deny that the American aid program has made a significant contribution to the economic and social development of Thailand. It is also fair to say that it has not been a one-sided affair. During the last three decades, American exports to Thailand have increased by leaps and bounds. Roughly speaking, during the years 1959 to 1983 the value of American exports rose more than twenty times, and it can be expected to grow even more, since Thailand has been able to maintain an average rate of economic growth of about 6 percent a year for the last two and a half decades. So it is true to say that aid fosters bilateral trade as well as friendship and international understanding. Put another way, one could say that the American aid program is a wise long-term investment. It should therefore be continued—and increased if possible—for lasting friendship as well as long-term mutual benefit.
III.
Trade and Investment
Thai-U.S. Trade and Investment Policies

Prok Amranand

Thailand and the United States are situated on opposite sides of the globe. Culturally, too, we are far apart in many respects. But modern technologies have helped to narrow the geographic gap considerably. For businessmen, knowledge of and adaptability to market conditions, including sales methods and consumer preferences, however complex they may be, can be acquired relatively fast. But the cultural gap remains wide, and only time, patience, and determined efforts on both sides can help to narrow it down.

The cultural gap which I am referring to is not so much a language barrier as a lack of understanding about traditional ways of doing business: knowing how those on the other side think and how to interpret and react to given situations in the other country. Because of this gap, each side tends to superimpose its own philosophy, business criteria, and ways of doing things on the other, which results in misjudgment, anger, frustration, and even despair in the course of their business relations. The Thais tend to build a "little Thailand" in the United States, while the Americans tend to think that Thailand is a mini United States.

This cultural gap has become increasingly evident as the United States has made larger and more long-term investments in Thailand, and also as Thailand has gotten more involved in the American domestic market, thereby encroaching upon the vested interests of domestic industries.

One area in which there is a dearth of understanding is the legal aspect of business. The complexity of American laws and regulations governing international and domestic trade is beyond the comprehension of most Thai businessmen. This not only results in their unintentional violation of laws, but also leads them to feel that they have been betrayed.

The most recent example of this occurred in 1984, when the American textile and garment industries filed a petition with the United States International Trade Administration which charged that the Thai government subsidized its textile and garment exports and which therefore requested the Administration to impose countervailing duties on textiles and garments from Thailand. After a few months of investigations by the Administration, it was provisionally determined that Thailand did in fact subsidize those exports, and therefore duties would be imposed.

The immediate reaction in the Thai government and industries was: "How could the United States do this to us? After all, we have been friends and allies for over one hundred and fifty years!" These angry reactions
could have been prevented if there had been a better understanding of the American trade laws, which give the Administration no choice but to proceed according to established procedures once a petition is properly filed.

There are indeed a multiplicity of rules and regulations related to trade in the United States, and to outsiders it is not easy to know in advance which laws the domestic industries will use against import interests. But if Thai businessmen wish to expand or even maintain their share of the vast and growing market in the United States, they need to be fully familiar with the rules of the game, however complicated and changeable these may be.

Apart from numerous federal laws and regulations dealing with trade and related matters, there are countless state laws and regulations about which our exporters need to know. The concept of state autonomy within the federation is unfamiliar to Thailand, where administrative power is largely centralized. For this reason, Thai businessmen were unpleasantly surprised last year when their packaged rice, after having been passed by the United States Customs Service, was forcibly removed from retailers' shelves in certain states because it did not meet state nutrition requirements. Having imported the same rice to those states for years without a problem, the Thai businessmen interpreted the sudden application of the state nutrition rules as a tariff barrier. But whatever motive lay behind the enforcement, the rules were the law of the land. The changeability of legislation in the United States has amazed Thai officials and businessmen no end. It is true that, in most cases, legal amendments have to go through a long process of public hearings, but it is also true that floor amendments can be introduced by a U.S. Senator and, in the absence of opposition, can be appended to a bill as a rider, thus becoming law without having to go through the usual hearing process. This is one of the prerogatives of a Senator, but it is almost impossible to get Thai businessmen to believe that such things can happen under the American democratic system.

Last year, when I was involved in the defense against the combined efforts of the American tuna fish industry to bar imports from Thailand and other countries of canned tuna packed in water, we were faced with a classic case of dealing with American trade laws and legislators. I shall mention some aspects that may be of general interest.

In late 1983, we learned that a very influential law firm was preparing a case against Thailand for submission to the United States International Trade Administration (ITA), demanding that the U.S. Administration impose a countervailing duty on the importation of canned tuna on the ground that the Thai government gave subsidies to the canned tuna exporters. We therefore actively organized our defense in that arena. But then the petition was filed in early 1984 with the International Trade Commission (ITC) against tuna exporters from all countries on the ground that imports had substantially caused injuries to the domestic tuna industry. So
the rules of the game and the arena were suddenly shifted from what we had been expecting. The next step was for the International Trade Commission to collect information through an extremely detailed questionnaire to be formulated by the ITC staff. We did not sit back and simply wait for the ITC staff to compile information, analyze it, and come to its own conclusions. Representing the Thai and other canned tuna exporters, we got involved from the start with the ITC staff in the process of formulating the detailed questionnaire, to make sure that information requested by the ITC would not be onesided.

We also engaged outside experts to prepare scientific and economic studies and presented them to the ITC, to show that injuries to the domestic industry were not caused by imports but by other factors, such as the preference of tuna fish for warm water, the change in the direction of the warm current in the Pacific Ocean, excessive investments in American tuna boats which had to be paid for with high-interest loans, the very long distance that the tuna boats had to travel to the fishing grounds, generating exorbitant costs for fuel and crews, and, of course, various cost components in producing a can of tuna by an average American packer.

At the same time, we became a coordinator for the American importers and overseas exporters to make sure that appropriate replies to the questionnaire were sent to the ITC. This was indeed vital, because if the replies were not prompt, accurate, and consistent, the authorities might use information supplied by our opponents. Our office in Washington, D.C., was in touch with the ITC office practically twenty-four hours a day, in order to supplement, verify, and clarify the information that the ITC received from various sources. We also could not afford to have any of our clients volunteer information to the ITC in a way that made it look like we were trying to promote sales or investment for Thailand.

On the day of the public hearings, our opponents, who had engaged one of the best public relations firms, came with busloads of men from the tuna industry whose canneries had just been closed down, to demonstrate their support for the move against us. They also had important personalities, including two Congressmen and one Senator, to testify against us. Of course, we had prepared to counter them. Finally, despite the well-financed and powerful efforts against us, we won the case by an overwhelming majority of the ITC members, who voted that imports were not the substantial cause of injuries suffered by the American tuna industry.

But the attack against the canned tuna imports did not end there. The combined interests of American canneries, labor groups, and the tuna boat industry refused to give up easily after having spent nearly a million dollars to keep us out of the market.

Having failed to win the case through the executive branch, the U.S. tuna interests turned to the U.S. Congress and sought to change the law to increase the rate of import tariff to such a prohibitive level that no canned
tuna could enter the United States. In fact, we had known that the U.S. tuna industry had been lobbying hard in Congress and had gotten four influential Senators ready to propose a floor amendment to one of the revenue or trade bills that would be coming up to the Senate before the election in 1984. This was now the third arena in which the tuna fight took place, and the rules of the game were no longer based on legal or economic arguments but on politics.

In Thailand, it would be considered a serious interference in the internal political process for a foreign business interest to lobby with Thai members of Parliament. But in the United States, this is not only normal but expected. When we contacted the U.S. Senators and their staff individually, they welcomed us and appreciated receiving facts and figures from us, as we had given them a balanced picture of the tuna issue and the negative effects that could arise if the import tariff were increased.

On September 17, 1984, in the U.S. Senate, a Senator from California proposed a floor amendment to a trade bill for the Senate’s immediate consideration, seeking an increase of the import tariff on tuna from 6 to 35 percent. The other Senator from California, a Senator from Alaska, and both Senators from Hawaii supported the amendment. On the other hand, both Senators from New Jersey stood up to oppose it, citing various arguments that were based on information supplied by us. After two hours of debate, the Senate rejected the amendment by a large margin, 73 votes to 22.

If other Senators had not been prepared for the surprise and had not been well-informed on the various ramifications of the amendment, it might have passed the Senate with ease. This was precisely what happened the next day, when an amendment to increase the import tariff on wine was introduced and passed by the Senate. The European wine exporters were greatly upset, but it was too late.

There are several lessons that Thai businessmen can draw from the tuna case. First, they have to know the decision-making mechanisms and the centers of influence in the United States. Second, they have to be fully alert to any possible adverse move against their interests. And third, they have to be familiar with the U.S. laws relevant to their interests, even if this means that specialists have to be brought in. In short, there is no cheap way to develop long-term business in the U.S.

So far, I have mentioned certain kinds of difficulties faced by the Thai side in understanding American ways of doing business and getting things done. For the Americans, too, there are a number of cultural barriers that divide us.

When I was the Thai Ambassador in Washington, D.C., a top executive of a multinational firm on the West Coast shared with me his grave concern that his company had invested heavily in Thailand for over a decade but that there had constantly been unresolved problems with the Thai
authorities. He admitted that he still could not comprehend the Thai mentality, and expressed the fear that his company's large investment could be in jeopardy.

I am sure there are a number of American businessmen who could not get beyond first base with their Thai counterparts and decided to give up before concluding a deal simply because of the cultural gap. On the other hand, there are many American businessmen who are very successful in Thailand, but they may not wish to reveal all their secrets concerning how to overcome the cultural problems. With diffidence, I shall venture to offer some of my personal thoughts on this subject.

Characteristically, the Thai people are very sensitive, although they do not usually display their feelings. They can easily be offended by an innocent American who is not well-informed of Thai customs. For instance, an American visitor can offend senior Thai officials as soon as he sits down on a chair, even before he opens his mouth, simply because of the way he sits, which by Thai customs may be disrespectful. There are many other ways to hurt their feelings unknowingly, but the Thai are always polite and keep smiling, while the Americans tend to take the politeness and smiles at face value.

For centuries, commercial transactions among the Thai people have been based on personal trust and family connections, and not on airtight, detailed contracts or legal commitments. Mutual trust has been the foundation of business dealings, large and small. Therefore, when American visitors come well-armed with high-powered lawyers, they can frighten away their Thai counterparts, who may take it as an insult, a display of distrust. In an extreme case which I encountered recently, the negotiations were called off after months of friendly talks without lawyers. The breakdown came as the deal was about to be closed when the American side, flanked by lawyers for the first time, appeared with a set of bulky contracts. The atmosphere suddenly changed to one of unfriendliness and overcaution. From then on, every word uttered was viewed with suspicion by the Thai side. Although the American lawyers kept repeating that provisions in the contract were in the standard form, they failed to realize that to the Thai businessmen the standard form is not bulky contracts but a clear demonstration of mutual trust at all times.

Being a lawyer myself, I certainly wish to see Thai businessmen using more legal services. In fact, many local businessmen in Thailand with international contacts do utilize plenty of legal services, but Thai lawyers, in contrast to their American counterparts, usually maintain a low profile, although their role is as crucial as that of their American counterparts in business negotiations.

About how to get things done in Thailand, many Americans have been told that one must see the Prime Minister or certain army generals. In believing this, American businessmen tend to ignore the permanent civil
servants who have the real and sustained administrative power. By going over their heads, the American businessmen take the risk of making enemies out of people on whom they have to depend in the long run.

I could go on citing more examples of incidents which show the cultural gap. Such incidents, in my view, should be useful lessons in helping us to bridge the gap. For Thais to understand the complex administrative and political systems of the United States, an organization such as the Thailand-U.S. Trade Council, recently established in Washington, D.C., with an office in Bangkok, can certainly be helpful; and for Americans to gain a better appreciation of Thai culture, an organization such as the American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand can be equally helpful.
U.S.-Thai Investment and Trade

James P. Rooney

Overview

Thailand occupies a strategic position in Southeast Asia. Today, it has a population of approximately 50,000,000 distributed over a land area of 514,000 square kilometers (198,000 square miles), nearly the same size as France. The population density is less than 100 persons per square kilometer; however, nearly one-seventh of the population lives in the capital city of Bangkok. Bangkok is the political, administrative, and economic center of the country.

Politically, Thailand has enjoyed an extended period of stability since 1979. The current coalition government served its full term, and a general election was held in accordance with the Constitution. However, in previous years the political scene was different. Since 1932, Thailand has seen thirteen constitutions, fourteen general elections, fourteen coups d'état, and forty-two cabinets.

Despite the image of political instability suggested by the frequency of changes of government, Thailand has demonstrated remarkable stability. It is important to recognize that the changes of governments and cabinets did not lead to drastic changes in policies as in other countries. In fact, most new governments strongly reaffirmed the policies of their predecessors. In particular, new governments were quick to issue statements confirming their support of foreign investment.

The inherent stability of Thailand is due to a number of factors. Unlike its neighbors, Thailand has never been colonized. Thus, Thailand has developed its own administrative system which is uniquely Thai, as opposed to inheriting an imposed system left by a departing colonial power. Thailand is a kingdom; and the monarchy, highly revered throughout the country, is a strong unifying factor which binds the country together at all levels. Thailand enjoys religious unity, as the population is 95 percent Buddhist. Finally, everyone speaks or understands the Thai language.

The Thai military has played a key and influential role in the complex nature of Thai politics. Military regimes have ruled the country for several decades. The position of the military remains strong, and it will always be an active element.

Another contributor to continuity has been the civil bureaucracy, which has remained in place during the various changes and has provided
needed stability by administering the functions of government in times of change. As a result, the bureaucracy has gained substantial strength and influence.

In its external relations, Thailand has historically aligned itself with the West. Relations between Thailand and the United States were established over 150 years ago.

In general, the Royal Thai Government is credited with a cautious and conservative handling of the economy. However, the maintenance of the coalition has required the Government to accept compromises on a broad range of issues, notably with regard to energy and the support price for rice. The Government has made major efforts to improve cooperation and communication between the private and public sectors.

Two of the foremost recognized problems of the future are income inequalities between geographic regions and occupational groups, and the concentration of resources in the Bangkok metropolitan area. Programs are under way to address these problems.

On the economic front, local interest rates fell in 1983 and credit was readily available. Consumer energy prices were reduced and the marketplace was confident that the foreign markets would recover. The combined effect of these factors resulted in a construction boom, higher consumer spending, and a rapid growth in imports. The agricultural sector began to recover; however, international prices have remained low.

Certain constraints on potential growth became more evident in 1984. A major and chronic problem has been the increasing trade deficit, which rose to U.S. $3.8 billion from U.S. $1.6 billion in 1980. The Government reduced the limit on commercial credit growth from 33 to 18 percent and limited import letters of credit to the level of the previous year. This limit has recently been lifted as the prime lending rates have increased and the tighter monetary policy has begun to have an impact on the manufacturing and construction sectors.

Traditionally, the Thai baht has been pegged to the U.S. dollar. This linkage, coupled with trade and current account deficits, led to a devaluation from approximately baht 20.45 per $1.00 to baht 23.05 per $1.00 in 1981. The baht was unpegged and officially tied to a basket of currencies managed by the Bank of Thailand, the central bank. However, the baht continued to follow the U.S. dollar. In November 1984, the baht was again devalued to baht 27.05 per $1.00. Currently, the value of the baht is again established by a trade-weighted basket of currencies.

Inflation continued to fall during 1983, ending the year at below 4 percent. Upward pressures exist, but the inflation rate has remained low.

Over the long term, Thailand shows the potential for significant growth. The agricultural base can be substantially increased in terms of productivity by the application of new and improved technology and methods. It is estimated that current agricultural output could be tripled. The
labor force is young, mobile, and well-educated. The experience of labor-intensive investments has shown that the labor force is easily trained and productive. Underemployment is more of a problem than unemployment. Significant development in the energy sector has allowed Thailand to partially reduce its dependency on imported petroleum products, perhaps the most critical element in the trade and current-account balances.

Potential long-term problems are fiscal policy and foreign loans. Traditionally, the Government has relied on a narrow tax base, meeting budget deficits through local borrowing and some offshore debt. Foreign debt service has increased, and the Government has initiated strong measures to control and reduce foreign debt.

The agricultural sector has provided the basis for Thailand’s growth, accounting for 21.8 percent of the Gross National Product (GNP) in 1983. Approximately 75 percent of the population works in agriculture. Manufacturing accounted for 18.6 percent of the GNP in 1983, and the target is for manufacturing and agriculture to share equal percentages. The manufacturing sector employs approximately 7 percent of the population. It is interesting to note that agriculture’s share of the GNP has declined from 25.4 percent in 1980 to the 1983 figure of 21.8 percent. Of the remaining sectors, transportation and communications account for 7.9 percent, wholesale and retail trade for 19.0 percent, services for 10.6 percent, and others for 22.1 percent for 1983.

The annual percentage increase in the GNP was 10.1 percent in 1983, compared to 23.1 percent in 1980, 13.7 percent in 1981, and 7.2 percent in 1983. Per capita GNP at current prices has risen from $707 in 1980 to $738 in 1981, $735 in 1982, and $793 in 1983. There is disparity in the per capita income figure, as the per capita income in Bangkok is four times higher than in the rest of the country.

The base of Thailand’s industrial sector has been the processing of primary commodities. Thailand is not an industrialized country and lacks the capability to produce capital goods. Nevertheless, this sector has grown rapidly and is broadening its base. The leading areas are manufacturing, construction, infrastructure, and utilities. Within the manufacturing sector, the principal products include petroleum products, cement, sugar, textiles, integrated circuits, garments, rubber products, gem cutting, and base metals. The production of integrated circuits started in 1973 and has shown impressive growth, ranking among the top ten exchange earners. Both garment production and gem cutting benefit from the dexterity and productivity of the Thai labor force as well as from lower comparative operating costs in Thailand.

Thailand is rich in natural resources. Tin is the primary product, followed by tungsten, fluorite, antimony, barite, manganese, and zinc. Thailand also has substantial reserves of lignite, gypsum, potash, and rock salt. The country has rich deposits of precious and semi-precious stones.
Natural gas was discovered in the Gulf of Thailand in the mid-1970s, and reserves are estimated at about 11 trillion cubic feet. Oil has been found onshore, and there is limited production.

The financial market is served by sixteen local and fourteen foreign banks, approximately thirty representative offices, and over one hundred finance companies. Four local banks control 70 percent of all commercial business, while the fourteen foreign banks account for only 5 percent of the total. The money market is relatively unsophisticated in terms of both breadth and depth. There are several Government institutions, among which the most important to foreign investors is the Industrial Finance Corporation of Thailand, which provides long-term funds. Insurance companies are another source of long-term funds. The domestic stock market gives a 10 percent tax break to listed companies, but the market is still rather thin. The foreign exchange market is controlled, but not onerously so. Remittances of dividends, royalties, and interest are not a problem, but are subject to a withholding tax.

Over the past few years, the financial condition of a number of finance companies and one commercial bank has required Government action and intervention implemented by the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Thailand. These problems are being resolved as efforts to restore confidence in certain sectors of the market are proving effective. There is also a substantial unorganized market, which the Government is now trying to bring under control.

In general terms, the Government is becoming more mature and sophisticated in handling and managing problems in this sector.

**Trade with the United States**

The United States is Thailand's second largest trading partner, following Japan. In terms of exports from Thailand to the United States, the gap is narrowing somewhat as follows:

(U.S. $–millions)

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Other major trading partners, in order of 1983 exports, are: Netherlands (691); Singapore (518); Hong Kong (317); Malaysia (285); West Germany (221); Saudi Arabia (184); United Kingdom (132); and Nigeria (126).

In terms of imports, again Japan is in the lead; but in this case the gap is increasing, as follows:
Other major trading partners in order of 1983 imports are: Saudi Arabia (1,046); Singapore (588); Malaysia (551); West Germany (450); Taiwan (288); People’s Republic of China (251); and South Korea (226).


The major imports from the United States consist of machinery and parts (including electrical goods), chemicals, plastics, and cotton. Machinery and parts increased by 4 percent from $368 million in 1980 to $383 million in 1983. Chemicals increased by 100 percent from $49 million in 1980 to $96 million in 1983. Plastics increased by 41 percent from $64 million in 1980 to $90 million in 1983. Cotton decreased by 20 percent from $88 million in 1980 to $70 million in 1983.

**Foreign Investment**

Recently, foreign investment has played a rather limited role in Thailand’s economic development, accounting for less than 5 percent of private gross fixed-capital formation in 1982. The official policy of the Thai Government is and has been to welcome foreign investment, as is evidenced by the legal provisions for attractive tax benefits and other privileges.

The mechanics of investment are relatively straightforward. A foreign investor may choose from several forms of legal organization, including sole proprietorship, three types of partnerships, private limited companies, public limited companies, joint ventures, and branches of foreign companies. The most common form of organization used in Thailand is either a private limited company or a branch of a foreign company.
There are three laws which usually concern foreign investors: the Alien Business Law, the Alien Occupation Law, and the Immigration Act.

The Alien Business Law prohibits aliens from engaging in certain business activities and requires permission to be received to conduct certain specified businesses. The law by no means affects or restricts all kinds of commercial operations. A few service businesses, such as law, architecture, and accounting, are prohibited to aliens, and certain others require licenses. Aliens are at liberty to engage in most types of business without getting permission under the Alien Business Law.

U.S. investors are not generally subject to the restrictions imposed by the Alien Business Law, thanks to the Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations between Thailand and the U.S. signed in 1968. This treaty is effective in perpetuity, but may be terminated by either party on one year's prior notice. The treaty provides that businesses incorporated in the United States or in Thailand that are majority-owned, controlled, and managed by U.S. citizens shall be accorded national treatment. This means that U.S. citizens can engage in business in Thailand on the same basis as Thais—with certain exceptions, which include communications, transport, exploitation of land and natural resources, banking, and domestic trade in indigenous agricultural products.

The Alien Occupation Law requires all aliens working in Thailand to obtain work permits. Furthermore, all aliens are subject to provisions of the Immigration Act, which controls the conditions under which aliens may reside in Thailand.

As a practical matter, serious foreign investors do not normally encounter problems in obtaining work permits or permission to stay in the country.

The Board of Investment is responsible for investment promotion. It has made efforts to streamline investment procedures by establishing a one-stop investment center. Other positive steps have been the establishment of an investment service center at the Ministry of Industry and a Joint Public/Private Sector Consultative Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, designed to address problems raised by the private sector.

The Business Environment

The opinion of U.S. investors in Thailand, as expressed by the American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand, is that the investment climate is favorable. The economy is well-managed and highly diversified, growth prospects are good, the labor force is growing, and wages are relatively low. There are problems in areas such as taxation, tariffs, protection of property rights, and bureaucratic red tape in start-up projects. However, these problems are considered manageable.
In general terms, the problems faced by U.S. investors have been business problems rather than policy-induced problems. U.S. investors usually face stiff competition from both other foreign investors and domestic firms. Accurate market data comparable to that generated in the United States is difficult to obtain in Thailand. U.S. managers must learn to operate in a cross-cultural environment.

One of the positive signs of Thailand’s growth has been the development of the domestic private sector. Thai companies are now actively competing on a regional and international basis. Many companies have expanded beyond the traditional restraints of family management and have implemented advanced organizational structures employing skilled professional management. This trend appears to be the direction of the future. As these Thai companies have increased in size and scope of operation, they have encountered the same problems as have the foreign investors. Their efforts to find workable solutions to these problems have contributed significantly to improving the investment climate.

Operating in a highly competitive marketplace, Thai companies have shown the ability to adjust quickly to market changes and consumer preferences. This inherent sensitivity to the market gives them a distinct advantage over non-Thai companies, which are sometimes slow to recognize the differences between their standard operating procedures and the nuances of the Thai market.

U.S. companies also face severe competition from other foreign investors. Foremost among the non-Thai competitors are the Japanese. There have been several instances where major U.S. companies have withdrawn from Thailand, unable to operate, while their Japanese competitors have survived.

However, the level of competition should not serve as a disincentive to new investment, but rather should serve as an indicator of business activity. Difficulty in assessing the market has been another problem. Abundant and accurate market data is not readily available in Thailand as it is in many other markets. The lack of such data creates the necessity to generate information, a difficult task. In some cases, self-generated data has been misinterpreted, leading to miscalculation of the potential size or growth of a specific market.

Finally, foreign managers do face certain cross-cultural problems in Thailand. Thai is the basic language in the country, especially in the rural areas; however, few U.S. businessmen speak Thai. As mentioned earlier, Thailand has developed a social system that is uniquely Thai. Foreign managers must recognize the unique features of the system and learn how to operate effectively in this different environment. The Thais have a highly developed set of values which are not readily compatible with the direct and blunt style of standard American management. These and many other similar problems face all newcomers to the marketplace. This new and different
cultural environment may be very frustrating at first; however, the success of existing U.S. investment attests to the fact that it is possible to adapt to the local conditions and to operate profitable businesses in Thailand.

The Market Environment

The traditional way of entering the Thai market has been to import a product through a trading company. To be successful in this market, U.S. companies must be able to adapt to the unique methods of marketing and doing business in Thailand. It is of interest to note that of the top 100 trading companies in Thailand, only three are U.S. companies, while eleven are Japanese.

Once a company's sales increase sufficiently, the next step is manufacturing. In many cases, the decision has been to establish a one-product or one-principal-product company, usually a joint venture. Actual distribution is either done directly to dealers or through a complex wholesale network. In urban Bangkok, a new channel is developing through over forty modern supermarkets and thirty-two department stores. Direct selling has also been a successful means of distribution.

There are six distinct markets in Thailand: industrial, commercial, wholesale/retail, government, agriculture, and services.

The industrial market is growing quickly, but is limited to Bangkok. It consists of consumer goods, food processing, beverages, vehicles, paper, rubber, and plastic items. The continuing expansion of cement, petroleum refining, textiles, and integrated circuits make these markets especially buoyant. The oil and gas development is a major market and is expected to generate up to $5 billion through 1990, with the major company (currently spending $1 million per day) having already invested over $2 billion. Mining is also included in this market category.

The commercial market represents 11 percent of the GNP and is made up of banks and insurance companies and other such companies where consumables are office supplies, equipment, stationery, computers, and associated products. This market is projected to remain active.

Wholesale and retail consumer trade represent 19 percent of the GNP. The Thai consumer market is one of the most profitable in Southeast Asia. Although the population growth has declined to only 1.6 percent per annum, the demand for consumer products has continued to grow. A growth rate of 6 percent is considered good in this market. The previously mentioned disparity in per capita income is very apparent in this market. Current estimates place per capita income as low as $150 in the Northeast and as high as $2,000 in Bangkok.
Thai consumers are becoming more quality-conscious and more sophisticated. To remain competitive, companies are accelerating plans for local manufacture with as much local content as possible. The objective is to increase margins and profits by reducing costs.

The Government budget accounts for 25 to 30 percent of the GNP. Major segments are defense, energy, infrastructure development, and heavy equipment.

Agriculture provides the single greatest source of employment and is the major source of cash generation. A good rice crop means that rural sales of consumer products will be good. This sector has specific preferences in terms of marketing and packaging. It is also price-sensitive.

In the services sector, tourism is a major factor and is now a major source of foreign exchange. There were approximately 2.5 million visitors to Thailand in 1984, who spent an estimated $1.2 billion in the country. There is also a wide variety of service companies.

In general terms, the marketplace will remain split between the rural and urban consumers, a fact that creates considerable marketing and distribution difficulties. Advancements in the media and transportation networks have helped to bridge this gap. For example, there is 100 percent coverage of the country's households by radio, which is serviced by hundreds of stations. Currently, nine color television stations service a market in which 90 percent of the urban Bangkok households and 60 percent of the rural households have television sets. Finally, the market has been receptive to new products as consumer preferences change.

Credit terms and turnover are often more important than profit margins, and the local market is well aware of the time value of money. Thailand is a young market with over 50 percent of the population under the age of 18. This group also has growing purchasing power. The marketplace is increasingly receptive to new products.

The Future Environment

U.S. trade and investment may face several new challenges in the coming years. In the forefront of the challenges is a growing worldwide protectionism. This problem has already surfaced in U.S.-Thai relations and will undoubtedly appear more frequently in the future. It affects the overall trade relationship between the two countries. From the perspective of U.S. business, Thailand is relatively open. There are several restricted areas, but restriction does not seem to be a major concern to U.S. business. Periodic campaigns to promote the buying of local products have not seemed injurious to the fundamental trade relationship. On the other hand, while the stated policy of the U.S. is one of free enterprise and open markets, the application of U.S. trade laws and regulations sometimes appears contra-
dictory. It is often difficult for other nations to comprehend U.S. trade regulations and the enforcement of those regulations even though the laws and regulations are quite explicit.

Thailand has experienced problems in the export to the U.S. of water-packed tuna and in the imposition of countervailing duties on textiles. In both instances, the cases were instigated by protectionist industry lobbies in the United States. The issues have been or are in the process of being resolved. However, such incidents do impact on the overall trade relationship. One of the seemingly contradictory aspects of the situation is that these actions take place outside of the perceived diplomatic channels and are usually resolved directly with the agency or department involved.

Both the tuna and textile cases received broad press coverage in Thailand and became topical issues. Both sides had reasonable positions when viewed from their own perspective. However, in both cases, the mechanism for remedy has been complex and confusing—especially to a party unaccustomed to such practices.

In the short term, potential trade between Thailand and the U.S. will definitely be affected by domestic policies in both countries. The strong Thai Government response to the level of foreign loans by moving to implement a zero-growth government budget and curtailing future foreign loans will undoubtedly reduce imports by reducing expenditures. Emphasis on exports will increase sensitivity to protectionist responses in the United States, where industry lobbies will continue to protect their constituent interests. As a consequence, Thailand may be involved in future problems such as the tuna and textile issues. Nevertheless, the United States should remain the most open market available to Thai exports.

The U.S. Farm Act provides an excellent example of how protectionist legislation in the U.S. can have a negative political impact on Thailand. The Farm Act provides a subsidy for U.S. rice exports and creates a world market price for rice, set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, at which the U.S. will sell its rice. As Thailand and the U.S. are the two major rice exporters, this act is viewed as a serious threat by the Thais, who do not subsidize their rice exports.

The initial reaction was one of anger and disbelief on the part of many Thais. The act was considered a direct attack on the Thai farmer using the economic resources of a highly developed country against a small, developing country that had always considered itself a friend and ally of the U.S. Thus, most of the political damage was incurred prior to the actual implementation of the Farm Act. While the full economic consequences have yet to be measured, rice prices have dropped since the implementation of the Farm Act. The primary beneficiaries have been rice buyers. The lower prices have reduced the revenues of both countries.
Thus, domestic legislation designed to provide relief to the U.S. agricultural sector created a major political problem between two countries that have enjoyed a close friendship and alliance for more than 150 years. Further, it carries the potential for further aggravation once other agricultural products such as maize are included in the program.

Within the six countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Thailand remains an attractive location for new foreign investment. However, investment capital is scarce, and there is fierce competition for investment within the region. The potential of such projects as the Eastern Seaboard Development and the downstream petrochemical industry will continue to draw the attention of investors.

The traditional position of welcoming foreign investment should remain, and there do not appear to be any reasons or conditions for the policy to change. The successful experience of existing investors will help to attract new investment in Thailand and will serve as evidence that the initial entry problems can be overcome and that foreign companies can operate profitably in Thailand.

From the business perspective, the external problems facing Thailand are not felt to be detrimental to the investment climate. These problems seem to cause concern mostly among businessmen who are unfamiliar with Thailand and have not had business experience there.

In sum, when evaluating Thailand as a potential market or investment site, it is important to keep the positive elements in the forefront of the decision-making process. The strong growth potential, agricultural self-sufficiency, mobile labor force, abundant natural resources, and dynamic private sector will serve Thailand well in the future. The current problems are much the same as in other developing countries, and indeed Thailand compares quite favorably in this regard. Finally, the fact that foreign investors are operating successfully and profitably in Thailand should attract new foreign investment.
IV.
Politics and Security: ASEAN, the United States, and Indochina
Thai-U.S. Security Relations*

Karl D. Jackson

Ten years have elapsed since the fall of Saigon, six since Vietnam occupied Cambodia, and an end to the Vietnamese presence in Cambodia is nowhere in sight. On the positive side, the U.S.-Thai security relationship has been transformed rather than eliminated, China has become Thailand’s friend rather than its foe, Thai radical movements have disintegrated rather than grown, and the Vietnamese revolutionary victors of 1975 have become diplomatic outcasts. Few observers in 1975 would have anticipated the decade’s dramatic developments, and fewer still would have thought that the decade would end with an improved security situation for Thailand. This paper will trace the U.S.-Thai security relationship from the close of the Vietnam War down to the present by reviewing the period of selective disengagement (1973–1977) and the period of reaffirmation (1978–1985). The first period was characterized by maximum flexibility, bordering on diplomatic opportunism, while the second period was dominated by the development of a functionally specialized alignment pattern in which Thailand, China, ASEAN, and the U.S. all contributed in specialized but complementary ways to maintaining Thai security.

Playing Both Ends Against the Middle: The Politics of Selective Disengagement

There can be no doubt that the period from the Paris Peace Agreement through the late 1970s held great potential for a fundamental breakdown in U.S.-Thai security relations. The period was marked by Thai feelings of abandonment, born of the realization that America was going to do precisely what it said it never would: abandon South Vietnam to its fate at the hands of the ever more determined and well-armed North. The Thai leadership concluded that President Nixon, shackled by Congress and public disenchantment, would not be able to stay the course in Vietnam. Congress was chiseling away at his ability to provide even material support to South Vietnam and Cambodia. The year 1973 saw the War Powers Act passed over a Presidential veto, and Congress forced the administration to halt the bombing in Cambodia. Given the evident inability of the United States to summon the political will required to guarantee the continued existence of South Vietnam and the Khmer Republic, why should Thailand accentuate Vietnamese hostility by maintaining its role as America’s “land-locked aircraft carrier?”
With America clearly in retreat from military involvement on the Southeast Asian mainland, Thai self-preservation dictated a policy of realignment. Within days of the Congressional cutoff of American bombing in Cambodia in August 1973, the U.S. and Thai governments announced the first drawdown of U.S. personnel in Thailand. The fall of the regime of Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapat Charusathien on October 15, 1973, added further impetus, because the student protestors, who had sparked the revolt, demanded, among other things, a more independent foreign policy for Thailand, including the removal of American bases.

The new government immediately sought closer contact with China, a policy that had begun under Thanom but would continue throughout the ensuing decade's many governments. China, especially after being transformed by the death of Mao in 1976 and the eclipse of the Gang of Four, would become the mainstay of Thailand's military security vis-à-vis its traditional enemy, Vietnam. The first Thai official delegation in two decades visited China in January 1974, after announcing in Bangkok that Thailand would adopt a "One-China" policy.

In May 1974, U.S. forces in Thailand were cut to 34,000 (compared with a wartime high of 50,000 in December 1972), and statements by Thai officials clearly indicated an inclination toward complete U.S. military withdrawal. Concurrently, Thailand sought to add balance to its diplomacy by improving relations with Hanoi and Moscow. Diplomatic recognition was extended to Rumania, Outer Mongolia, and Czechoslovakia; a North Korean trade delegation visited Bangkok; and relations with China continued to warm.

During 1973–1976, a consensus developed within the Thai foreign policy elite, favoring decreased reliance upon the United States and returning to a more traditional Thai stance of establishing cordial relations with as many contending powers as possible as the most efficacious means of protecting Thailand's sovereignty. The governments of both Seni Prommoj and Kukrit Pramoj sought complete withdrawal of American bases, improved relations with North Vietnam, and diplomatic relations with China. In late March 1975, the Thai government decided to cut the lifeline of the Lon Nol regime by stating that the U.S. government "had no right" to transship ammunition through Thailand. As the April denouement approached in Vietnam and Cambodia, Thailand's survival instincts dictated increased public resistance to U.S. security policies in Indochina.

American policymakers in the immediate aftermath of Saigon's fall made public statements indicating that previous commitments to the defense of Thailand might no longer be binding. When Secretary of Defense Schlesinger was asked whether the U.S. would continue to be obligated to defend Thailand from external attack, he replied: "[I] would have to consult my lawyers." Furthermore, Secretary Kissinger omitted Thailand from a listing of defense commitments in Asia. High American officials
seemed to be publicly undermining what little deterrent value remained in
the U.S.-Thai security relationship. Perhaps the absolute nadir in U.S.-Thai
security relations was reached in the closing days of 1975, when Senate
Majority Leader Mike Mansfield urged the abrogation of the Manila Treaty
as well as closing out American economic aid to Thailand.

In June 1975, former Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman clearly eluci-
dated the new policies to be followed by Thailand in disengaging from the
U.S.-Thai alliance:

The present government is committed to following a policy of
equidistance—Thailand should try to keep on the best possible terms with
major powers—the U.S., Soviet Union, China, Japan, Western and Eastern
Europe. If we allow one power to station troops here, we may get into trouble
with another large power, or one of the smaller powers. It was not my per-
sonal feelings, but the resolution of the American Congress banning U.S.
forces from taking part in overseas operations. If they can't perform military
duties why are they here? As tourists? It doesn't make sense. We have seen the
sad situation in South Vietnam and Cambodia of the U.S. Congress refusing
credits to those countries. Executive agreements are completely meaningless if
Congress is not willing to go ahead. What are promises worth if we are unsure
of the position of the [American] legislative branch? If the U.S. Congress was
to pass a resolution tomorrow that if Thailand were attacked the U.S. would
join Thailand's defense, I would be the first to advocate that American forces
remain. At present, however, they are a liability.

Events in this period conspired to accentuate the negative: the air-
planes flown to Thailand by fleeing South Vietnamese could not be
returned to Vietnam because of U.S. foreign assistance legislation; tens of
thousands of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees could not be moved out
rapidly; and, most important of all, the United States ignored the explicitly
stated wishes of the Thai Prime Minister during the Mayaguez Affair. This
brought U.S.-Thai relations to a new low, with an official note of
regret being tendered in Bangkok by the American Chargé d'Affaires and a
large anti-American demonstration being staged at the U.S. Embassy.

The year 1976 was dominated by the final withdrawal of American
forces from the bases in Thailand. There was a feeble American attempt to
maintain a residual force, but this was rejected with a certain amount of
political fanfare by Kukrit Pramoj. The U.S. response to the Thai govern-
ment announcement on March 20th that U.S. military activity in Thailand
must end "forthwith" was a forthright "We don't stay where we are not
wanted." In the period 1973–1976, Thailand had rapidly readjusted its pattern
of international relations: moving away from the U.S. (but without dissolv-
ing the relationship entirely); moving toward China (but without becoming
a client); and seeking outright accommodation with Hanoi along with lim-
ited advances toward the Soviet Union.
Thai positions toward Vietnam following the December 1978 invasion of Cambodia have been remarkably steadfast, and therefore we tend to forget that Thai foreign policy in 1973–1978 was based on diplomatic flexibility and accommodation with Hanoi and Phnom Penh. This basic policy was present even during the stridently anti-Communist government of Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichien (October 1976–October 1977). Immediately after the October 1976 coup, which reasserted the military role in Thai politics, General Kriangsak Chamanand (Secretary-General of the National Administrative Reform Council) reiterated the policy of détente: “We want good relations with Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia” and “our policy towards China has not changed.”

Clashes with the Khmer Rouge occurred repeatedly along the border. With typical lack of balance, the Khmer Rouge involved themselves in border conflicts with Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand simultaneously. Thai policy in responding to the Khmer Rouge differed markedly from Vietnamese responses to similar incidents. Whereas the Thais never ceased protesting the frequent and terrible border violations, Thailand nevertheless continued its pursuit of a diplomatic solution. In contrast, the Vietnamese response to Khmer Rouge activity was entirely military: escalation and counterstrikes by both sides led eventually to full-scale war and invasion. Thailand, especially under the government of General Kriangsak, calculated that the most serious threat to Democratic Kampuchea came from Vietnam and that the Khmer Rouge must eventually come to terms with Thailand if they were to have any chance whatever of survival. In response to a series of vicious raids across the Thai border, Prime Minister Kriangsak stated that the Thai government would accelerate its efforts to establish better relations with Cambodia. Bangkok even provided possible rationales for the border violations. For example, General Kriangsak suggested that confusion and poor communication between the border area and Phnom Penh, or, alternately, inaccurate maps might explain the border incidents. Thailand went out of its way to play down the border incidents.

As Vietnam and Democratic Kampuchea engaged in conflict, both antagonists sought better relations with Thailand. Military security along the Thai-Cambodian border improved slowly after Thai Foreign Minister Upadit Pachariyangkun’s “goodwill visit” to Phnom Penh in late January 1978, which resulted in an agreement to exchange ambassadors. During 1978, Thailand displayed a nearly awesome ability to fine-tune its foreign policy; even while the border raids into its territory continued in February, government spokesmen reiterated the contention that the border situation had improved. When fifty Thais were killed, Thailand sent a “report” rather than a “protest” note, because “Cambodian leaders might not know what is happening on the border.”
Thailand’s successful diplomacy with the Khmer Rouge was matched by new cooperation with Vietnam. In early January 1978, Thailand and Vietnam signed an aviation agreement allowing Thai International to overfly Ho Chi Minh City. The most senior Vietnamese official to visit Thailand since 1975, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh, arrived in Bangkok on January 10. All of this, of course, was taking place in the wake of the first Vietnamese invasion of Democratic Kampuchea, which had resulted in the severance of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Cambodia on New Year’s Eve, 1977. Vietnam’s obvious preparations for further warfare with Cambodia presented Thailand with an additional opportunity for improving its relationship with Vietnam. Playing one enemy off against the other reaped one benefit after another for Thai security.17

A series of in-depth interviews that I conducted with a representative sample of the Thai foreign policy elite in early 1978 indicated overwhelming support for the idea that détente with Hanoi and Phnom Penh would supply Thailand’s strongest defense. In my interviews, the following perceptions were dominant:

1. Vietnam would prove a benign influence in Southeast Asia after an initial period of somewhat chilly diplomatic relations. Thailand’s external security problem had been solved for at least fifteen years, because Vietnam would concentrate on reconstruction and consolidation of the South after thirty years of warfare. In any case, Vietnam obviously lacked the internal capability to achieve both economic development and territorial expansion simultaneously, and therefore it would concentrate on its own internal development.

2. Vietnam’s border problem with Pol Pot’s Kampuchea would not lead to a full-fledged Vietnamese invasion, because this would arouse Khmer nationalism, involve the Vietnamese in protracted counterinsurgency warfare, increase the danger of war with China, and jeopardize Vietnam’s relationship with Thailand and with ASEAN in general.

3. The Soviet Union was not giving significant amounts of economic or military assistance to Vietnam, and therefore Vietnam’s capabilities were not being artificially enhanced by outside inputs. Vietnam had not fought for thirty years to gain its independence from foreign domination in order to become a dependency of the Soviet Union. Vietnamese nationalism would never tolerate Soviet utilization of former American military bases in Vietnam. Finally, the Soviet Union was a far-off land with only marginal significance to the security calculations of Thailand.

4. In the wake of the Cultural Revolution, China would become more inner-directed; state-to-state relations would take precedence over party-to-party relations, and Chinese support for Communist insurgencies inside
Thailand would either stabilize or decline. China-Vietnam relations would remain cool but correct. China would not threaten the stability of Southeast Asia.

5. The United States under President Carter had withdrawn psychologically from Southeast Asia and could not be depended upon in any crisis threatening Thai national sovereignty. Thailand was on its own and better off as a result.

6. The peace and stability of Southeast Asia would be assured either by settling all conflicts locally through bilateral negotiations on the model of the informal settlement worked out to cool off the Thai-Kampuchean border dispute of 1977–1978 or by utilizing the regional institutions set up by ASEAN.

During Thailand's attempt to achieve accommodation with Hanoi and Phnom Penh, U.S. policy evinced both skill and moderation. The U.S. did not make a major issue of its being requested to remove itself from the bases in Thailand. Rather than acting petulantly, the U.S. increased its security assistance to Thailand even as the direct American presence there came to an end. Total U.S. military assistance equaled $42.7 million in 1975, $132.6 million in 1976, $109.2 million in 1977, and $119.5 million in 1978. This general upward trend antedated the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. While W. Scott Thompson hypothesized that Thailand was less successful than the Philippines in bargaining with the United States over its participation in the Vietnam War, the post-1975 record regarding military assistance lends support to the opposite interpretation. Thai participation in the Vietnam War may have exacerbated relations with Thailand's traditional enemy, Vietnam, but even after the American alliance had been downgraded by both sides, the benefits to Thai security continued to flow and were much larger in absolute terms than those made available to the Philippines (bases notwithstanding), as is indicated in the figure and table, below.

Only in 1985 did total military assistance to the Philippines exceed the total provided to Thailand; in reality, however, $140 million out of $181.9 million consisted of economic support funds that have nothing to do with military hardware and are administered by the Department of State through the Agency for International Development. In the eleven years 1975–1985, Thailand received an allocation of more than 4.5 times as much FMS and MAP per year as the Philippines. The American military presence in the Philippines remained much higher because of the U.S. facilities at Clark Field and Subic Bay; however, military hardware flowed disproportionately to Thailand, especially after the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia underscored the potential for an external threat to Thailand's national security. If U.S. interest in a country were judged solely on the basis of military hardware, Thailand remained the most important country in
Figure 1: U.S. Military Assistance to Thailand and the Philippines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>132.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>109.2</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>119.5</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>418.1</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>247.5</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>158.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>205.7</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>235.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>106.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>107.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,882.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>818.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total military assistance includes foreign military sales agreements (FMS), military assistance grants (MAP), economic support funds (ESF), and international military education and training (IMET). FMS credits are loans rather than grants, whereas MAP, ESF, and IMET are given by the U.S. Government. ESF is a form of economic assistance, cannot be used to purchase weapons, and is administered by the Agency for International Development rather than by the Department of Defense.*

Southeast Asia. Far from “moving offshore,” the U.S. continued to make heavier hardware contributions to Thailand than to any other state in Southeast Asia.

In addition to seeing Thailand initiate more open relationships with Hanoi and Phnom Penh, 1977 and 1978 were marked by an important series of visits which further enhanced Thai security. Former Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj visited Beijing in October 1977 and was received at the highest levels. Prime Minister Kriangsak visited Beijing in late March 1978. China’s Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping returned the courtesy by visiting Bangkok in November 1978, just as the final Vietnamese invasion loomed over Cambodia. In the course of his visit, he branded Hanoi “the Cuba of the East” and “the hooligan of Southeast Asia.”

Furthermore, Thai foreign policy received encouraging signals from Washington. On May 5, 1978, Vice President Walter Mondale paid a brief visit to Bangkok. In contrast to Majority Leader Mansfield’s 1975 call for the abrogation of the Manila Pact, the Vice President publicly and privately reaffirmed U.S. commitments to Thailand under the Manila Pact and the Thanat-Rusk Communiqué. Furthermore, the Vice President pledged to accept an increasing number of refugees and to increase FMS credits.
Organizing Your Friends: Functional Specialization as a Means for Achieving Security

As the year 1978 drew to a close, Thai foreign policy had achieved virtually everything it had sought: distancing from the United States; enhanced relations with China; and partial détente with Hanoi and Phnom Penh. The flexibility had enabled Thailand to extract advantages from the contradictory interests of China and Vietnam, and Vietnam and Cambodia.

The Thai diplomatic honeymoon ended abruptly when the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia began on December 25, 1978. The occupation of Cambodia, the subsequent Chinese pedagogical war against Vietnam in early 1979, and the ever more blatant Soviet utilization of bases in Vietnam provoked an almost complete reversal of Thai elite opinion on security-related issues. \(^{21}\) Whereas elite members in my survey in 1978 had depicted Vietnam as benign, inner-directed, and nonexpansionist, a subsequent survey of Thai elite opinion after the occupation of Cambodia revealed that 98 percent of those interviewed saw Vietnam as a threat. In early 1978, very few members of the Thai elite thought that Vietnam would actually occupy Cambodia; in the 1980s, however, the occupation was perceived as a threat to Thai security. Whereas elite opinion in 1977–1978 favored neutrality for Thailand in the conflict between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam, in the 1980s it favored direct opposition to Vietnamese actions. In the period of accommodation, the Thai foreign policy elite thought of the Soviet Union as a far-off country of which little was known and which played only a minor role in Southeast Asia. The events of early 1979 transformed that perception, perhaps permanently; the Soviet Union had become a threat according to 96 percent of the respondents in the survey.

The reversal of Thai elite opinion in 1979 has been reflected in Thai foreign policy. Although foreign ministry spokesmen reiterate the litany that Vietnam is not an enemy and that Thailand seeks friendly relations with all countries in the region, in reality Thai security policies have shifted from accommodation to confrontation, from an assumption that diplomacy can do all to a strategy having a major military component. Once the Cambodian buffer had been occupied by Vietnamese troops, China (with Thailand’s connivance) began supplying guerrillas to harass the Vietnamese. While Khmer non-Communists had received short shrift from Thai land during the Pol Pot period, the Vietnamese threat dictated a new policy of active support.

Thailand’s new situation required a new mix of outside inputs to maintain Thai security. Obviously, the United States remained in psychological tatters during the Ford and Carter years, and the Vietnam syndrome precluded Thai dependence upon its old ally, especially for intervention against Vietnam. But Thailand eventually derived five things from the
United States: psychological reassurance via frequent high-level reaffirmations of the Manila Pact and the Thanat-Rusk Communiqué; diplomatic support in the United Nations and around the world; access to military supplies and training; the prospect of meaningful logistical support in the event of major hostilities with Vietnam; and the continued presence of American military force in Southeast Asia through the bases in the Philippines and from regular visits to Thailand by American ships.

It must have been obvious to Thai policymakers that the mix of American inputs alone could not meet Thailand’s security needs and that these needed to be supplemented elsewhere. First, Thailand needed a real threat to Vietnam that was capable of diverting most of Vietnam’s superior military force away from Thailand. Clearly, the Americans could not fulfill this need. Second, Thailand required a source of material for insurgents who could prevent Vietnam from firmly consolidating its hold on Cambodia. Obviously, in the United States in the immediate post-Vietnam era, the idea of weapons aid for Cambodia was political poison; therefore, Thailand needed to look elsewhere for this type of assistance. The third element necessary to Thailand after 1978 was a broad, worldwide diplomatic coalition to deny Vietnam legitimacy for its Cambodian conquest. Here the United States was necessary but not sufficient, and a major effort was needed by Thailand and its ASEAN partners to rally support, especially within the Third World.

If we look to U.S.-Thai security relations in the era of uncertainty occasioned by Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia, the most striking element is the change in rank ordering of countries contributing to Thailand’s security. The United States was the dominant external protector in the 1950s and 1960s. However, as a result of its Vietnam-derived inability to wield military power in Southeast Asia, the United States was displaced from this role by China and became a secondary although not inconsequential ally. The Chinese punitive expedition into northern Vietnam in February–March 1979 provided incontrovertible evidence that only China was willing and able to expend blood, treasure, and international goodwill in order to protect Cambodian sovereignty and Thai national interests.

The Chinese intervention was limited but effective enough to permanently alter Vietnam’s strategic calculations. The Politburo in Hanoi in 1975 correctly calculated that the U.S. was incapable of recommitting its forces to save South Vietnam. In late 1978, Vietnam stripped the north of troops on the false premise that China, although mightily irritated, would not intervene militarily as a result of a Vietnamese occupation in Cambodia. Three hundred thousand Chinese troops storming into Vietnam indicated that Hanoi’s judgement had been incorrect.

Casualties on each side in this brief but brutal war were roughly equivalent, and there was no clear winner. The Chinese took every one of
their objectives and took them on schedule. On the other hand, the Vietnamese militia troops performed very well against Chinese regulars. The lesson of 1979 for Vietnam was not that China could readily defeat Vietnam. The lesson was much more profound and long-lasting: all future Vietnamese politico-military moves on the Southeast Asian mainland must reckon on the possibility of a two-front war with China as a powerful and willing adversary. Never again would Vietnam be able to wield its military forces without calculating on the very real possibility of Chinese intervention. The necessity of defending the border with China has permanently complicated Vietnam’s strategic picture and required full-scale national military mobilization, bringing army strength up to the economically debilitating level of 1.2 million.

Chinese actions have greatly complicated Vietnamese expansionist activities in Cambodia—not only by supplying arms and money to anti-Heng Samrin forces, but by deterring Vietnamese inclinations to apply blatant coercive persuasion to Thailand. Without China’s manifest willingness to commit troops to battle against Vietnam, Thailand would be much more vulnerable to the threat of a quick surgical strike aimed at “bringing Bangkok to its senses.” The fact that there could always be “a second lesson” has required Vietnam to maintain more men per capita under arms than any other nation in the world and to position 500,000–700,000 troops opposite China.

Perhaps the most important cost to Vietnam has been the realization that, for the first time, it faces a power that is at least as patient and obdurate as Vietnam itself. Dealing with the French and the Americans was much easier, because it was clear from the outset that they could be routed psychologically and paralyzed politically. In confronting China, Vietnam for the first time faces an opponent whose domestic political system is largely immune to influence and whose inclination is to play for the very long run—bleeding Vietnam for decades if necessary, while waiting for a leadership in Hanoi that will recognize the necessity of coming to terms with China.

The occupation of Cambodia required ASEAN to play a new role in Thai security considerations. At the outset, there were substantial differences within ASEAN on how to deal with Vietnam: Malaysia and Indonesia were inclined initially to downplay the threat from Vietnam and to emphasize that China constituted the real threat to Southeast Asia; such perceptions led to policy initiatives aimed at enticing Vietnam into a compromise settlement. The more “dovish” perceptions of Indonesia and Malaysia (compared with Thailand and Singapore) opened ASEAN to divisive diplomatic campaigns emanating from Hanoi. Finally, differences in perception led only Singapore and Thailand initially, and later Malaysia, to participate in arming and training non-Communist factions in the anti-Heng Samrin coalition.
Over time, differences within ASEAN have decreased significantly. Repeated Vietnamese incursions into Thailand since 1980, along with consistent Vietnamese unwillingness to accept anything approximating compromise, have eroded support for Vietnam within the Indonesian foreign policymaking establishment. Patient Thai diplomacy combined particularly well with Vietnamese haughtiness to produce a major change in President Suharto’s personal inclinations in July 1984. As of February 11, 1985, the ASEAN foreign ministers, including most especially Indonesia’s, stated:

The foreign ministers call upon the international community to increase support and assistance to the Kampuchean people in their political and military struggle to liberate their homeland from foreign occupation.22

The open call by Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja for Indonesian assistance to the KPNLF rebels represents a unanimity with Thai policy perceptions that is unprecedented in the history of the Cambodian problem.23

The United States provides the final element in the functionally specialized coalition backing Thailand’s international interests. Thai officials, for at least the past three years, have sought to involve the United States more extensively in their security concerns. First, Thai officials have sought fuller assurances regarding what the United States would do if Thailand got into “real trouble” with Vietnam. If the Vietnamese Army seized Korat and demanded Thai recognition of Vietnamese suzerainty in Cambodia, what would the United States do? Would full logistic support be made available rapidly enough to make a difference? Would U.S. air power be available to counter Vietnamese superiority in tanks and aircraft?

These discussions have often occurred in the context of discussing the possibility of American weapons aid to the non-Communists in Cambodia. Thai officials have stated that they could easily increase the numbers of non-Communist guerrillas in the field to 50,000, but that this could not be done unless the United States were willing to involve itself by jointly planning these activities and therefore taking part of the responsibility for possible Vietnamese retaliation. In essence, Bangkok officials have been probing American counterparts to determine whether the post-Vietnam syndrome is dissipating at long last, thereby returning substantive meaning to the parchment of the Manila Pact and the Thanat-Rusk Communiqué.24

And What Do We Do For An Encore?

The Vietnamese dry-season offensive in 1985 was longer and involved more combat troops than any operation since the original conquest. The border camps of all three anti-Heng Samrin factions were occupied in a methodical attempt to push the resistance out of Cambodia. Artillery, tanks, and a large body of infantry provided the Vietnamese with a concen-
tration of conventional force that would have been inappropriate for guerrillas to resist. Two hundred thousand Khmers have been displaced into Thailand. In addition, in what has now become a regular facet of the annual offensive, Vietnamese troops intentionally violated Thai territory and had to be driven out by Thai troops and airpower.25

Even though the corridors of Southeast Asian studies are littered with the bones of those who have made predictions about outcomes in Indochina, intelligent discussion requires us to consider the short-term future (the next 6–18 months, January 1985–June 1986), in order to judge the ultimate impact (if any) of the substantial manifestation of Vietnamese military power just witnessed in western Cambodia. Admittedly, there can be no certainty in these matters, but several things seem reasonably probable over the next year or year and a half.

First, the military forces of Son Sann, Sihanouk, and the Khmer Rouge have not been destroyed or demoralized. The camps that had once housed hundreds of thousands are now in Vietnamese hands, and the Vietnamese may try to occupy them permanently. This may be a blessing in disguise for the anti–Heng Samrin forces, because it will free them from static duties and allow them to range deeper into the interior, in true guerrilla fashion, to find targets that have been made more attractive because so many Vietnamese troops have been concentrated in western Cambodia.

Second, if ASEAN and other powers such as the United States become serious about supplying additional support for the resistance, the end of 1985, like the end of 1984, should see more rebels in the field than ever before, hopefully operating deeper in Cambodia than has previously been the case. The Vietnamese receipt of escalating the conflict to win a decisive victory may well produce a more robust opposition with the means to fight at a higher level of warfare. The analogy to the early days of the Vietnam War is relevant here. Like the Vietcong, the anti–Heng Samrin forces continue to have a rear base that can offer supplies, training, and cash for operating in the Cambodian interior. As with the Vietcong in the early 1960s, military operations can probably be expanded almost at will, because the enemy is as unpopular internally as it is overextended militarily. If resources made available by the PRC, ASEAN, and others continue to grow in 1985, the year could end with growing military insecurity within Cambodia in spite of the expensive dry-season offensive just mounted by Vietnam. The chief limits preventing the non-Communist factions from becoming more important militarily are: (1) lack of resources comparable to those made available to the Khmer Rouge by the PRC; and (2) the continuing absence of military officers capable of leading a genuine guerrilla movement inside Cambodia. The conjunction of these two factors produces a policy paradox: all the external assistance in the world will come to naught without good military leadership, but good leadership will not emerge unless leaders are given "the tools" with which "to finish the job."
Third, the prospects for strengthening ASEAN contributions are greater than ever. Following the usual annual cycle, when the guns stop firing, Vietnamese diplomats will again begin dropping hints that they are willing to talk. These hints will be released through what have become regular channels, Canberra and Jakarta. Indonesia will continue to explore virtually all the possibilities put forward by Hanoi but cynicism concerning the utterances of Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach has never been higher in Jakarta. There is now a greater realization that the Vietnamese Foreign Minister’s annual forays are designed to split ASEAN or to curry favor in Australia, but that behind the public relations facade there is virtually no willingness whatever to accept anything except continued Vietnamese domination.

Fourth, the position of China remains firm and powerful. Even without significant offensive activity along Vietnam’s northern border, China’s mere presence has been sufficient to require heightened levels of military readiness throughout northern Vietnam this year. The real-world costs to Vietnam remain very high, whereas the costs to China are negligible.

Fifth, the U.S.-Thai military-security link will probably continue to grow. F-16 fighters have been offered to Thailand by the United States, and the decision to buy twelve of them, at a total cost exceeding $300 million, will consume all of Thailand’s unutilized FMS credits as well as a large proportion of future MAP and FMS. Singapore and other ASEAN nations will probably follow suit by buying F-16s for themselves. The U.S. decision to sell these planes was a long time in coming, not because the U.S. was shy about supporting ASEAN security, but because the cost and complexity of the weapon system created genuine fears that Thailand might be putting all of its eggs into one basket and that its overall security needs might be better served by a less complex and expensive product. While these remain valid concerns, the buildup of Soviet air power at Cam Ranh Bay—including MiG-23s and additional TU-16 bombers—has exerted and will continue to exert pressures on the ASEAN countries to increase the sophistication of their arsenals.

An interesting question is whether the purchase of the same aircraft by other ASEAN powers will evolve into some sort of joint air defense arrangement capable of mounting a significant air challenge to Vietnam in the event of a major attack on Thailand. Twelve Thai F-16s alone would not do this. Thai F-16s only become truly significant in combination with the E-2Cs and F-16s that will be purchased by Singapore. The purchase of high-tech aircraft by Thailand and Singapore could conceivably serve as a catalyst for a type of military-to-military cooperation that would magnify the deterrent capability of the forces while decreasing the maintenance and operation costs. The thought here is not that ASEAN should turn into a military alliance but merely that buying, maintaining, and operating these new and costly weapons on a multilateral basis would convert the purchase
price into real deterrent value for the front-line state. Obviously, U.S. technical expertise could be combined with Thai and Singaporean political dexterity to produce a meaningful increment in Thai defensive capabilities.

The most perplexing quandary for the United States in 1985 was whether it would continue to follow ASEAN’s lead on the Cambodian question. There can be no doubt that the United States at times in the past has failed to live up to what it claims to be an unwavering policy maxim. For example, at the International Conference on Kampuchea (ICK) in 1981, the United States backed China and brushed aside ASEAN positions that were conciliatory toward Vietnam. In early 1985, when all of the ASEAN countries called upon the world to provide both military and humanitarian assistance to the non-Communist resistance groups, this placed the United States in a difficult position. The asymmetries of guerilla warfare mean that a comparatively modest expenditure would ratchet up Vietnamese and Soviet costs by a very significant sum. Forcing such an investment on the Soviet Union might enhance the U.S. global objective of containing the Soviets and their surrogates under circumstances which disproportionately favor the opponents of expansionism. Furthermore, providing U.S. assistance to the non-Communist factions would increase the probability of a lasting political settlement with Vietnam; a Son Sann–Sihanouk military force that maintained its independence from the Khmer Rouge and held China at arm’s length might be viewed by Vietnam as an “Australian” solution to the problem of governing Cambodia. Finally, American aid, especially in covert form, would enhance long-term Thai security by keeping Thailand’s traditional enemy hopelessly bogged down in Cambodia, thereby using up resources that might otherwise be devoted to spreading “the revolution” to Thailand.

Having made all of these arguments before, I remain skeptical that significant American weapons aid will be forthcoming anytime soon. The American political system in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era is largely incapable of maintaining the covert quality of covert operations. Any operation requiring more than a few days’ duration and involving even a small number of individuals will become public knowledge in Washington, regardless of the laws on security.

Furthermore, substantial resistance to weapons assistance predominates in the Departments of State and Defense. High-ranking officials in both departments believe that the factionalized, urban-oriented non-Communist forces simply lack the knowledge and capacity to motivate a rural insurgency. This resistance is mirrored in the Administration’s response to an amendment to the foreign assistance act that would provide $5 million annually for military assistance to the non-Communists. Initially, the Administration expressed straightforward opposition to the idea of direct aid of any kind to the non-Communists, preferring instead indirect humanitarian assistance through the U.N. refugee relief operation.
Principal decision-makers within the Administration doubt the military potential of the non-Communists, distrust congressional Democrats who will vote aid to the Khmers while opposing assistance for the Contras in Nicaragua, and fear that the assistance might provoke the Vietnamese in Southeast Asia or the Soviets internationally without significantly altering the military situation inside Cambodia. In March 1985, Congressman Stephen Solarz introduced an amendment to supply $10 million in military assistance over two years to the non-Communists, saying that “notions that the Vietnamese army . . . can be induced to withdraw from Cambodia on the basis of appeals to their compassion alone are the height of naivete.”

The House of Representatives approved the Solarz amendment by a wide margin, 288 to 122, on July 9, even though the Administration, on July 11, continued to voice its disapproval of military aid. The controversy was finally settled by including the funds in the military assistance budget, but accepting the Administration’s insistence that it be used only for nonlethal purposes. Hence, the assistance will be given as Economic Support Funds (ESF), an economic aid program that is run by the Agency for International Development, even though the funds are part of the military assistance budget.

Although the United States continues to resist overt weapons aid, the Solarz amendment represents a major turnabout for U.S. policy. By providing ESF to Sihanouk and Son Sann, money given by China and ASEAN can be used for military supplies. The fact of giving formal assistance to the KPNLF and Sihanouk confers a degree of international legitimacy not previously enjoyed by the non-Communists. U.S. involvement may convince the ASEAN countries themselves to do more as a result of greater U.S. commitment to a negotiated and neutral outcome for Cambodia. As far as Indochina is concerned, passage of the Solarz amendment is not necessarily “the beginning of the end” of the post-Vietnam era, but the magnitude of the change means that U.S. policymakers may at long last have reached “the end of the beginning” in the process of recovering from the stinging psychological trauma of 1975.

NOTES

*I am indebted to the Henry Luce Foundation, whose support allowed me to conduct research in Thailand in 1977–78.

1. See Thanat Khoman, “Problems of Foreign Troops in Thailand and Thai Foreign Policy,” Social Science Review.


Thai-U.S. Security Relations

Likhit Dhiravegin

Introduction

United States-Thai security relations involve myriad factors. For such a broad topic, a conceptual framework is needed to bring the numerous variables into perspective. An investigation of this kind is necessarily broad and will best serve as a background for subsequent discussions which focus on specific topics. This is the objective of the present paper.

United States-Thai security relations are, in the final analysis, relations of mutual interest. While the Thai elite need American support and assistance in order to maintain the present politico-economic system, the United States in turn has needed a loyal ally to counterbalance, first, the Communist regime in China and then the Indochinese states. At the very least, a viable Thailand, with its "free economy" and its non-socialist form of government, serves American interests in Asia as well as the American position in the global political game of power politics.

American involvement in Asia gained momentum after World War II, when the United States swiftly moved in to transform its wartime enemy, Japan, into a capitalistic-democratic system. The Korean War, starting in 1950, and the Vietnam War in a later period catapulted the United States into a complex web of entanglement in the Asian region. Needless to say, Thailand, because of its strategic geographic position, came into the picture. In fact, United States-Thai relations date back to the wartime period. Indeed, the United States was technically at war with Thailand because of the latter's declaration of war. Only through Thai political maneuvers and keen American insight into the political situation was Thailand spared being a loser in the war. The United States also acted as a balance against the British, and to a certain extent the French, who approached Thailand with their claws wide open. Again miraculously, the Thai were saved. Thanks to its age-old diplomatic skill and political sophistication, Thailand narrowly missed being another Japan, on which a process of demilitarization was imposed and on which sweeping economic reforms and political changes were forced.\(^1\)

If anything, the absence of a program such as that imposed on the Japanese could be viewed as a blessing, for it meant that Thailand was able to maintain its time-honored political independence. But critics could also consider such luck as a "curse in disguise," because while Thailand escaped the process of being demilitarized, it paid a price by having its democratic development interrupted by military intervention in politics,
starting with Field Marshal Pibulsongkram and continuing with Field Mar-
shal Sarit Thanarat and his successors. In fact, it would not be incorrect to
say that American support of a strong anti-Communist regime in Thailand
led to American support of the military government. To be sure, a dictato-
rial military regime would normally run counter to the American ideals of
democracy, freedom, and liberty. But as the Communist threat, with its
domino effect, was looming large, democracy and its ideals had to be tem-
porarily shelved for a more immediate need, a fight for survival. With the
U.S. bent on fighting the Communists willy-nilly, a pragmatic course in
foreign policy was adopted. Support for Thailand in the form of military
aid was established. This aid, coupled with the history of military involve-
ment in Thai politics, helped the Thai military become entrenched in the
power structure, with its impact still felt today.2

This brief introduction has been aimed at providing a general back-
ground for United States–Thai security relations. It has shown that security
relations between the two countries have had a long history. Most of all, the
discussion was meant to remind analysts of present-day United States–Thai
security relations of the long, mutually beneficial relationship. The full
dimension of the sustained relationship can be understood only by also
taking into account the past experiences of the two countries.

The Security Issue: A Conceptual Framework

The word security has its roots in military terminology. Its basic
meaning is territorial integrity, the absence of an invasion by foreign
troops. In a broader sense, security could mean political independence,
economic freedom, etc. Indeed, the meaning of security has been so vague
that it could denote almost anything. The word security, however, is prefer-
red here to the word military because the latter has an aggressive tone while
the former conveys a meaning of self-defense. In our discussion, security
will mean “keeping the existing socio-economic-political system intact,
with the assumption that the majority of the people are averse to having a
radical change.” Thus defined, security in Thailand means keeping Thai
society the way it has been. This is obviously system maintenance with a
conservative overtone. But in the final analysis, a discussion of security,
especially that of systemic integrity, is prima facie made from within a
conservative frame of reference.

Security threats come from two sources: external and internal. Exter-
nally, the classic case is outright invasion. Hitler’s marching his troops into
Poland was a case of security threat for Poland. There can also be a subtler
threat from outside, e.g., support given by an outsider to elements which
seek to bring about a change in the existing system or support for a separatist
movement. The support given by one Communist party to another in order
to strengthen an insurgent movement is an example par excellence for the
former category. Support by Libya and Syria for the separatist movement in
the south of Thailand is a case in point for the latter category. The third form
of security threat involves both the blatant and the subtle varieties. This is an
outright invasion by foreign troops, seizing power, overthrowing the existing
regime, and then supporting a puppet regime while continuing to station
troops in the country "at the request of the new government" in order to
"temporarily" maintain stability. Kampuchea and Afghanistan are cases in
point. The fourth kind of security threat is espionage and terrorism. The
IRA's terrorism against Great Britain is a good example.

Internally, there are three sources of security threat: first, minority
problems; second, a group with a different political ideology which seeks to
bring about a change of regime; and third, the failure of the existing system
to accommodate itself to the people's needs and demands, which compels
the people to seek an alternative system.

The first category, minority problems, is well-known. Differences in
race, ethnicity, religion, language, region, and culture can become a secu-
rity threat if the problems and conflicts flare into the open. The war
between the Sikhs and the Indian army at the Golden Temple is a clear case
in point. The black problems in the United States in the late 1960s and
early 1970s are also good examples. Burma is a classic case of a country
that is plagued with a minority problem. Thailand is no exception. The
four provinces in the south have been a constant concern for Bangkok.

The second category—the existence of a group with a different politi-
cal ideology seeking to bring about a new system—is also a serious security
threat. This group, which is usually given the pejorative name of rebels or
traitors, is often organized as a political group which seeks to undermine
the position of the ruling elite and advocate its overthrow. It usually makes
a popular appeal for its noble course. If left unchecked, this category of
threat could endanger the existing regime or system. At the very least, it
could become "a thorn in the chest," as the Thai saying goes. Examples of
such a category are the traditional anti-monarchical elements or the present
Communist movement in Thailand, whose aim it is to seize state power and
introduce a socialist system into the country.

The third category, which in a sense is closely related to and serves as
a raison d'etre for the existence of the second category of security threat, is
the failure of the existing system to accommodate itself to the people's
needs and demands. This third category of security threat could stem from
two factors: (1) the inability of the ruling elite because of the corruption
and demoralization of the bureaucrats; or (2) the inability of the existing
governmental and administrative machinery to cope with rising new prob-
lems. In both cases, reforms in the leadership and in the system are impera-
tive. Failing that, the system will die a natural death.

It should be obvious by now that the various security threats coming
from both external and internal sources make the analysis of United States—
Thai security relations a very complicated task. But given the conceptual framework we have briefly outlined, we can selectively probe into the categories of security threat that are most relevant to the topic of our discussion, which is the internal security problem of Thailand. Then we can focus on the internal security problems of Thailand which have an impact upon United States-Thai security relations.

**Thailand’s Security Problems**

The internal security problems of Thailand include all three categories that we have already discussed: minority problems, the element with a different political ideology which seeks to overthrow the existing ruling elite and to introduce a new system, and the possible failure of the existing system to accommodate itself to the people’s needs and demands.

The first category has existed in Thailand for quite some time. The minorities are the Chinese, the Vietnamese refugees, the hill-tribe people, and the Muslims in the south of Thailand. Of all these minorities, the Muslims in the south of Thailand pose the greatest security threat because of their separatist sentiments and movement.

This problem, which by its very nature has arisen internally, is related to external support—most notably the support allegedly given by Libya and Syria in the form of training, arms, and ideological inculcation. The aim of the separatist movement is to establish a Republic of Pattani. This problem, which has been plaguing the south for quite some time, is serious and must be handled with the right kind of strategy. First and foremost, there must be respect and tolerance for religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences. The policy of the present government seems to take this strategy into account. Secondly, there must be political autonomy, which so far has not been adopted because of the long tradition of centralization of administrative power. This is in fact a taboo in the Thai governmental and administrative philosophy. As a result, the granting of political autonomy will not come easily. Understandable as the government’s position may be, political autonomy is a *sine qua non* for the solution of this problem.

Despite the persistence of this separatist movement, it has not as yet posed a serious security threat to Thailand. A subtle policy of integration and sincere respect and tolerance for differences would help enhance the prospect of gaining more support from the Thai-Muslims for the political community of which they are legitimately a part. This aspect of the security threat would not involve United States-Thai security relations.

The second category of security threat for Thailand is obviously the insurgency movement. This is the Communist Party of Thailand, with its 10,000-strong membership, seeking to seize state power and bring about a new political system. Thanks to the variables to be discussed below, this problem has now been nipped in the bud, at least for the moment.
The Communist movement in Thailand has suffered a setback for the following reasons.6

First, the alleged atrocities committed by the Pol Pot regime, which resulted in millions of deaths, seriously discredited the Communist movement. The numbers may have been exaggerated for propaganda purposes, but even if they are reduced by 90 percent, they are still dreadfully high. In fact, the number of deaths admitted by the Kampuchean leaders themselves was over ten thousand. This official figure is relatively small, but still large enough to strike fear into the hearts of those who are Kampuchea’s neighbors, especially the intellectuals who were told of the killing of academicians, medical doctors, schoolteachers, etc. The news of atrocities certainly shook these people, many of whom had been sympathizers of the Communists. They began to question the validity of the belief that a Communist revolution was the final answer to the “existing rotten system.” Thus, the Communist movement has lost moral support in intellectual circles.

Second, the October 6, 1976, military coup d’etat in Thailand, which toppled the democratic government, and the coup d’état against the “gang of four” in the People’s Republic of China were two significant events which took place on the same day with extremely important political consequences for the Communist movement in Thailand.

The October 6, 1976, massacre at Thammasat University, which resulted in a military coup and an end to democracy, sent thousands of students into the jungle to join the insurgency in some form of united front. However, no sooner had they joined the movement than internal conflicts began to flare up. The students complained that those who were in the top echelon of the Party apparatus were no less conservative and feudalistic than the Thai bureaucrats; that the Three World Theories were Chinese and inappropriate to the Thai situation; and that, despite the long years of struggle, the Thai Communist leaders had not been able to come up with a revolutionary theory of their own, i.e., a Thai revolutionary theory. Another complaint was that many of the top-echelon leaders would sometimes speak in Chinese in order to make it impossible for the new members to understand when the subject of discussion was supposed to be a secret.7 Conflicts and hence disillusionment started to prevail among the new members. Many began to think of returning “home.” The Thai Government and the Internal Security Command were quick to seize the opportunity to launch a campaign for the surrender of the insurgents. This came out in the Office of the Prime Minister’s Orders 66/23 and 65/25, which gave priority to politics—i.e., to win back the insurgents to the government’s side—rather than to the former military operation aimed at suppression. Such programs as Karoonyatheb, or the Diety of Kindness program, successfully induced a large number of students to defect from the movement.

Third, the October 6, 1976, coup in the People’s Republic of China, in which the “gang of four” was arrested and political power was transferred
from the Maoist faction to that of Deng Xiaoping, brought about drastic changes in China's economic policy. This change of policy and the gradual de-Maoization process caused theoretical conflicts between the Thai students and the veteran Communists, and among the veteran Communists themselves. Soon, the rift became an uncompromising political struggle which eventually led to the split of the Communist Party into factions; some members even joined the students in surrendering to the authorities. If anything, the two October 6 events exposed two major weaknesses of the Communist movement in Thailand: ideological conflicts and organizational defects. The former were reflected in the absence of an indigenous theory acceptable to the Thai; the latter were reflected in the inability of the Party or movement to absorb new blood into the organization.

Fourth, the dramatic events in Indochina in late 1979 reinforced the setback of the Communist movement and aggravated their conflicts. These included the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnam, in which a new regime was installed by the invading forces. The invasion was strongly condemned by the People's Republic of China. "Vietnam is to be punished" was a sentence repeatedly uttered by Deng during his visit to the United States. A punitive military operation did take place when Chinese armed forces marched across the Vietnamese border. But it ended after a short while without much success. However, both the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnam and the war between China and Vietnam proved beyond any doubt that socialist comradeship did not mean much when it came to conflicts between national interests. It was realized that the Communists were not as pure as they claimed to be, after all. This created confusion, doubts, and unanswered questions among members of the Communist movement. In fact, the events threw them off balance.

Fifth, the slump is the world economy following the oil crisis—which harmed both the free-market systems, such as that of the United States, and the socialist centrally-planned economies, such as that of the Soviet Union—buttressed the impression of many people that, after all, given a real crisis, neither the capitalist nor the socialist systems could prove that one could outdo the other. On the contrary, either because of luck or because of what was dubbed by a Japanese scholar as the "Asian way of doing things," the ASEAN countries have been doing fairly well economically for the past few years. They survived the oil crisis and, despite the worldwide economic stagnation, they have been having some degree of economic growth, ranging from 6 to 9 percent between 1970–1975 and 1976–1980, and 2.5–6 percent in 1982. The ASEAN countries have a "free economy" with a semi-authoritarian political system, and somehow the system functions fairly well. This situation has in some ways dimmed the black-and-white view that only two major politico-economic systems, democratic-capitalist or socialist, can function successfully. It has given the ASEAN countries more confidence in their methods of handling their problems. This has made the appeal of a
Communist revolution as a final solution to the prevailing social injustice and underdeveloped economy less attractive.

Thus, the probability of a successful Communist movement in Thailand—be it in the form of the Maoist strategy of the jungles encircling the villages and the villages encircling the towns, or the urban strategy outlined above—must, in view of the preceding analysis, be regarded as very slim. In fact, Lt. Gen. Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth, who has been in charge of the 66/23 policy, declared in October 1984 that the government has now won the war against the Communist movement in Thailand.12

The last category of internal security threat in Thailand is the possible failure of the existing system to accommodate itself to the people’s needs and demands. The corollary of this is that to thwart this threat a political system must be developed that is capable of accommodating itself to the new situation. To elaborate, one has to backtrack to the development of Thailand in the 1960s and early 1970s. What one sees—apart from the existence of the strong military regime headed first by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (who became Prime Minister in 1958 after staging his second coup) and later by his successors, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and Field Marshal Prapass Charusathien—is an emphasis on national development which focused on economic development and educational improvement. Various policies were adopted, including the building of the economic infrastructure, the promotion of industry, the promotion of foreign investment, educational expansion into the provinces, economic development planning, and the engagement of experts in various fields for the purpose of turning Thailand into a developed society. All this led to structural change in the Thai economy. The country gradually became industrialized; more cash crops were grown; and there were more college graduates. This was followed by a population growth and a greater degree of urbanization. There was also a bigger middle class now, which included import-export businessmen, industrialists, bankers, financiers, etc. Amidst this development and change, the political structure was still essentially a traditional benevolent dictatorship. This led to a great imbalance between the socio-economic and the political structures, because the government could not accommodate itself to political changes, especially to abstract demands such as political participation. As a result, there was the uprising of October 14, 1973, in which the military was temporarily unseated from power. The October 6, 1976, coup was a backlash against the runaway freedom and democracy of the interlude from October 14, 1973, to October 6, 1976.13 What has come into existence—and been dubbed “halfway democracy”—could be characterized as an attempt to bring about a fusion of the old elements (the bureaucrats, military and civil) with the new elements (the social forces emerging from socio-economic changes).

The socio-economic changes which took place as a result of the national development policy brought about new social forces—basically a
middle class of industrialists, bankers, financiers, import-exporters, and university graduates. These new forces are now part of a more complex society. They are a factor in Thai politics to which the system has to accommodate. While a democratic form of government would be able to accommodate itself to this new situation, such a system would ideally exclude the military and civilian bureaucrats from involvement in politics. But Thai political reality dictates that such a course of action would not be practical. With its record of continuity and domination in Thai society, the bureaucracy will continue to be a threat to the development of full democracy. Somehow, these "old forces" have to be incorporated into a system which can make coexistence with the "new elements" a possibility. The accommodation of the old and the new elements is necessary for the following reasons.

The old elements—the bureaucrats, especially the military—have traditionally played an important role in administration and in the governmental process. This is due to the fact that the basic power structure and institutions have largely remained intact over recent centuries, which is accounted for by the following factors.

First, Thailand has never been colonized. Unlike other societies, where the traditional ruling elites were unseated or their power was reduced to a minimum, the Thai ruling elites have been able to maintain their grip on power because of the absence of external interference.

Second, there has never been a social revolution in Thailand. The June 24, 1932, revolution was in fact a coup d'état staged by the bureaucrats against the monarchy. As a result, the power vacuum was filled by more or less the same group of people.

Third, Thailand, unlike other Asian countries, was not greatly affected by World War II. Fighting was only sporadic and very short-lived. As a result, the physical and institutional damages were minimal.

Fourth, Thailand has never undergone any change imposed by an outside power, as was the case with Japan after the war.

Because of the above factors, the basic institutions, culture, and values in Thai society have remained largely the way they have traditionally been, and this includes the power structure and the ruling elite.

However, amidst the status quo, socio-economic change gradually took place after the national development program was launched in the early 1960s. This led to the emergence of the new middle class, as already mentioned. This new middle class, most notably the businessmen, has become politically important, for the following reasons.

First, the new business class is largely composed of second- and third-generation Sino-Thai, who are fully legitimate Thai nationals. Discrimination against these people, as it was practiced against their fathers or grandfathers, would hardly be possible today. They feel that they are full members of Thai society and have a right to make their demands.
Second, this new group of businessmen is usually well-educated. Unlike their fathers or grandfathers, who usually read or spoke only Chinese or were even illiterate, much of this new blood in Thai business circles has graduated from good business schools in the United States, Europe, Australia, etc. The political implications of this fact need not be elaborated here.

Third, the size and scale of business activities in Thailand have grown tremendously over the past three decades. Instead of the small businesses or factories of the past, which exported products to neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, present-day business enterprises have large assets with investments from abroad in the form of joint ventures. Firms with assets of $50 million or more now number more than a hundred. Thus, Thailand has turned from a raw-material-exporting economy (rice, teak, tin, and rubber) into a more complex business-and-industrial-enterprise economy. As a result, political stability has become important, because it is needed to operate this kind of economy. In order to protect one’s business and to guarantee that one will not be upstaged by rival firms that exploit the political process, it is necessary for owners or executives of big firms to get involved in the political process. This has turned the businessmen into active political actors, who can best be accommodated only in an open political system.

Fourth, for the reasons mentioned above, businessmen have now become heavily involved in politics by seeking alliances with influential military officers and civil servants, by supporting political parties, by running for election to parliament, and even by working for appointments to Cabinet posts. They are no longer apathetic members of Thai society, and they are actively calling for an open political system.

The characteristics of the two groups of social forces—the old and the new—call for a political system that could accommodate both the bureaucrats and the businessmen-politicians. Full democracy, which would exclude the military and civilian bureaucrats, would not be practical, but neither would a military dictatorship such as the Sarit regime. A halfway democracy that combines the traditional structures and values and the new semi-open politics would probably be the most feasible system. Short of that, the country may drift into a kind of corporatism of the Latin American type, with a national party and essentially military control.

**United States–Thai Security Relations**

Against this background, what should be the role of the United States in promoting Thailand’s security? Clearly, the United States can play a contributory role in two respects.

First, the United States can act to thwart any menace to Thailand’s security which may stem from the outside, especially from countries with a different political ideology and system. Although an outright invasion may
not be likely, deterrence against such a phenomenon by United States policy and by its physical presence (in the form, for example, of the Seventh Fleet) would be of great importance.

Internally, the United States can be of great assistance to Thailand by strengthening the Thai economy with more economic aid. This could be done jointly with Japan and others in international organizations. A healthy economy would contribute greatly to Thai stability. But economic growth must be followed by a more equitable income distribution in order to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. There must also be an effort to bring about more balance between the urban and the rural sectors. These tasks, needless to say, must be undertaken by the Thai. But the United States could contribute toward these ends by providing more economic and technical aid.

On a more significant plane, the effort to develop a political system that will be able to accommodate the two elements in Thai society should be encouraged. But of most importance is the necessity to maintain the democratic aspects of the system. The United States could make its contribution by giving its expressed support to the development of such a "democratic" system.

Conclusion

Obviously, Thailand's security is closely related to its relations with the United States. But in the final analysis, that security will depend on Thailand's ability to elicit a stable political system appropriate to its setting, and the American role in that will at best be contributory. The long-term survival of Thailand will depend on how the Thai people conduct their own domestic and foreign policies. Self-reliance with friendly support from countries such as the United States will be the key to its security needs. To survive the turbulent global political scene of today, the Thai will have to be the lords of their lives and the masters of their souls.

NOTES

1. A proposal was made to strip Thailand of its armed forces in order to pave the way for the development of a democratic form of government. See Sir Josiah Crosby, Siam: The Crossroads (London: Hollis & Carter, Ltd., 1954).
3. Likhit Dhiravegin, “Karnpatiroop Lae Karnpatiwat” [Reform and Revolution], *The Journal of Political Science* (Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Bangkok), Vol. VIII, No. 1 (January–April, 1982).


7. From an interview with a former student leader who fled into the jungle after October 6, 1976.

8. The October 6, 1976, incident and the influx of new members helped to reveal the weaknesses of the Communist Party of Thailand as an organization. It was tested and performed poorly in terms of recruitment and the ability to withstand new challenges.


10. This point was repeatedly made by Masahide Shibusawa, Director of the East-West Seminar of Tokyo.

11. The newly industrialized countries (NICs) have a “soft authoritarian” regime and a “capitalist” economy, a combination of strong government and the market system.


13. Likhit Dhiravegin, “Social Change and Contemporary Thai Politics: An Analysis of the Inter-relationship between the Society and the Polity,” presented at the Asia Society, New York, 1979; at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1980; and at a conference on Thai studies, New Delhi, February 1981; and published as a monograph by the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, Bangkok, 1984.

Thai Politics and Bilateral Relations

Kramol Tongdhamachart

By way of introduction and for my own convenience, I shall divide my analysis of Thai-U.S. relations and their impact on Thai political thought and commitments into two separate parts: the pre-World War II and the post-World War II periods.

Although the history of Thai-U.S. relations dates back to the early part of the nineteenth century, it was not until the period immediately after World War II that the significance of this relationship began to be felt in Thailand. For the Thais were profoundly grateful to their American friends when, thanks to the moral and diplomatic support of the United States, Thailand was not listed as a loser of the war.

Thai-U.S. relations during the pre-war period were less complicated than in the period after the war, in the sense that the pre-war relationship was smooth and progressed at an even pace. There were no immediately identifiable events that had a truly significant impact on internal Thai politics.

By contrast, in the post-war period, Thailand’s American friends have played a great part in influencing and shaping her internal political thoughts and outlook. The political changes that occurred from the time of Seni Pramoj’s government in 1945 to the fall of the Kriangsak regime in October 1976 did not arise out of indigenous factors, that is, from Thailand’s own political ideals or philosophies. Thailand’s relations with the United States have been so close that almost every change that has occurred during the post-war period has been associated with some aspect of that relationship.

The Pre–World War II Period

Prior to 1932

One must first of all understand the general internal situation during the period of absolute monarchy. The focal point for all political and governmental activities was the ruling king. In principle, the Thai kings were regarded as elected by the people, and they were expected to exercise their authority within the framework of ten kingly virtues, which are called “Thosapit rajadhama.” These virtues included alms giving, morality, liber-
ality, rectitude, gentleness, self-restraint, tranquility, nonviolence, forebear-
ance, and nonobstruction. Furthermore, a king had to dispense justice,
protect the weak, enrich the poor, and diligently safeguard his subjects.
Thus, even though an absolute monarch could theoretically extend his
authoritative power to all civil, military, and religious affairs, he could in
fact be deprived of his royal power if he violated any of the ten kingly
virtues. The records clearly show that Thai kings have been dethroned when
they were found not to comply with the ten kingly virtues and when the
wish and will of the people were betrayed.

Although the first Thai-U.S. contact can be traced back to the year
1818, when the commercially minded American began to explore Thai-
land's economic potential, the mutually fruitful association and lasting
friendship between the United States and Thailand did not really begin
until 1833, when the first Treaty of Friendship and Commerce was signed.
That treaty was the model for all the trade and diplomatic activities that
followed. Some authorities argue that the opening of Thai-U.S. relations in
1833 had the sole aim of promoting trade, and that there were no political
motives involved. But the Thai government, besides expecting commercial
gains, wanted assistance from the United States to counterbalance the colo-
nial pressures coming from a number of European countries.

The close relations and friendly ties between Thailand and the U.S.
became more apparent when the Harris Mission concluded a treaty with the
Thai government in 1856, establishing permanent diplomatic relations,
which, in effect, helped to mitigate the domination of the European
powers. Furthermore, the praiseworthy work of people like Bradley,
Caswell, and McFarland undeniably spread seeds of goodwill for the Amer-
icans, which provided a very firm foundation for American influence on
Thai politics.

Thai leaders always had complete faith in their American friends. The
United States managed to convince the Thais that they had no territorial
ambitions, unlike some of the countries in Europe. The American mission-
aries were very helpful to Thailand and the Thai people in general. Together
with “advisors” like Edward Strobel and Francis B. Sayre, they helped to
establish the trust and goodwill of the Thai people. In fact, it was through
Strobel’s strenuous efforts that Thailand was able to resolve its long-
standing conflicts with France. Some authorities even argue that the Ameri-
can advisors helped Thailand to regain its sovereignty.

There is no doubt that Thai-U.S. relations played a vital role in
implanting western democratic ideas in Thailand. For several decades, the
Thais were exposed to notions of due process, individual freedom, individ-
ual dignity, popular sovereignty, progress, and development. Although
these had no direct impact on the structure of the absolute monarchy, they
certainly caused it to become more moderate and benevolent. King Rama
VII himself, after he ascended to the throne in 1925, always preoccupied himself with the liberalization of the government.

After 1932

A “Committee of the People’s Party” (i.e., a Parliament with elected representatives) inherited the broad powers previously exercised by the absolute monarchy, following the successful coup of June 24, 1932. With that, Thailand was said to have, for the first time, a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

A new class of “young turks” emerged to lead the government. While the Thais were busy with their new form of government and the new political ideas, American influence declined rapidly. As Frank C. Darling has put it: “The influence of the United States in Siam was minor from the time of the overthrow of the absolute monarchy until World War II. American trade continued at a low level.” American missionary activities also fell off. However, for a while, American advisors continued to be active, despite the fact that they hardly had any significant influence on the new political system after 1932. By 1940, the number of advisors was very small.

As World War II approached, Thailand still looked to the United States as a friend and ally. Toward the end of 1941, American friends and advisors were still assisting Thailand with regard to the conclusion of a treaty with Japan on offensive and defensive arrangements.

When the conflict in the Pacific finally broke out, the United States chose not to view Thailand as an enemy, despite the Thai declaration of war against the U.S. by Phibun Songkram’s government on January 25, 1942. With the creation of a Thai Minister posted in Washington and a “Free Thai” organization established after M. R. Seni Pramoj’s announcement that his Legation was independent of Phibun Songkram’s government, the United States viewed Thailand as an unfortunate country to be liberated rather than as a hostile enemy. The Free Thai movement therefore received total support from the Americans. The United States government agreed to assist Seni Pramoj in his efforts to organize an underground resistance movement inside occupied Thailand, as the strategic advantages to be gained from this by the American military and intelligence services were immediately recognized. This mutually desired endeavor undoubtedly helped to enforce and promote much closer ties and cordial relations between the United States and Thailand, and provided a strong foundation upon which future relations between the two countries were to be based and developed. This was reflected, first of all, by U.S. efforts to release Thailand from the twenty-one demands made by the British when the war ended in 1945. This had a tremendous impact on the relations between Thailand and the United States and on the good image of Americans held by Thais for the next several decades.
The Post–World War II Period

The post-war situation and its consequences gave rise to several interesting factors that had significant repercussions on Thailand’s internal affairs. Seen after 1945, foreign influences on Thai politics, especially American influences, became much more extensive.

While Great Britain was trying to impose punitive sanctions on Thailand during the post-war negotiations, the U.S. was sympathetic to Thailand, and the British proposals were vastly mitigated and modified. But one of the omitted clauses in the British proposals was of great significance and later was to have serious repercussions on Thailand’s attempt to become a true and functioning democracy. Some authorities have even claimed that as a consequence of American’s failure to give support to the British proposal to reduce the power and prestige of the Thai armed forces there emerged a significant number of military leaders who, in the subsequent periods of Thai politics, played a great part in keeping Thailand from living up to its democratic ideals.

The Democratic Period: August 1945–April 1948

By January 1, 1946, the United States had reestablished diplomatic relations with Thailand and given her a post-war reconstruction loan of $10 million. Seni Pramoj, the Thai Prime Minister at the time, was very popular, especially with the United States, which felt that his policies had a positive impact on American hopes both for Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia.

Seni’s efforts had led to the building up of the democratic elements in Thailand, and this, in turn, had acted as a counterbalance to the parallel rising of the military elements who had as their leader the wartime Premier, Phibun Songkram. What was even more important to the United States than Thailand alone was the American policy of preventing Asia’s domination by foreign powers, particularly European powers attempting to return to their former colonies or even to take over independent Thailand. The United States hoped that, with the absence of a colonial background, Thailand would be able to serve as a model to the former European colonies for a new political order in Asia.

Seni’s efforts and the sympathetic and friendly attitude of the United States led to closer relations between the two countries. The United States became more and more involved both in Thailand’s internal and external affairs. Meanwhile, however, the military group was becoming stronger; its numbers and influence were on the increase. Soon after the Thai War Criminals Trial in November 1947, the number of extremists in the group increased even further, and the decline of the liberal and democratic government was obvious to everyone.
The Authoritarian Period: April 1948–September 1957

There were two phenomena that led to the decline of the democratic movement during this period. First, there was the emergence of the new military group soon after the war ended in 1945; by 1947 they had become very powerful. Second, the United States, fearing the spread of communism, became less and less interested in assisting the evolution of constitutional democracy and more and more interested in deterring the Communists.

However, there were also two other factors that cannot be ignored. In general, the Thais were dissatisfied with the way in which the prosecution of war criminals had been handled. Also, the country was facing serious economic problems, and the government was unable to do anything to resolve them. When the coup came in 1947, all the democratic elements were removed from active political roles. Although Kuang Apaiwongse, leader of the democratic elements, became the head of the government after the general election of 1948, it was only for a very brief period, for Phibun Songkram forced him to resign only a few months later.

When Phibun Songkram returned to power in 1948, the United States, concerned with the Cold War and the fear of Communist influence in Southeast Asia, readily accepted him, thereby involving itself in Thai political affairs, and increased its military and economic aid to Thailand. Phibun Songkram’s position was enhanced by this, and his policies to consolidate military power in Thailand to deter communism were strengthened. This Thai-U.S. interdependency further enhanced the already close relations between the two countries. These close ties were clearly reflected in Phibun Songkram’s decision to follow the Americans in recognizing the Bao Dai regime in Vietnam in 1950, despite the resignation of Pote Sarasin, who was one of his top colleagues and was entrusted with handling the foreign affairs of his government.

Thai-U.S. relations became even closer when Phibun Songkram sent troops to Korea in 1950 to fight under the United Nations flag, side by side with the Americans. Thailand was in fact the first Asian nation to send troops to Korea under the United Nations flag. In return, the U.S. made a sizable increase in its material contribution to Thailand’s internal stability.

A series of bilateral agreements were concluded in 1950, initiating programs to increase Thailand’s military might and advance her economic and social development. Per capita income in the country and the minimum living standard of people living in rural areas were to be upgraded, while on the military side, recruitment was to be doubled in a relatively short time and the armed forces were to be equipped with weapons and supplies to make them combat-ready. These moves encouraged the emergence of a new generation of military leaders—men like Pin, Sarit, and Phao, who in turn supported Phibun Songkram’s moves away from democratic ideas and toward authoritarian rule.
After the division of Vietnam into the North and South in 1954, Thailand joined SEATO in order to deter further Communist expansion, and this certainly helped to strengthen its close and cordial ties with the United States. This excellent relationship was not, however, without its down side. As was revealed later, the closer the ties, the greater the American influence over Thai decisions and Thai affairs. Dissatisfaction with the government's reliance upon the United States became widespread. In 1955, for the first time ever, anti-American feelings surfaced among the remaining (but still inactive) democratic elements, particularly over the issue of American control over Thailand's affairs.

Three factors accounted for this hostility. In general, there was a widespread uneasiness among the democratic elements concerning the government's unsuccessful struggle with the economic and financial difficulties at that time. Second, and more specifically, a fear, particularly among the Thai leaders, developed concerning America's apparent change of heart in respect to China, especially when, in Warsaw in 1955, the U.S. opened up a dialogue with the PRC for the first time. Third, but more significantly, there was a genuine belief that, through military aid, the United States exercised control over the Thai government. In a time of economic and financial difficulties, economic and technical aid from the United States was relatively negligible compared to the military aid of the same period.

The general feeling was that, as the Americans sought to maintain close relations by expanding their aid programs, the increased military and police aid had helped to strengthen the already powerful Sarit and Phao, who then suppressed innocent opposition leaders.

Nevertheless, in the general election in February 1957, it seemed possible that the democratic elements could be returned to power. However, there was fraudulent voting, allegedly engineered by the government, and this eventually caused the collapse of the Phibun Songkram regime toward the end of the year, which resulted in Sarit taking over.

The Period of Benevolent Absolutism: September 1957-October 1973

During the brief interim period before Sarit took power in 1958, there was a modest change in American foreign policy toward greater flexibility. The Americans realized by now that communism could not be fought solely on the military level. Thus, economic, social, and political aid began to become more significant. Nevertheless, the main objective of Thai-U.S. policies remained the deterrence of communism from inside and outside. Thai-U.S. relations continued to remain close and friendly, despite the brief period of anti-Americanism, and Sarit himself gained the full confidence of the Americans by the end of his career.

In the early days of the Thanom-Prapass regime, internal politics were relatively tranquil. The economic and social development programs
initiated by Sarit had been further expanded, and the benefits were obvious to everyone. Thus, the government was left to benefit from its fruitful relations with the United States with little or no interference from domestic affairs. Again, the threat of Communist expansion was to play the major role in enhancing the relationship between the two countries. The U.S. began to build its first military bases in Thailand in 1964, and the number of these increased sharply as the conflict in Vietnam developed into a full-fledged war. In appreciation for the assistance and cooperation extended by the Americans, Thanom decided in 1967 to send Thai troops to Vietnam. Thai-U.S. relations in military, economic, political, and cultural affairs were at their height until the closing period of the Thanom-Prapass regime.


Toward the end of the Thanom-Prapass regime, there was a resurgence of anti-Americanism as a new group of democratically minded university and vocational college students emerged. This anti-Americanism reached its peak when the United States launched its Mayaguez campaign against the Khmer Rouge by using Thai territory without prior consultation with the Thai authorities, prompting unprecedented anti-American demonstrations. This unfortunate episode marked the lowest ebb in Thai-U.S. relations after the end of World War II.

Successive civilian governments following the downfall of Thanom and Prapass tried to turn away from dependency on the United States. While economic and technical aid was to remain intact, military aid and other diplomatic and political support from the United States were to be phased out altogether. At the same time, there was a move toward establishing more balanced relations with all friendly countries, irrespective of ideological, social, or political differences. Kukrit Pramoj, when he was Prime Minister, succeeded in opening up diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China even before the Americans did.

But despite the prevailing air of anti-Americanism, Thai-U.S. relations survived, and there were several positive developments even during this difficult period—including American support for the concept of ASEAN regionalism.

The Emerging ‘‘Authoritative’’ Democracy: From the Rise of Thanin to the Fall of Kriangsak

The policy of moving away from dependence on the United States gradually eliminated American involvement in Thai politics. But when Thanin took over, his policy of suppressing Communist activities within Thailand and limiting external Communist expansion toward Thailand’s borders encouraged a new series of American involvements. Yet, even though the policies of the two countries coincided, the American involve-
ment in Thailand during this period did not quite reach the same high level as in the previous period. In 1977, SEATO was dissolved and the U.S. cut back its aid programs to Thailand.

Kriangsak Chomanand came to power in November 1977 and quickly adopted a new and actively independent foreign policy, compared to Thanin's rigid stance. He traveled extensively, visiting the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, in addition to the United States. With his own unique style of "survival diplomacy," Kriangsak tried to reestablish more balanced relations with the rest of the world. However, Kriangsak also succeeded to a certain extent in convincing the U.S. government of Thailand's strategic importance and persuaded the U.S. to adopt a more "credible" policy toward Thailand. It was becoming apparent that it was in the interest of the United States to help Thailand and ASEAN develop their resilience, and that, bilaterally, the United States could afford to improve close relations with Thailand while playing an important role in encouraging indigenous regionalism capable of coping with political and security problems.

Toward the end of his premiership, Kriangsak was able to restore close and friendly relations with the United States. Although anti-Americanism still existed, it was at a low level, compared to what it had been during the Thanom-Prapass period.

Conclusions

On the whole, Thai-U.S. relations have had very little negative impact on Thailand's internal affairs. Since the last day of the obsolete monarchy, many governments have taken power, inspired by many different policies and political ideals. Yet each government has looked to the United States as a friend and ally. The U.S. is, and always has been, Thailand's big brother—especially in times of crisis. Throughout the history of Thai-U.S. relations, the Thai people have always looked to the United States for help and assistance, and the Americans have always been ready to extend their helping hands in the most timely manner. Even today, Thailand would call for America's help if her independence and sovereignty were being undermined. Anti-Americanism and demonstrations like the one over the Mayaguez incident were the acts of a relatively few extremists.

Thailand has been and still is dependent on the United States in many ways. Apart from physical goods and commodities, she continues to import a wide variety of things, ranging from social behavior to technological concepts. Thailand still sends many of her young people to study in the United States. I myself am just one among a vast number of Thais who have lived in the U.S. and been educated there. Sometimes we Thais think about how difficult it is for us to avoid being "Americanized" in everything we do, and even in the way we think.
Finally, there is one vital point that I would like to make. During the height of the anti-American demonstrations, discontent with the Thanom-Prapass regime was the result of the Thai people's dissatisfaction with America's control over their government through its military aid program. The statistics reveal that American technical and economic aid to Thailand was only a third the size of the military aid. From 1949 to 1983, the U.S. military assistance program has represented around 70 percent of all U.S. aid to Thailand, and that percentage may even be increased by 1986. Now, if we are to learn from our experience, especially from the undesirable incidents of 1975, we should work to have the U.S. aid program readjusted so that the proportions for economic and technical aid approximate or even exceed the proportion for military assistance.

During the Sarit regime (1958-1963), for example, Thai-U.S. relations were in one of their happy phases. The friendship between the two countries was close and their interdependency very intense. Yet, from 1953 to 1961, 54 percent of U.S. aid went into military assistance compared to only 47 percent for economic and technical programs.

I shall leave a fuller discussion of this issue to others. But, clearly, the Thai people feel that a more balanced aid program would greatly help to deepen their appreciation of and affection for their American friends.
ASEAN in Thai-U.S. Relations

Sarasin Viraphol

Economic Relations: Underlying Factors

Clearly, the importance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is being increasingly recognized by the United States. Following his trip to Jakarta in July 1984 to attend the annual meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers, Secretary of State George Shultz noted that the region is "where the action is." Previously, in March 1983, Secretary Shultz had emphasized in a landmark speech in San Francisco that U.S. policy is to strengthen ties with ASEAN. To Shultz the significance of ASEAN lies primarily in its growth and development, reflecting the potential of the entire Pacific region, which President Reagan has optimistically described as "the future."

The United States has taken note of the fact that, during the past decade, the ASEAN countries have enjoyed relative stability and have grown economically in real terms at an average annual rate of 7 percent—which is about twice the global average. In addition, these nations have striven to develop themselves economically by maintaining investment, finance, and trade ties primarily with the United States, other Western nations, and Japan. This development strategy has resulted in the strengthening of economic ties with the United States, and there has been a terrific expansion in the volume of trade. For most of the six ASEAN countries, the United States has been among their top three trading partners in the recent past. In 1972, the value of ASEAN exports to the United States amounted to $1.44 billion, while that of U.S. exports to ASEAN stood at $1.357 billion—which means that ASEAN-U.S. trade in that year was only 2.66 percent of the U.S.'s total foreign trade. A decade later, the corresponding figures were $13.245 billion and $9.779 billion, respectively, and the ASEAN share of U.S. foreign trade was 5.02 percent and represented 18 percent of the total U.S. Pacific trade. ASEAN currently ranks as the fourth largest trading partner of the United States, after Canada, Japan, and Mexico. One should also note that between 1972 and 1983 ASEAN-U.S. trade increased at an annual rate of 22.5 percent, while the corresponding rate of increase for trade between the United States and the world was only 16.1 percent. Furthermore, U.S. imports from ASEAN increased by 26.8 percent annually, while from the world the rate of increase was only 20 percent. Trade with the United States now accounts for nearly 30 percent
of ASEAN’s total foreign trade. (By comparison, ASEAN exports to Japan between 1972 and 1983 grew by an average of 27.1 percent annually, while Japan’s exports to ASEAN grew by an average of 21.6 percent yearly.)

As for investment, the United States has been the leading investor in ASEAN countries until very recently, when it lost competitive edge to Japan. (Japan has overtaken the United States in the investment field partly because of the Japanese government’s incentive scheme of export credit, preferential loans, and deferred payments.) But U.S. investment continues to figure prominently in the field of manufacturing.

**Political and Security Relations: Underlying Factors**

It may be recalled that, following the fall of Indochina to the Communist powers in 1975, the “Domino Theory” enjoyed considerable appeal. There was talk that it would only be a matter of time before the irresistible tide of communism would engulf Thailand and the rest of ASEAN. However, subsequent events have proven that this was indeed an exaggerated notion. In fact, within the span of a decade, confidence has returned to the non-Communist ASEAN states. Indeed, the decade has witnessed several important developments. In a quest for regional supremacy, Vietnam has drawn closer to the Soviet Union and sought the latter’s support in its invasion and occupation of Kampuchea. The Soviet Union, in the meantime, has taken advantage of the U.S. military retrenchment to spread its influence and extend its military presence into Southeast Asia, thus affecting the global military balance in general and the regional force alignment in particular.

At the same time, however, there have been other developments that have been favorable to U.S. interests. First, relations between Beijing and Hanoi, which had already been deteriorating steadily since the mid-1970s, took a turn for the worse following the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in 1978. The Vietnamese action was interpreted by the Chinese as a direct challenge to them as well as an attempt to tilt the fragile regional balance of power in favor of Vietnam and its powerful ally, the Soviet Union. As a result of this development and following important shifts in China’s internal policies from an ideologically radical course to a pragmatic orientation, thanks to Beijing’s leadership change, China has begun to turn toward ASEAN, the United States, and the West. In the Southeast Asian context, this has reduced the fear of a monolithic Communist threat, which gave rise to the “Domino Theory” in the first place, and has even enhanced possibilities for cooperation. One positive effect for ASEAN has been Beijing’s cessation of outright material and propaganda support to the various outlawed Communist insurgent groups, which in turn has enabled the ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand, to act decisively against the most serious threat to their internal security.
Thus the Communist victory over Indochina has provided an added impetus for ASEAN solidarity. Adhering to guidelines propounded at the Bali Summit in 1976, ASEAN has not only survived but has emerged as a positive force for regional stability.

The various foregoing developments have presented the United States with challenges as well as opportunities. In retrospect, the United States seems to have benefited a great deal from events of the past decade in Southeast Asia. The pessimism that followed the U.S. defeat in Vietnam has been replaced by a growing sense of optimism and confidence, which, in the first place, owes much to the ability of the individual ASEAN states to prove that they could cope with and manage their problems. A consciousness has emerged in Washington of new opportunities for restoring and enhancing the U.S. position of leadership in Southeast Asia, which in turn can serve the future stability and prosperity of the greater Pacific region. ASEAN is proving to be a politically viable partner whose self-reliant determination and efforts have put the ASEAN house in order.

There exists an underlying and increasingly favorable climate for political and security cooperation between the ASEAN countries and the United States. This prevailing climate is facilitated by a number of similarities in their political, social and economic orientations. The present governments of the ASEAN nations are relatively conservative and pro-Western, and they adopt similar stands and perspectives on international and regional issues. All of them declare their commitment to the ideals of free enterprise and maintain an open-market economy to the furthest extent possible. The Soviet Union's offensive policies and actions serve as a common denominator for enhancing the security relationship between ASEAN and the United States. With the reelection of President Reagan, the United States confirmed its determined effort to meet the Soviet challenge in the Pacific and elsewhere. Although the ASEAN states have refrained from pursuing a comparable, highly visible anti-Soviet stance, they have demonstrated their preference for a close working relationship with the United States.

Hence, the political and strategic cooperation between ASEAN and the United States has grown out of a common perceived threat and a belief that the United States serves as a counterbalance against the proliferation of military and political activities pursued by the Soviet Union and its allies, particularly Vietnam. ASEAN feels that the United States has contributed to regional stability and development, which in turn has enabled the ASEAN countries to develop their potential. (The Philippines and Thailand, of course, are linked by formal treaty arrangements to the United States.)

The United States has given prominence to its relations with ASEAN, which it characterizes as "a major force for stability" of "central importance" to U.S. interests in the region. The main aim of the United States
has been to strengthen ASEAN’s defense capabilities, primarily with military and security assistance. In addition, the United States maintains its own military bases in the region and the powerful Seventh Fleet. These measures are designed to demonstrate the U.S. will to safeguard U.S. interests and those of its allies.

Recently, the United States has pointed out the need for sharing its defense burden with its friends and allies in the region. The message is intended primarily for Japan, which has been pressured to shoulder more of its own defense responsibilities, but ASEAN also has a contribution to make. Its development as a viable economic and political force with a pro-Western orientation helps to ensure a dominant position for the United States in Southeast Asia. A friendly ASEAN further contributes to keeping vital sea-lanes open. Also ASEAN’s opposition to Vietnam’s attempt to make its occupation of Kampuchea a fait accompli frustrates Communist expansionism. While the United States may find it easier to deal with the global threat posed by Soviet naval expansion in Southeast Asia, ASEAN has proved better suited (with support from others, including the United States) to dealing with regional problems such as Kampuchea.

The Reagan Administration has highlighted the significance of the Pacific region in the U.S. security scheme. Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage has summed up Washington’s attitude toward the strategic importance of the Pacific by pointing out that five of the United States’s eight mutual security treaties are with the Pacific nations and that the Pacific is the “great connector” whose lines of communication are increasingly vital to U.S. security—especially in light of the tremendous force expansion in the region by the Soviet Union. According to Armitage, the United States’s role is to act as an essential “balance” against the rising Soviet strength.

Thus, American strategy, as explained by Washington, is two-pronged: the United States must build up its own military capabilities to adequately meet the escalated Soviet military presence in the region, while at the same time strengthening its friends and allies. What the United States envisions is a cooperative security arrangement encompassing all friendly states in the region.

The Current State of ASEAN-U.S. Relations: Issues and Questions

In Southeast Asia, the United States has to resolve a number of rather complex questions. There is, for one thing, the effect of the “Vietnam trauma.” Also, while the United States wishes to maintain a dominant position in Southeast Asia, it has to face the fact that this is an area where U.S. influence and capabilities are not unlimited. Nevertheless, it is widely thought that the American position and interests in Southeast Asia can best
be served by the U.S. bolstering its ties with regional friends, though this may not always be easy.

The United States is a global power, while ASEAN is essentially a collective regional entity. Both are bound by a commonality of interests which shapes the perimeter of their relations. Both are conscious of the need for interdependence and cooperation. Yet, at the same time, their actions are dictated by obligations and priorities specific to differing requirements and circumstances. Nevertheless, in maintaining and developing what is essentially a symbiotic relationship, they recognize the need to fine-tune that relationship to reconcile the discrepancies and divergences. Naturally, as their relations become more intensified, the problems and questions will become more sharply focused.

On the economic side of the picture, it is obvious that there are some basic issues affecting the ASEAN-U.S. relationship. Secretary Shultz has emphasized that economic ties constitute the cornerstone of U.S.-ASEAN relations. For capital development, the open-market-oriented ASEAN economies are dependent on the U.S. market for the export of a few primary commodities and manufactures to enable them to import capital goods for development. While advocating free trade as the common denominator that binds the United States to ASEAN, Washington has been seen as inhibiting the free flow of trade, particularly that involving the ASEAN export of agricultural and other primary products. The ASEAN nations believe that the United States—along with Japan—has not responded adequately to the ASEAN demand for greater market access. The American proposal to levy countervailing duties on textiles from ASEAN is a recent example of U.S. protectionist practices. There have also been other "irritants," such as the tuna and the textile quota issues. The ASEAN nations also complain about the degree of serious consultation on technology transfer, investment, and resource development between the United States and ASEAN. At the ASEAN-U.S. post-ministerial dialogue in Jakarta in July 1984, the United States pledged to cooperate with ASEAN in the development of human resources. Although this move has been regarded as a "step in the right direction," it is still too soon to say if anything substantial will materialize from it. In the meantime, steadily falling commodity prices in the world market and other impediments to ASEAN exports threaten a downturn in ASEAN foreign trade and GDP (gross domestic product), coupled with a sharp increase in foreign debt.

Hence, the question becomes whether or not the present degree of responsiveness on the part of the U.S. contradicts declared U.S. strategic objectives in the region. The United States, together with Japan, speaks of the desirability of realizing a Pacific cooperative framework involving all regional friends and allies. Secretary Shultz said on February 22, 1985, in San Francisco that the United States is prepared to play a major role in the
emerging economic cooperation among the market-oriented nations of the Pacific Basin. While the United States has not officially endorsed the suggestion by Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone that ASEAN should take the lead in making the Pacific community concept a working reality, President Reagan did agree with his Japanese counterpart at their meeting in Los Angeles in January 1985 that the present annual dialogue involving eleven nations of the Pacific region within the framework of the ASEAN post-ministerial meeting could serve as an official forum for discussion, perhaps complemented by other activities in the private sector. Nevertheless, there is some apprehension in ASEAN that such a proposal for broader cooperation at this stage may deflect attention away from the more mundane and problematic bilateral economic issues, which would remain unresolved. This feeling has been reinforced by the American attempt to push for trade in services and high technology while seemingly raising non-tariff barriers against primary products and commodities on which exports ASEAN depends for its well-being.

ASEAN and the United States share a common perception of the physical threat from the Communist states inside and outside of Southeast Asia. Both focus on the role served by Vietnam in Soviet expansionism. They are concerned with the ever-increasing Soviet presence in Indochina. The Soviet use of Cam Ranh Bay as a forward base from which increasing numbers of combat aircraft and naval vessels are being deployed for surveillance and other missions in the South China Sea, the Pacific Ocean, and beyond is a clearly visible threat. ASEAN and the U.S. agree that the growing Soviet military presence in Indochina poses a grave challenge to U.S. forces and interests in the region. For the United States, that presence represents a strategic challenge of the U.S. Seventh Fleet’s primary responsibility for keeping sea-lanes open for trade and security. In addition, the growing Soviet military presence constitutes a serious obstacle to efforts toward an East-West détente. For ASEAN, the more immediate worry is the Soviet support given to ASEAN’s neighbors in Indochina. More than $2 billion worth of military equipment has been supplied by Moscow to Hanoi, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh since 1979, and more than three thousand Soviet military advisers are now stationed in Indochina. These are genuine threats, and they make ASEAN suspicious of Soviet motives and intentions in continuing to back the Vietnamese adventure in Kampuchea.

Nevertheless, there is a difference in emphasis in the U.S. and ASEAN thinking regarding the precise form of the Soviet threat. In the U.S. perception, the Soviet presence in Southeast Asia constitutes an integral part of Soviet global strategy in challenging the United States for supremacy. Thus, what the United States has primarily sought from ASEAN has been cooperation in military security directed specifically at the Soviet factor. ASEAN, on the other hand, while aware that the Soviet Union constitutes the main threat, would like to see superpower rivalry in
the region either significantly reduced or totally eliminated. This is the rationale behind the ASEAN-advocated ZOPFAN (zone of place, freedom, and neutrality) proposal. Besides, ASEAN interests are more specifically focused on Southeast Asia, with the emphasis not merely on military security but on comprehensive security, which includes the enhancement of the respective countries’ political and economic well-being.

ASEAN essentially endorses the U.S. military presence in the region and the U.S. security commitments to the various ASEAN states. It sees these as a vital guarantee of peace and stability, though at times it has doubts about the adequacy of U.S. responses to crisis situations. Because the United States has security interests and commitments on a global scale, and is often focused on other regions of the world, this has sometimes been used as a rationalization for lack of action or insufficient action in the Southeast Asian context. One result of this is ASEAN’s uncertainty about U.S. thinking in response to such regional issues as Kampuchea, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Washington periodically issues assurances that the United States recognizes that regional interests are an integral part of global interests. What remains unclear is how the United States will reconcile differences that may arise between the two perspectives.

The current U.S. stand on the Kampuchean problem is perhaps the most pressing issue at the moment that arouses uncertain feelings in ASEAN. It is common knowledge that Washington has consistently expressed its support of the ASEAN position on the need for a comprehensive political settlement in Kampuchea. It is also understood that Washington wishes ASEAN to take the lead in searching for this avenue to peace. The U.S. abhorrence of the Khmer Rouge is also well known, but Washington has sided with ASEAN in recognizing the coalition government between the Khmer Rouge and two non-Communist nationalist factions. Yet, after the recent ASEAN call for the international community to provide material assistance to the coalition, Washington announced that no such assistance could be expected from the United States. While this caution seems to be due to Washington’s reluctance to escalate the conflict in Kampuchea by direct U.S. intervention, a few facts must be discerned.

First, the Kampuchean conflict has already been internationalized by the full-scale Soviet support in war material to Vietnam. Second, if the United States truly favors the ASEAN strategy in resolving the Kampuchean problem, it must regard material assistance for the armed resistance as not only a vital component of the ASEAN strategy but as morally compatible with traditional U.S. ideology. Support for the Afghan freedom fighters has often been voiced in the U.S., and is even regarded as a “moral” responsibility. Thus, the paucity of support shown for the Kampuchean armed resistance is difficult to justify. A more forthright response by the United States at this critical juncture when Hanoi seems bent on an outright military solution could help to restrain the bellicose Vietnamese.
It is interesting to note that the recent declaration from Hanoi that it could see a positive U.S. role in the settlement of the Kampuchean problem drew little reaction from Washington. While the Vietnamese move was probably only tactical, many observers were disappointed by the absence of an assertive and imaginative U.S. response. U.S. behavior on this score has been subjected to various interpretations. Some would maintain that Washington is still suffering from lingering effects of the “Vietnam syndrome.” Others argue that it indicates the U.S. preoccupation with Central America, the Middle East, and prominent East-West issues involving relations with the Soviet Union. Still others suspect that Washington’s ongoing “obsession” with the missing-in-action issue accounts for its deference to Hanoi. Another argument is that Washington sees no need yet to offer material assistance, since the military balance in Kampuchea has not been radically altered by the intensified Vietnamese offensive against the Kampuchean resistance.

Finally, any interpretation of Washington’s attitude toward Kampuchea must inevitably touch upon the China factor. Some see the U.S. reluctance to have a greater involvement in the Kampuchean problem as a form of deference to China. Although it is mainly aiding the Khmer Rouge, who are unacceptable to the United States, China, in concert with ASEAN, is seen by the U.S. as keeping the problem under control, thus making it unnecessary for the United States to assume any direct responsibility—an arrangement that the U.S. would undoubtedly find very attractive.

Hence, the perception of China’s position in the context of ASEAN-U.S. relations is very important. Over the past decade, China has gone through a significant transformation from an adversary to a potential partner of both ASEAN and the United States. China has also demonstrated to the international community that its commitment to Socialist and Communist doctrines is by no means inflexible. This has been shown in the economic field by Beijing’s insistence on achieving the “Four Modernizations” as a justification for all its actions and policies, which include opening to the non-Communist countries and particularly the Western world. China’s new pragmatic approach has resulted in rapprochement with ASEAN. Nevertheless, among the ASEAN countries there is lingering doubt about China’s long-term intentions toward Southeast Asia. According to one line of reasoning, China’s conflict with Vietnam over Kampuchea demonstrates the Chinese threat to small states in the region. Yet, others think that the falling out between China and Vietnam has made Beijing more amenable to seeking cooperation with ASEAN, with the result that ASEAN can be more flexible in adjusting its relations with China. This view argues that the existing state of affairs enables ASEAN to positively influence China’s course of action in safeguarding and promoting stability in Southeast Asia.
Nevertheless, what role China ultimately assumes in the region will be
determined to a large extent by the interplay among China, the United
States, and the Soviet Union, the three major political powers. In spite of
their differences over Kampuchea, Moscow and Beijing are improving their
bilateral ties. ASEAN must carefully monitor the meaning and impact of
this development. At the same time, ASEAN is concerned about the rela-
tionship between China and the United States, not only because both are
major powers but because their intentions and actions concerning the
region must be examined on their merits. ASEAN is interested in seeing
how the U.S.-China entente affects developments in Southeast Asia, espe-
cially over the Kampuchean problem. Some believe that the United States
entertains too many "romantic" notions about China, at the expense of
ASEAN interests. Yet, there are also those who feel that cooperation with
China by both ASEAN and the United States is beneficial to regional sta-
Bility and order.

A Recommended Course of Policy and Action

On the whole, ASEAN attaches considerable importance to its rela-
tions with the United States in both the bilateral and multilateral contexts.
The United States, for its part, has also reiterated its support for ASEAN
on numerous occasions. It is apparent that both ASEAN and the United
States will enjoy an enduring partnership.

Yet, the ASEAN countries have to bear the brunt of subversion and
aggression from Communist powers while also being burdened with the
urgent tasks of development and modernization. ASEAN is expected to
assume heavy security responsibilities, not only for its own sake but for the
stability and progress of the entire region. Thus, it is hardly fair for ASEAN
to be subjected to economic pressures from the United States, which has
declared its undaunted support for ASEAN progress and well-being. In
recent months, the United States has been experiencing a remarkable eco-
nomic recovery. The strong dollar has attracted huge investment and mone-
tary inflows into the country. Indeed, the U.S. standard of living has been on
a constant rise, as economic bouyancy has been apparent everywhere.

Under these circumstances, the U.S. demand for reciprocity in the
conduct of bilateral economic relations is somewhat irrational. While the
United States may face problems in the widening trade imbalance with
Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, no combination of ASEAN exports
could seriously hurt America's economic might. Nor can a comparison be
made between the hardship suffered by the ASEAN countries and by the
United States. The ASEAN countries cannot continue to purchase Ameri-
can products if they cannot sell their manufactures and goods in the United

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States. This makes it very difficult to explain to the people of ASEAN the apparent contradiction between America's professed friendship and her economic restrictions vis-à-vis ASEAN.

On a more general level, the United States seems to be downplaying its obligations toward developing countries. It has withdrawn from UNESCO, has threatened to pull out of the International Labor Organization (ILO), and has indicated its intention to reduce its financial contribution to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) unless trade in services and high technology is duly included. The United States also seeks loopholes in international agreements and international conventions to force its way on other nations. The United States further uses legal arguments to make certain that the ASEAN countries obey its wishes, particularly in the trade area. The United States has requested certain ASEAN countries to join GATT, purportedly for their own benefit, and then has turned around and found loopholes to penalize those countries. With the ASEAN nations already burdened with multiple problems such as falling commodity prices, rising labor and production costs, shrinking overseas markets, armed conflicts at their borders, a large influx of Indochinese refugees, and a spiraling debt, the U.S. is surely asking too much for too little. Political support from the United States is of no tangible help to ASEAN, and even becomes irrelevant, if the U.S. does not behave like a responsible great power and a dependable friend and ally.

Politically, U.S. relationships with countries in the Pacific region are going through a series of challenges. The ANZUS partnership is facing a test involving the need of the United States to better heed the feelings and aspirations of its allies. In East Asia, the United States is entering a period of détente and limited cooperation with China, which requires sensitivity on the part of the United States toward the feelings of the Chinese and other friends likely to be affected by the Sino-U.S. bilateral interactions. The United States has of late also been locked into a confrontation with Japan regarding trade deficits, market access, and Japan's proper role in defense. Furthermore, such outstanding issues as Taiwan, arms technology transfers, and the Kampuchean problem are relevant to the conduct of relations between the United States and its ASEAN friends. Among the members of ASEAN, there is a widespread feeling that the United States is not sensitive enough to various local problems—especially the Kampuchean problem, where it refuses to provide material support for the non-Communist resistance forces. The weight of the United States could go a long way toward resolving that conflict, particularly by pressuring Vietnam to come to the negotiating table, just as the Reagan Administration has used toughness to persuade the Soviet Union to accept the process of détente. In the final analysis, the United States will have to be more active in its support of the ASEAN position. After all, the United States cannot fail
to see that a Kampuchea under unchallenged Vietnamese military occupation would be detrimental to regional peace.

The Philippines should be another major preoccupation for the United States, not only for the sake of bilateral ties but also for the sake of ASEAN's future stability in Southeast Asia as a whole, and the U.S.'s own strategic position in the region. Finally, while the United States may speak of its growing commitment to the security of the Pacific in terms of increases in the numerical strength of the Seventh Fleet, which is undoubtedly very reassuring to the regional friends and allies, it is readily apparent that the threats to the region are multifaceted, and therefore various means must be employed to deal with them. ASEAN has used its political solidarity and economic growth as the main weapons to cope with the overall threat of Communist subversion. When it comes to defense against outright aggression, however, the ASEAN states need to be certain of unequivocal support from the United States. Only then can the United States expect its ASEAN friends and allies to help in the common defense against the growing Soviet and Soviet-sponsored threat.

In the effort to establish a Pacific community designed to serve their broader strategic and economic interests, the United States and Japan must take concrete actions to vitalize ASEAN so that it can assist the latter in initiating broad regional cooperation. Up till now there has been more talk than action from Washington and Tokyo in this respect. In the final analysis, the United States can and must give Southeast Asia a higher priority in its foreign policy. For one thing, the U.S. should place security issues relating to the region, particularly the Kampucheans problem, on the agenda of all strategic negotiations with the Soviet Union. For its part, ASEAN has already gone on record as collectively telling the Soviet Union that it should expect no better relations with ASEAN until it starts behaving in a more constructive way in respect to Southeast Asian stability.

The United States should also sponsor additional studies of ASEAN in order to better focus U.S. interests in ASEAN, which is already recognized by the United States as intrinsically tied in with the future stability and prosperity of the Pacific region, as well as the global leadership and influence of the United States. For the ASEAN states to become more capable in dealing with the serious economic and political challenges confronting them, they should be able to enjoy greater support from the United States in terms of development and security assistance. As a stabilizing factor, ASEAN can then contribute to the further strengthening of cooperative arrangements between the United States and other nations throughout the world, which will be to the interest of the United States.

Secretary Shultz said in Jakarta on July 13, 1984, in his meeting with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers, that a solid basis of cooperation between the United States and ASEAN should be founded on three principles: real-
ism, strength, and negotiation. By *realism* he meant "facing up to problems." By *strength* he meant a "strong sense of national purpose," based on economic and military vitality. And by *negotiation* he meant the resolution of problems through "principled, effective diplomacy." ASEAN earnestly hopes that these principles will hereafter form an unshakable basis of cooperation between itself and the United States.

**NOTES**

1. In late 1985, the U.S. administration began to apply a quota system to regulate the importation of textiles from Asian countries. It was apparently part of the administration's effort to kill the Jenkins Bill and quell the protectionist sentiment then rife in the Congress. While the restrictions would have had a devastating effect on Asian textile imports into the United States had the Jenkins Bill been passed, the compromise measure, as the quota system came to be interpreted, has also placed a serious restriction on textile exports from the ASEAN countries.

   At about the same time, the ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand, were given another rude shock when another piece of restrictive U.S. legislation, known as the Farm Act, was enacted. As it is designed to boost the export of U.S. farm goods such as rice and corn through government subsidies, the ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand, see the move as an unfair, direct challenge against them as the United States strives to wrestle back lost U.S. overseas markets for primary agricultural produce.

2. Subsequent to this meeting, in late 1985, the U.S. Congress acted on a bill sponsored by New York Democratic Congressman Stephen Solarz to provide between $1.5 and $5 million in "nonlethal" aid to the non-Communists in the Kampuchean coalition government. Acting on this, the Reagan administration authorized the disbursement on $3.5 million for the procurement of nonlethal equipment by the non-Communist resistance in their struggle against the Vietnamese occupation forces. It was a significant gesture by the U.S. Congress to show its support for the Kampuchean armed struggle to liberate Kampuchea from the Vietnamese.
U.S. Perspectives on ASEAN and Regional Security

Donald E. Weatherbee

Introduction

Today, more than a decade after the fall of Saigon, it is in a real sense remarkable, given the forebodings of the time—the apocalyptic vision of falling dominos that had underpinned security perceptions for a quarter of a century—how politically stable the Southeast Asian region has been, compared with many other regions of the world. The non-Communist states have joined together in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), rather than becoming dominos falling to an external push. In fact, the domestic cement holding them firmly upright has further hardened through real economic growth that is increasingly shared by all segments of the populations. With the exception of the special case of the Philippines, local Communist insurgencies have been effectively contained by new strategies that are doctrinally encapsulated in the originally Indonesian concept of “nation resilience” and given operational expression in formulations such as Indonesia’s HANKAMRATA (“Total People’s Defense System”), Malaysia’s KESBAN (“Security and Development”), and the elements of Thailand’s Orders of the Prime Minister’s office 66/2523 and 65/2525.

“National resilience” and its generalization to “regional resilience” recognize the complexity of that condition known as “security,” which in its most general sense describes a total social/political/economic state framework within which measures of peaceful change and adaptation can be directed to the pursuit of consensually determined goals without threat of coercive violence from domestic or foreign sources. Defined this way, security is primarily assured through response to demands in the domestic environment. ASEAN’s leaderships have had to make their search for security legitimate in societies that are undergoing the disruptions of rapid economic and social change and that are at the same time horizontally stratified by income inequities and status while vertically cut by race, ethnicity, religion, and the other marks of subnational community identities. In environments of rapid economic growth and technological diffusion, ideological constructs within which the population can be mobilized to common goals of modernization are balanced by appeals to primordial belief systems and social groupings in which the human spirit has greater value than the cold impersonality
of aggregate economic growth data. The most serious problems in this respect are to be found in Malaysia and Indonesia, where technocratic modernizers are challenged by the forces of Islam.

Internal security is not a condition that exists in an external vacuum. The ASEAN states after 1975, and particularly after 1978, operated in a regional security environment destabilized by the demonstrated willingness of Vietnam to use force in the pursuit of its external political objectives. In ASEAN, a new, imminent, and intense threat was felt as Vietnam’s army rolled westwards, making the Thai-Cambodian border ASEAN’s strategic frontier with a perceived potential military adversary. This regional polarization was made even more dangerous by the extra-regional security linkages of the contending parties—to China, the USSR, and the U.S.—which in effect conferred a kind of surrogate status on the regional states in the triangular East Asian power configuration.

The ASEAN response to these externalities has been sophisticated and multifaceted. The members have sought to enhance “regional resilience” through building up the conventional armed forces of the national states and engaging in an accelerating pattern of military cooperation, seeking thereby to create some local deterrent capability. ASEAN has wielded its symbolic commitment to a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), rhetorically denying the legitimacy of great-power intervention, while actively encouraging, through its ties to the United States and other members of the Western alliance systems, the operation of a regional great-power balance of power. Within its own ASEAN framework, this group of very diverse states has built a political solidarity that has allowed it to become an effective political and diplomatic caucus internationally.

In the face of formidable economic problems and the threat of aggression, the ASEAN states have, in U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz's words, "distinguished themselves by realism, imagination, and sense of purpose." The member states have achieved high rates of economic growth while consolidating internal security. As a group they have responded coherently and in a manner appropriate to their resources to external security concerns, giving thereby some political reality to the 1976 Bali Summit’s promise. In sum, ASEAN’s achievements in the dangerous decade since 1975 provide a solid foundation for continued U.S.-ASEAN cooperation in meeting the dangers and opportunities of the future.

The U.S. Vantage

Today, relations with ASEAN are commonly defined as the “cornerstone” of American policy in Southeast Asia. While some might quarrel with the total accuracy of this statement, it does reflect the importance the United States attaches to its ties to the region. Substantively, this is most visibly represented by what is called “unambiguous support” of ASEAN's
efforts to force a political settlement in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{3} The value attached and the resources devoted to burnishing the U.S.-ASEAN connection in the Reagan administration are in sharp contrast to what only a few years ago appeared to be the crumbling of American power and credibility in the region as the reality of the collapse of U.S. policy in Indochina mocked the rhetoric of the Nixon Doctrine. Nervous allies and friends were alarmed by the term "redeployment," which seemed to cover not only an American military and political withdrawal, but, in the trauma of Vietnam, a psychological distancing as well. This, of course, occurred at a time when ASEAN Southeast Asia felt insecure and vulnerable in the wake of the Communist victories in Indochina. With the exception of continuity in the opening to China, major elements of the foreign policy agenda of the Carter administration seemed at the minimum irrelevant to the ASEAN non-Communist states, and in some cases dangerously naive. The U.S., transfixed by the Iranian hostage crisis and impotent in the face of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, seemed to be some kind of Gulliver, systemically unable to respond coherently and in a sustained manner to crisis and commitment. Yet, today, we see that the United States is an important partner in shaping the future of a region whose growing importance is at the policy heart of the "Pacific Community" in the idea of a coming "Asian century."\textsuperscript{4} Let us briefly note some of the major characteristics of that "partnership."

1. \textit{U.S. political relations with the ASEAN states seem generally firmer and more broadly based than ever before.}

If space allowed, we could sketch a multifunctional web of bilateral and multilateral relations and transactions that are evidence of a growing congruency of U.S. national interests in the region with the national and regional interests of the ASEAN states, involving much more than security interests narrowly defined as "cold war" issues. Although most recently it has been politically focused on the problem of Vietnam in Cambodia, the U.S. "dialogue" with the ASEAN states continues to expand in terms of subjects covered and mutual sensitivities.

2. \textit{U.S. economic and commercial interests in the region have grown dramatically in concert with the dynamic economic growth of the ASEAN states.}

U.S.-ASEAN two-way trade reached $23 billion in 1983, and ASEAN has become the U.S.'s fifth most important trading partner after the European Community, Canada, Japan, and Mexico.\textsuperscript{5} With the ASEAN economies (excluding the Philippines) growing at rates averaging about 6 percent, there is every reason to expect that the U.S. economic stake in ASEAN will expand. The growing linkage between the American private-sector investment and economic growth in ASEAN was recently illustrated by the opening of the U.S.-ASEAN Centre for Technology Exchange. There is a dynamic reciprocity between the political and economic U.S.-ASEAN relations which should be remarked upon. Development of the economic inter-
dependencies of the ASEAN region and the relative prosperity of its neocapitalist market economies is underpinned by the political framework of stability to which the reinvigorated U.S. presence in the external environment is a major contributor. The interdependencies themselves, however, act to make the U.S. political commitment more certain and credible.

3. The contemporary U.S. political and economic presence in the region provides a framework of general cooperation conducive to mediation of the differences between the U.S. and ASEAN.

Numerous bilateral issues and irritants exist between the U.S. and its ASEAN partners, but the awareness on both sides of the growing interdependencies makes communication and adaptation possible in a nonconfrontational style. The importance of this cooperative framework is evident once we introduce specific trade and commercial questions into the discussion—for example, U.S. textile quotas or tin sales. The continued development of structures for policy consultation on international economic issues will further ease frictions. This ability to disagree but still cooperate is not just a phenomenon of the economic dimension of the relationship. For example, it is the wider area of U.S.-Indonesian political agreement that makes it possible for both nations to accommodate to the differences they have on navigation rights under the archipelago maritime jurisdictional regime.

4. U.S. political and economic interests in the region are supported by a sophisticated security structure.

Enhanced American military capabilities are (for the time being) securely based in a geopolitical setting that seems more favorable to the U.S. than its adversary. The commitment of the current American administration to a revitalization of the U.S. political/military presence has been welcomed by ASEAN’s leaderships, who themselves are committed to upgrading their own defense forces in a pattern of growing regional cooperation which, while not an alliance, is at least an entente. The U.S. has firmly and repeatedly asserted its continuing commitment to its security treaty partners in ASEAN, the Philippines and Thailand: the former because of an historical legacy as well as congruency of interests; the latter because of its crucial “front-line” status facing Vietnam in Cambodia. The U.S. also maintains important, although less formal, long-standing security relationships with Indonesia and Singapore. In recent years, there has been broadened defense cooperation with Malaysia. Even new ASEAN member little Brunei now fits within the ASEAN-American security nexus, with Bandar Seri Begawan being included on the itineraries of American Pacific Commanders in their efforts to establish close working relationships with ASEAN military commands.

Programs of American military assistance to ASEAN, although representing only one quantifiable dimension of the security relationship, do exemplify both the symbolic and instrumental nature of the U.S. perception
of ASEAN's security requirements as well as suggesting U.S. strategic priorities in the region. The table presented below documents recent American security assistance to the ASEAN countries in the main categories of Foreign Military Sales financing (FMS), Economic Support Funds (ESF), Military Assistance Program (MAP), and the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET).

The basic general assumption underlying American security assistance is that the U.S. has a common interest with ASEAN in the development of a stable, peaceful Southeast Asia as the political basis for economic growth and social welfare. There is implicit within this assumption the idea that the U.S. and ASEAN have common strategic interests with respect to the linkage of the regional balance of power to the global balance. This, however, is not openly accepted by all of the ASEAN leaderships. The ideal of a ZOPFAN is still a vital symbolic expression of a desire for regional independence from the global great-power balance. Realistically, however, ZOPFAN is not considered a current practical alternative.

The argument that, somehow or other, Southeast Asian security can be considered strategically independent of the U.S.-USSR global relationship cannot be maintained in the final analysis by even the most idealistic

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<th>U.S. Military Assistance to the ASEAN States</th>
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<td>Thailan</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>509</td>
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<td>Singapore</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>Brunei</td>
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**TOTAL U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO ASEAN ($ thousands)**

| 239,648 | 235,366 | 265,950 | 301,180 |

SOURCE: see note 9.
proponents of ZOPFAN. The ASEAN economies are fully integrated into the global market economy. The interdependencies are such that access to Western trade, investment, and assistance is crucial for their prosperity and development (= national resilience). It must be acknowledged, even if only grudgingly, that this global economy has a Western political context that is strategically underpinned by U.S. power. As members of this political economy, the ASEAN nations are directly affected by the ability of the United States to effectively balance a power that has the potential to threaten the system. In this way, the global balance is relevant to regional security, ZOPFAN notwithstanding.

5. The U.S. is the preponderant great power in the region.

Much has been made of growing Soviet military capabilities in the East Asian and Pacific region. Certainly, its new strategic position in Vietnam enhances the power projection capabilities of its navy and air force. Alertness to this development should not, however, obscure the fact that the U.S. remains militarily superior, whether measured quantitatively or qualitatively. In the regional context, it is just as important to note that while the Soviet Union has sought with some degree of success to redress the military balance, it has not been able to compete in other vital areas of state interaction.

If we compare the U.S. position in Southeast Asia today to that of the Soviet Union, the contrast is striking, particularly in light of the fears of a decade ago. The USSR has close political relations with only one significant Southeast Asian nation—Vietnam—which in terms of the rest of the region is a pariah state. The USSR's Vietnam link cripples it politically in dealing with the ASEAN states. Whereas the U.S. presence in the region is multifunctional, energetically caught up in every dimension of state activity, the Soviets present primarily a one-dimensional threat of looming military menace, both in terms of their own growing presence as well as the linkage to Vietnam. The democratic values that are expressed through American foreign policy are still admired (if not always emulated), whereas the Soviet Union and its regional ally are held accountable for the violence in Afghanistan and Cambodia. Despite some ASEAN voices calling for "equidistance" between the two great powers in the continued validation of ZOPFAN as a goal, there appears to be little reason to expect that the Soviet political image in East Asia will be appreciably rehabilitated in the near future.

Ironically, out of the collapse of the strategy of containment in Vietnam, a more functionally vital set of U.S. interests, linked to the interests of regional states, has acted to create a pattern of international activity which, while not "containing" the Soviet Union in the sense of counterforce, structurally and functionally denies Soviet participation and will continue to do so unless the Soviet Union itself alters its political, economic, and military policies. Gorbachev's efforts to rhetorically recast the face of Soviet policy in Asia and the Pacific do not yet demonstrate elements of substantive change and, therefore, have been received coolly.
Elements of the ASEAN Dynamic

The preceding discussion is meant to suggest that in its political, economic, and security components, American national interest in the Southeast Asian region seems to be well served at the present by the ASEAN connection. What, then, have been some of the intervening factors that have produced this kind of outcome ten years after "Vietnam?" For our present purposes, we will not consider internal political and psychological changes in the United States itself or an analysis of the policy output of the current administration designed to add substance to the rhetoric of U.S. commitment to ASEAN. It is probably more useful in terms of thinking about the future evolution of the region to indicate some of the salient indigenous regional factors making for stability.

1. The nature of leadership in ASEAN.

The ruling elites of the region share a number of characteristics in common. They are essentially pragmatic, depending upon bureaucratic-technocratic support structures for decision-making that rationally allocates resources for the optimization of real interest. Thus, the decision-making context is nonideological. ASEAN leaderships' increasing self-confidence has been buoyed by the successful weathering of the world recession. Secondly, all of the leaderships in the market economy states of the region are anti-Communist, although the sources and intensity of their anti-Communism, as well as their perceptions of the external threat, differ depending upon their geostrategic perspective. The perceptions and value base of the current leaders seem to be widely shared through the ASEAN elites, so that we can expect continuity in leadership styles and identification of interests, even though there may be role changes—as long as the regimes persist.


All of the leaderships of the region are secure in their national identities. They are confident that they are on the right track. With the exception of the Philippines, decision-making power has been legitimately consolidated, even though in many cases the political institutions are fragile. In the ASEAN region, we see the grouping confidently acting as a successful coherent political caucus mobilizing global support against Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Kampuchea. For the United States, the mature nationalisms of our friends and allies mean that we no longer have the psychological power to force our viewpoint on leaderships that are fully capable of determining their own national interests. The growing political independence of the regional actors, combined with the development of autonomous power centers, may complicate the shaping of American policy. How will the U.S. relate to the mature nationalisms of ASEAN? The nature of American official exchanges with ASEAN at the highest levels—for example, the success of 1984's Mahathir and Prem visits to the U.S.—
together with burgeoning networks of informal American-ASEAN elite communication (this conference being an example thereof), augur well for that future. This is underlined by ASEAN appreciation for President Reagan's 1986 Bali ASEAN stopover.

3. ASEAN regionalism.

Paradoxically, while greater political independence and new power centers are emerging in the ASEAN area, there is a growing appreciation by the states themselves of the regional dimension of their interactions which transcends simple geography or the limited charter of the Bangkok Declaration. The post-1975 evolution of ASEAN is one of the most significant factors that has led to regional stability. Since the ASEAN Bali Summit (1976), and especially since the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, the now six states have self-consciously sought to harmonize and coordinate policies so as to minimize frictions among themselves and maximize their common interests. An autonomous ASEAN regional political identity is increasingly one to which external actors relate.10


The victor of 1975 has been unable to establish a credible political and economic alternative model to ASEAN. Hanoi's initial boasts that its triumph marked only the beginning of the revolutionary wave that would sweep over Southeast Asia ring hollow. By almost any economic measure that can be quantitatively presented, Vietnam is a pauper state when compared to the economically vibrant members of ASEAN. It has become a welfare client of the Soviet Union. This is only in part the result of the direct and indirect economic costs to Vietnam of its war in Cambodia. It also is the result of disasters of its "socialist path" to industrial development. Politically, Vietnam put paid to its chances of mutually beneficial coexistence with ASEAN by what is now the seventh year of intransigence on a Cambodian settlement. Militarily, the ability of the Khmer resistance to keep large numbers of Vietnamese forces engaged over time, with only relatively small inputs of lethal assistance from ASEAN and China, has destroyed any myth of Vietnamese invincibility. Post-1975 Vietnamese performance, as opposed to revolutionary rhetoric, has given ASEAN leaderships confidence that they control their own destinies.

5. The relative irrelevance of the Soviet Union to the political economies of ASEAN.

The Soviet Union is not appealing to ASEAN as a national model. The continuation of the stalemate over Cambodia and the Soviet backing of Vietnam will continue to inhibit Soviet efforts to improve relations with ASEAN states. The Soviet Union does not seem likely to become a major partner in the economic dynamism of the region. Despite renewed efforts, it is doubtful that the Soviet Union will be able to significantly expand trade and commercial opportunities. The structure of the Soviet economy,
the technological and market preferences of the ASEAN states, and the well-established patterns of traditional trade work against the Soviet Union in this respect.

The Security Future

The thrust of the argument to this point is that from the perspective of a decade after the fall of Saigon, ASEAN states today are more secure rather than less and U.S. interests are better served than could have been expected. We have attributed this result to the regional states’ own national domestic and foreign policies, the growth of regionalism, a return to a constructive role by the United States, and the limited regional political impact of the Vietnamese-USSR nexus. In terms of the major parameters of security, ASEAN exists in a relatively stable environment. This basic outline of stability in the regional security environment will not be significantly altered as long as present policies continue. The existing balance of power is not so unfavorable to any actor that it will feel compelled to use radical means to redress it. This conclusion is by no means intended to suggest complacency or the absence of factors or issues that could threaten regional stability. There are both local conflicts which have a potential for escalation as well as longer-range trends which are politically and strategically ambiguous in terms of evolving security relations.

Regional Conflict


Thailand has been turned into ASEAN’s front-line state as its border region with Cambodia has become the de facto bleeding Khmer-Vietnamese border. From Thai sanctuary the regrouped Khmer Rouge and smaller non-Communist Khmer resistance forces carry a low-intensity war back into Cambodia. This has spurred retaliatory Vietnamese incursions and lodgements into Thailand. The scale of the 1984/85 Vietnamese dry-season offensive graphically illustrates the possibility that if the resistance persists, digs in, and becomes stronger, a need for preemption may force Vietnam to take even bolder military steps that might threaten full-scale military engagements with Thai forces. This could crystallize the issue of how far ASEAN solidarity would go if “political defense” escalated to a call for military assistance. The continuing stalemate over Cambodia seems to have only the Soviet Union and possibly the PRC as winners. Certainly, it is a wasting asset for ASEAN and Indochina. The longer it continues, the more deeply entrenched the USSR will become in Vietnam. The longer it continues, the more deeply entrenched China will become as Thailand’s strategic partner—to the discomfiture of Malaysia and Indonesia. In neither case does it appear that the longer-range common interests of ASEAN and the U.S. are being served by prolonging the crisis.11
2. **Vietnam-PRC.**

Since the Chinese invasion of Vietnam's northern border region in February 1979, China's strategic guarantee to Thailand has carried with it the option of tit-for-tat force. China's demonstration that it can open a "second front" at will may or may not restrain Vietnam. It does, however, raise questions about possible responses by Vietnam's strategic ally, the USSR. Certainly, an unlimited Chinese invasion of Vietnam would require some form of Soviet support for Hanoi, with all the potential dangers to ASEAN and the U.S. We are impressed by the fact that up to now all parties to the Cambodian conflict have sought to manage it so as to avoid escalatory uncertainties. China's restraint in 1985 was significant in this regard. It should be noted, though, that while it is the issue of Cambodia that sets the current Sino-Vietnamese conflict agenda, other issues will continue to divide the PRC and Vietnam even in the event of some negotiated settlement over Cambodia.

3. **Intra-ASEAN conflict.**

Southeast Asia is a region where territorial disputes, jurisdictional disputes, overlapping ethnic insurgencies, etc., have a disruptive potential. One of ASEAN's greatest accomplishments has been the development of mechanisms for intra-ASEAN conflict avoidance. Now the change of government in the Philippines seems to promise a final resolution of the long-standing Philippines-Malaysia dispute over sovereignty in Sabah. Even so, the issues posed by Sulu refugees in Sabah will continue to spur local irritations. Although not strictly an intra-ASEAN problem, the poor state of relations between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea is a worrisome issue.

4. **The South China Sea zone.**

The multiple territorial and maritime jurisdictional conflicts in the region of the South China Sea pit the claims of five of ASEAN's six members against Vietnam and the PRC, as well as each other. This is not simply a matter of resource competition. At a strategic level of analysis, it is part of the struggle to determine the local international order as between Vietnam and ASEAN and the regional role of the great powers. As the PRC becomes militarily stronger, particularly in its naval forces, there will be greater potential for forcing issues in such a way that Vietnam's strategic ally will become involved. In a sense, we find in the South China Sea a regional strategic microcosm.

5. **Refugees.**

Regardless of the final outcome on the ground in Cambodia, it is probable that Thailand will be faced with a residual Cambodian refugee problem, posing a particular kind of internal and external security problem not wholly dissimilar from that in the Middle East. The Cambodian refugee problem for Thailand is only one element of its refugee crisis. The continuing flow across the Mekong from Laos taxes its political resources as well. To this we must also add the Vietnamese "boat people," who defy
the odds of weather and piracy to make their way through the South China Sea. Because of its geographic contiguity to the Indochinese states, Thailand has the most acute refugee problem, but other ASEAN states are not without their own refugee concerns. If Thailand resorts to unilateral “solutions” such as forcing the refugees back across the border, regional tensions will increase. While more than 1.5 million Indochinese refugees have been settled in third countries, the exodus is not over and third-country responsiveness is still necessary—not just for humanitarian reasons, but as a contribution to regional peace and security.

Strategic Ambiguities

1. The U.S.-PRC relationship.

The ultimate objectives of the U.S. in its relationship with the PRC remain as yet unclear, and hence threatening to many in ASEAN. To what extent does the U.S. contribution to China’s modernization pose a security threat to China’s neighbors, particularly in Southeast Asia? As China becomes a regional nuclear weapons power, will the U.S. be able to bring it into arms controls negotiations? If not, what impact will that have on Southeast Asia in terms of its relations with the Soviet Union or Japan’s rearmament programs, particularly the sanctity of Japan’s nonnuclear principles? There is already in some ASEAN circles some sentiment that the USSR might have to be viewed as a potential future counterweight to the PRC if the U.S. places greater priority on its relations with China than with ASEAN. What is certain is that leading ASEAN circles have different perceptions about the implications of the PRC’s power role in East and Southeast Asia than does the U.S.12

2. The Japan-U.S. relationship.

Although the U.S. welcomes Japan’s acceptance in principle of an obligation to assume a greater defense burden and the need to modernize, expand, and upgrade its military capabilities, some possible implications of a greater Japanese security role have perturbed ASEAN leaderships. A militarily stronger Japan in an ideological context of Japanese neo-nationalism suggests as well a Japan less dependent on the U.S. and freer to pursue its own national interests in the region with political power more commensurate with its economic power. Efforts by the U.S. to forge an implicit Northeast Asian strategic alliance with Japan and the PRC will continue to be viewed with suspicion by the ASEAN states, who do not want burden-sharing to be burden-shifting.

3. The USSR and Vietnam.

Although we have argued the relative irrelevance of Soviet strategic force enhancement to the region’s immediate security future, we cannot ignore the capabilities of the Soviet Union to conduct what might be called coercive or intimidatory diplomacy involving military display if suitable opportunities should present themselves or vulnerabilities be perceived.
This kind of muscle flexing would be to demonstrate presence and to remind the regional states of the possible consequences of too close a military link to the U.S. It also could be used to support a local ally—for example, Vietnam's claims and interests in the hotly disputed South China Sea region. It could also back Soviet efforts to exploit any possible political openings that might arise—the Philippines being a case in point. In the past, however, such acts have tended to be counterproductive: not persuasive but confirming the malign image of the USSR.

4. The evolution of regionalism.

A number of questions could be raised having a bearing on the future of ASEAN regionalism. For example, will the stalemated confrontation between ASEAN and Vietnam over Kampuchea prove so internally stressful to ASEAN solidarity that political fragmentation on this issue might spill over into other areas of ASEAN cooperation? Will ASEAN's decision-makers have the political will to implement the necessary measures to institutionally strengthen the existing patterns of cooperation? Most important in terms of security is the question of the emerging political dimension of ASEAN and its translation specifically into regional security policies.

ASEAN regionalism is already much more than simply the development of cooperative linkages and transactions confined to the nonpolitical domain. Since the Bali Summit, and especially since December 1978, the grouping has developed a security dimension. The Thais use the expression "collective political defense," coined by Dr. Thanat, to characterize ASEAN's efforts to defend the region from external threat. The intense pattern of intra-ASEAN bilateral and multilateral circulation and consultation among senior members of the ASEAN military and civilian security elites has led to the creation of a kind of ASEAN security community which has contributed to the definition of a common understanding of shared concerns. The question arises: at what point, or as a consequence of what kind of event, might "collective political defense" be transformed into collective military defense? Although ASEAN military forces have been substantially improved in terms of their conventional warfare capabilities, ASEAN leaders deny that the visible elements of increased defense cooperation and the pace of ASEAN joint military exercising on a bilateral basis presage an ASEAN military alliance. There are concerns expressed in ASEAN circles that the militarization of the grouping would lead to greater alignment, in contradiction to the goal of a ZOPPAN. As the Malaysian Deputy Foreign Minister put it, ASEAN's members "are not prepared to be military outposts in the forward defence line of foreign powers." Furthermore, the conversion of ASEAN into an overt defense instrument would make it even less likely that political structures could be devised to bridge the gap between ASEAN and Indochina.

Finally, a complete discussion of ASEAN regionalism would have to include the issue of its potential linkages to the wider "Pacific Commu-
nity." So far, the governments of the ASEAN states have responded negatively to the concept of a structured process for building a "Pacific Community." Their reluctance to embrace the notion grows out of complex perceptions of how their national interests as well as their associational interest in ASEAN would be affected. One concern is that ASEAN's voice would be muffled in a broader framework that might perpetuate existing inequalities in a Pacific political economy dominated by the U.S. and Japan. There is also concern that any system of expanded multilateral Pacific region cooperation outside of the ASEAN "dialogue" process would carry with it as well an implicit political framework, including the security system underpinned by American power. As we have noted above, ASEAN has resisted politicization of its image in the global power contest, thus rejecting any strategic linkage to U.S. allies in Northeast Asia.

The Real Threat: Regime Fragility

It is in the internal political processes of the regional states that the most volatile and, arguably, the most potent factors working to influence patterns of continuity and change in the total security environment are at work, strengthening or eroding "national resilience." We can simply sketch here some problem areas, the most critical being the Philippines.

Although President Marcos no longer wields the instruments of power, uncertainty abounds about the future. All of the indicators of instability continue to be present in a society buffeted by the conjuncture of economic disaster, coup-politics, and internal war in a psychological environment conditioned by repression and violence. The relevance of political change in the Philippines to security has been elegantly put by American Ambassador Bosworth who advised: "Here in the Philippines, democracy can be your national security doctrine." Now that Marcos has been toppled, the United States will have to develop instrumentalities to relate to a Philippine regime with a value base different from that to which it is attuned. Furthermore, the constitutional framework that will emerge seems likely to guarantee that the status quo ante of the U.S.-Philippines relationship will not be recovered. This, of course, has implications for future rounds of military-base negotiations, which directly affect ASEAN's security considerations. Furthermore, if, eventually, a truly radical nationalist leadership emerges in the Philippines either by ballot or bullet, the pattern of consensual decision making in ASEAN would be disturbed. ASEAN solidarity rests on a framework of shared elite values that seems too fragile to be able to integrate a radical Philippines. Therefore, both the United States and the other ASEAN countries have a common interest in supporting the consolidation of democratic rule in the Philippines.

In Indonesia, leadership seems assured through the 1988 election and into the next decade. Eventually, however, Suharto will be succeeded by a
Speculation surrounds the succession process, since the formal institutions are no guide to the real process of selection. Any successor will not have the mantle of legitimacy—saving the country from the PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party)—that Suharto has. It might be suggested that the internal divisions of "left" (liberal democracy) and "right" (Islamic fundamentalism) will be more pronounced by that time. We cannot rule out the possibility that generational change in leadership in Indonesia will bring different values and attitudes to the problems of government and foreign relations, either in terms of a "purifying force" or more expansive foreign policy goals.

In Thailand, the military has seemed permanently poised for a coup, as leading elements within it try to find constitutional (or, if necessary, extra-constitutional) ways to formally shift the balance of political power in the kingdom away from the civilian parliament and parties and back to the army. The discontinuities of the "student revolution" of 1974 and the Young Turks' April Fools' Day coup in 1981 suggest that such a transfer would not necessarily be peaceful. The failure of the 1985 "Black Monday" coup attempt and the results of the 1986 election in Thailand should not obscure the fact that representative democracy is still vulnerable. Although a military succession would not in and of itself bring major alterations in Thailand’s relations with its neighbors or with the U.S., the internal instability would have impact, particularly if it gave new impetus to Thai radical politics and probably Communist insurgency. Furthermore, any future royal involvement in politics by coup, particularly against constitutional democracy, would seriously undermine the legitimating function of the monarchy in Thailand.

This kind of discussion could be expanded to all of the ASEAN states. For example, at what point might Islamicization in Malaysia as a defense against fundamentalism tip over into a kind of neo-fundamentalism that could have a very disruptive impact on the pluralistic society? Will Brunei’s absolutism be able to accommodate the expected demands for greater participation in the political system by the vastly growing number of educated Bruneians? What are the implications for Singapore politics of possible dynastic succession?

The kinds of issues posed by internal regime change in ASEAN have direct relevancy for intra-ASEAN relations and the way in which the United States can relate bilaterally to the ASEAN states. This becomes a factor in U.S. perspectives on incumbent regimes and indigenous opposition groups. The U.S. has institutional difficulties in relating to opposition groups. This was clear in the confusion surrounding the definition of the U.S. stance toward the change of regime in the Philippines. This is interpreted as an absence of empathy towards their objectives. Conversely, if the U.S. should seek by political intervention to moderate or mediate what might be considered the authoritarian excesses of incumbent regimes towards their opposi-
tion, a counterproductive result could eventuate in terms of other U.S. interests. This could be an outcome in Korea.

Conclusion

I began this essay by describing what I see as the major parameters of the regional security status quo and how this relates to American interests. I then sought to identify some of the regional factors that have worked in the last decade to bring us to this point. I have located most of them in the political economics of the states of the region and the structuring of an international regional political economy. It is here, too, much more than in U.S.-USSR conflict relation, that I have looked for those factors that might make for continuity or change in the next five to ten years.

I have concluded that I do not expect the major characteristics of the external security environment to be significantly changed if current trends persist. The Soviet military buildup in East Asia, in terms of both its conventional and its strategic forces, obviously is of concern to the United States and its friends and allies. For whatever purposes the buildup is intended, we can expect that Soviet forces will continue to be enhanced. While there is, of course, an awareness in ASEAN of Soviet capabilities, this does not now, at least, appear to be translatable into effective political penetration, nor does it seem likely that the USSR will in the future be able to make its military strength functionally relevant to ASEAN so long as there is constancy of U.S. power and purpose in the region. This power and purpose will have to be expressed through comprehensive policies integrating all aspects of U.S. interests in the region if the opportunities in the ASEAN-American linkages are to be realized. The quality of that relationship in the future, as in the present, will be in part dependent on the perception of interest which, in the last analysis, is defined by the incumbent elites on both sides.

NOTES


2. For example, during the June 1982 U.S.-ASEAN dialogue following the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Deputy Secretary of State Walter Stoessel repeatedly emphasized that ASEAN is the “cornerstone” of U.S. policy and that the U.S. will continue to work with ASEAN on a broad range of economic and political issues (Straits Times, 17 June 1982).

4. ASEAN is much less enthusiastic about its putative "Pacific Community" membership, it being only in the 1984 post-Ministerial dialogues that the ASEAN countries were even willing to discuss Pacific regional developments. The caution with which this subject has to be pursued with ASEAN is implicit in Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's statement that "It would be better if ASEAN came to the forefront to formulate this plan. Japan and the United States should take a back seat and promote the plan quietly according to ASEAN's wishes" (Straits Times, 22 November 1984).


8. See, for example, U.S. Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command Admiral William Crowe's remarks in Brunei during his October 1984 visit (Straits Times, 12 October 1984).


11. The local and great-power interests in the Cambodian crisis are dealt with in detail in Donald E. Weatherbee, ed., Southeast Asia Divided: The ASEAN-Indochina Crisis (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985).


A Thai Perspective on the Indochina Issue

Somphong Choomak

In Thai-U.S. relations, the Indochina issue is a factor that should not be disregarded, because it seriously affects the relations between the two countries. This paper focuses on the analysis of four major developments that occurred after the Communist takeover in Indochina in 1975 and on how and to what extent these four developments affect the relationships between Thailand and the United States. These four developments are: the Sino-Vietnamese conflict, the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, the increasingly close military and economic cooperation between Vietnam and the Soviet block, and the problem of Kampuchean refugees in Thailand.

The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict

Sino-Vietnamese relations began to deteriorate in 1975-76. Vietnam's regional security design of "special relationships" among the three Indochina states gradually began to be realized in 1975. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party had tranquilly agreed to Vietnamese control over Laos's future development. The Khmer Rouge leadership of Kampuchea, however, did not surrender to the mounting Vietnamese pressure. Backed by China, it pursued a policy of open confrontation with Vietnam. From mid-1977 to the end of that year, Vietnamese leaders paid visits to China to negotiate with Chinese leaders, but their relations could not be improved. An increasing number of border incidents and the influx into China of hundreds of thousands of "Hoa" (Vietnamese who are ethnically Chinese) aggravated the conflict. The 1978 alliance between Vietnam and the Soviet Union and the subsequent Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Kampuchea were the last straw for China.

Vietnam's alliance with the USSR, together with the military campaign, apparently convinced the Chinese that they had to take steps to weaken the Vietnamese and also to end troublesome incidents along their own border. Deng Xiaoping, the then Vice-Premier, during his stopover in Japan after his visit to the U.S., spoke of the need to teach the Vietnamese a lesson. On 17 February 1979, Chinese forces in Yunnan and Guangxi marched into Vietnamese territory. Of some 200,000 Chinese troops then in the border region, 70,000-80,000 were engaged in the original drive. The Vietnamese had 50,000 well-trained and well-equipped regional troops plus 50,000 militia; no regular Vietnamese army units were deployed on the
border, but five divisions were kept in reserve around Hanoi. The Chinese made six main thrusts, the two strongest aimed at Lao Cai and Dong Dang. They apparently met stiffer resistance than expected, and so, on the second day, they halted about six miles inside Vietnam to await reinforcements and supplied. After augmenting their expeditionary forces to 200,000 men and the total in the region to 600,000, the Chinese renewed their offensive on 23–24 February. In this seventeen-day campaign, the Chinese penetrated as far as twenty-five miles into Vietnam. The PRC announced on 5 March that its troops, having attained their goals, were withdrawing. China claimed on 16 March that its troops had completed their withdrawals and called on Vietnamese troops to leave Kampuchea. In April 1979, both countries agreed to negotiate in Hanoi, but they failed again to improve their relations.

Convinced that the Vietnamese occupation is a concrete manifestation not only of Vietnam's regional ambitions but also of Moscow's global hegemonistic designs, China considers its policy of containing Vietnam in Kampuchea as a matter of principle not to be negotiated or changed. Therefore, in spite of little progress made in reversing the military trend in Kampuchea, China's position on the entire issue has remained adamant and consistent since 1979. As late as 5 November 1982, Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang told Prince Sihanouk in Peking: "China will as always support the Kampuchean people in their struggle against Vietnamese aggression until they win final victory." In fact, since the formation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea in June 1982, Peking has stepped up its financial and military aid to the resistance forces. As long as the Kampucheans are willing to fight the Vietnamese, China is determined to stay in the war.

China presumably hopes to make the Vietnamese military occupation of Kampuchea so costly that it will bring about a change either in Hanoi's basic policy towards Kampuchea or in its leadership structure, which will eventually bring about a policy reorientation in Vietnam. At the same time, by maintaining the credibility of the anti-Vietnamese resistance movement and expanding its political and operational bases as much as possible, China also seeks as an immediate aim to ensure that the military situation in Kampuchea will not become so unfavorable as to lend any credence to the legitimacy of the Heng Samrin regime. That is why China has shown enthusiasm about a coalition government and generosity in giving military aid to all anti-Vietnamese forces so long as they pledge not to sabotage the entire resistance effort.

The interesting thing is that the Sino-Vietnamese conflict has revived U.S. interest in Southeast Asia. As everyone knows, Southeast Asia's importance to U.S. policymakers receded in the wake of the U.S. defeat in the Second Indochina War; but in 1978 the United States began to show an interest in the area again. The revival of U.S. interest was motivated, to a
considerable extent, by the idea that the east-west conflict of the cold war had been largely displaced by an east-east rivalry. Richard Holbrooke, the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs under President Carter, made this point in a speech at Washington in November 1978. He also said that the east-east rivalry had already produced a new alignment of forces in Asia, with many dramatic consequences. One of the most important was the neutralizing effect that the conflict among the Communist states had on their ability to project power elsewhere, and another was the stimulus that each felt to seek better relations with non-Communist states, including the United States. According to Holbrooke, the competition between the USSR and China had stimulated the latter to improve its relations both with its Southeast Asian neighbors and with Japan and the West.

The Indochina conflict, or Vietnam's crisis with Kampuchea and its heavy reliance on Soviet military support to hold up its domination of Indochina, led to the normalization of relations between the U.S. and the PRC and a hardening in American policies toward Hanoi. It also remarkably accelerated ASEAN's move to revive the Manila Pact. Under the terms of this agreement, the U.S. was able to rationalize increased deliveries of military supplies and assistance to Thailand.

In February 1979, Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak visited Washington and was assured of U.S. support. President Carter allegedly said that if Thailand should be threatened by the conflict, the United States would take "definite action" on behalf of her security. A joint statement announced the speeding-up of deliveries to Thailand of combat aircraft, weapons, and ammunition. The American commitment was later made even stronger, at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting at Bali at the beginning of July. The continuing Vietnamese action in Kampuchea, the presence of Vietnamese divisions near the Thai border, and the continuing exodus of refugees made ASEAN statesmen fear for their own national security. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, while not specifically endorsing the ASEAN stand, agreed that "the fighting in Kampuchea poses an increasingly serious danger to the security of the region. . . . The conflict there carries with it the serious risk of expanded military action and escalation." He went on to say that the United States would come to the defense of any of the five countries threatened, "particularly Thailand at this moment."

U.S. military aid more than doubled from 1980 to 1983, going from about $40 million to $67 million in 1982 and approximately $91 million in 1983. The U.S. also agreed to make available to Thailand the long-range, surface-to-surface Harpoon missile system. The number of visits to Thailand by the U.S. Fleet increased, as did the number of joint Thai-U.S. military exercises. Twelve such exercises, including the much-publicized Cobra Gold 82, were scheduled in 1982. Weapons deliveries to Thailand, including artillery for border defense as well as coastal patrol boats, helicopters, and air defense communications, were accelerated.
As for the ASEAN nations, all have recognized the increasing Soviet threat in the region since 1978. The principal reasons for this threat-perception are: (1) the sharply increased use of Vietnamese bases by Soviet air and naval forces after 1979; (2) the fact that Soviet bombers can now fly with ease from these bases to points as distant as the Strait of Malacca; (3) the increase in Soviet military aid (about U.S. $3–6 million per day) to Vietnam, which is now the strongest military power in Southeast Asia; (4) Vietnam’s permission, after September 1979, for the Soviet Pacific Fleet to make port calls; and (5) the penetration deep into the Gulf of Siam by Soviet naval forces in November 1980.

As the military capabilities of the ASEAN nations are insufficient to meet external threats, reliance on American deterrence, in the form of U.S. Pacific air and naval power, constitutes a basic assumption of ASEAN security. The United States supports conventional force improvements in the ASEAN states through its Foreign Military Sales programs, while the growth of Soviet naval and air power in the region is to be balanced by the expansion of the U.S. Seventh Fleet. The ASEAN nations recognize that the United States has the military force needed to deal with Vietnam’s large numbers of fighter aircraft and tanks. The strengthening of U.S.-Australian cooperation—through an agreement to permit B-52s to use Australian airfields and through the establishment of bases for U.S. forces in Western Australia to support operations in the Indian Ocean—is seen as a contribution to security in the ASEAN region. Some ASEAN nations also believe that, besides the U.S., China is another deterrent to a possible Vietnamese attack supported by the Soviet Union. Thailand and Singapore are the front-line members of ASEAN who maintain close contacts with both the U.S. and China.

The Vietnamese Occupation of Kampuchea

On 25 December 1978, the Vietnamese army launched an invasion into Kampuchea, utilizing the political cloak of the “Kampuchea National United Front for National Salvation” (KNUFNS). When the invasion took place, Hanoi claimed that it was being undertaken by Kampucheans rising up against Pol Pot. The Vietnamese military intervention was swift and decisive, with the capital, Phnom Penh, occupied on 7 January 1979. A large number of Pol Pot’s forces dispersed into the countryside to carry on a protracted war.

The initial Vietnamese political purpose was attained on 8 January with the establishment in Phnom Penh of a People’s Revolutionary Council headed by Heng Samrin. Heng Samrin had been a member of the executive committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea for its eastern region and the political commissar and commander of its Fourth Division. He was credited with leading a revolt against the Pol Pot government.
On 11 January, the People’s Revolution Council proclaimed the founding of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, which was accorded immediate diplomatic recognition by the governments of Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and its allies. On 17 February, a senior Vietnamese delegation led by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and including Army Chief of Staff General Van Tien Dung traveled to Phnom Penh. The following day, the Vietnamese and their client Kampuchean government concluded a Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation, which was cited to justify the continued presence of Vietnamese forces. The treaty contained obvious similarities to the treaty concluded in July 1977 between the governments of Vietnam and Laos, stressing mutual “national defense and construction.” In addition, agreements signed in March between Heng Samrin and the visiting President of Laos, Souphanouvong, completed the pattern of formally expressed special relationships within Indochina that accommodated Vietnamese political dominance and strategic needs.

Conflict between the Communist parties and governments of Kampuchea and Vietnam served to give rise to a wider struggle engaging the interests of major external states over the appropriate and acceptable pattern of power in Indochina. The conflict over the internal political identity of Kampuchea and the nature of its external affiliations became more than a matter of competing wills and capabilities of the Kampuchean and Vietnamese Communist movements. It became central to the competing interests of China and the Soviet Union, whose governments committed resources and prestige to the cause of their respective clients. Moreover, Thailand and its fellow members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as well as the United States, were incorporated into an alignment opposed to the consolidation of Vietnamese power throughout the whole of Indochina.

Thailand, without doubt, has been more directly affected by the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea than have the other ASEAN states, and has been in some respects facing a deteriorating security situation, for the following reasons.

First, the loss of Kampuchea as a buffer state has brought Thai and Vietnamese troops in direct confrontation with each other. The unsettled conditions on the border and the continued fighting between the forces of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (who seek refuge and support on the Thai side of the border) and Vietnamese regulars can always lead to the possibility of uncontrolled escalation of armed conflict involving Thailand in a major way. The Vietnamese might also deliberately make incursions into Thai territory, as has happened in the past. Such moves could serve tactical objectives—notably, to take revenge on Thailand for assisting the Khmer resistance forces.

Second, and more generally, the apparent consolidation of the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea has changed the regional balance of power in some respects in favor of Vietnam. Hanoi may use its influence in
Phnom Penh against Thailand in various ways, including support for Thai insurgents. Some Bangkok officials fear that Hanoi's long-term strategy is to link such support with plans for the invasion of Thailand, and they see this possible scenario as the most serious threat to Thailand arising out of the present situation. Since Vietnam already has considerable influence in Laos, the addition of Kampuchea to its sphere of influence means that Thailand now has to face Vietnamese preponderance along its entire eastern and northeastern border. The Thai-Kampuchean border region is relatively close to Bangkok; hence, Vietnamese troops alongside that border are viewed with particular apprehension.

Third, there is an opportunity cost for Thailand. Bangkok has traditionally followed a policy of competing with Vietnam for influence in Laos and Kampuchea in order to strengthen these entities as friendly buffer states. This was the principal reason why Thailand early normalized relations with both the Kaysone Phomvihane and the Pol Pot governments. When the Vietnamese drove out Pol Pot and installed the Heng Samrin government in Kampuchea in January 1979, Bangkok had to recast its traditional policy, hoping that the government of Democratic Kampuchea had sufficient international recognition and Chinese support on the ground to reverse the situation in Phnom Penh.

Fourth, the cost to Thailand relates to the refugee situation. Famine and fighting in Kampuchea have caused an enormous refugee problem in the eastern Thai border provinces ever since late 1979. The refugee presence has inflamed local sentiments, and the refugee flow itself is often a cover for infiltration.16

Owing to the common interests of Thailand and China, Thailand's relationship with the latter has become very close. Some observers say that China has emerged as Thailand's de facto ally. Since the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, Chinese officials have repeatedly declared that China will assist Thailand if she is attacked by Vietnam. Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang also promised Thai Prime Minister Prem in November 1982 that "should the Vietnamese authorities dare to invade Thailand by force, the Chinese government and people will stand firmly by the side of Thailand and give all support to the Thai people in their just stand of opposing aggression."17 The Chinese commitment Thailand is also the main strategic deterrence against a major Vietnamese attack on Thailand.18 Moreover, the insurgency situation in Thailand has greatly improved since the intensification of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict and the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea. China started in mid-1979 to terminate all overt, traceable support for the Thai insurgency movement led by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). This was done in order to court Bangkok's friendship, to achieve common interests in Kampuchea, and to encourage Thailand to take the lead in shaping a firm ASEAN stance against Vietnam.
The United States, as is generally known, has based its support for ASEAN in the Kampuchean matter on a global perspective of its own security interests, and its perception that security in the Asian-Pacific region can only be achieved by reducing the Soviet spread of influence in the region. As an analyst has remarked, the U.S. is going to play a coordinating role in limiting the spread of Soviet influence, or, in other words, is going to carry on the containment policy in a modified form and at two levels: the first or higher level is to involve Japan and the PRC in containing the Soviet threat; the lower-level containment is to be practiced by lesser states such as South Korea, Taiwan, and the ASEAN nations. The Americans make military technology available to these countries on reasonable terms. A good example is the increase in sales of weapons and defense systems to the ASEAN countries and the accelerated delivery of weapons to Thailand when that country has been faced with threats from Vietnam, which has received strong support from the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, while the Soviet Union is giving $3 million of daily support for Vietnamese military operations in Kampuchea, the U.S. until recently has done very little for the non-Communist Khmer resistance forces. The Thai government therefore called for more U.S. support for these non-Communist forces and the United States in 1985 responded with the modest provision of $5 million per year in economic support for the non-Communist forces.

The Increasingly Close Military and Economic Cooperation between Vietnam and the Soviet Bloc

Vietnam has become heavily dependent on the USSR and its allies for military and economic aid.

Vietnam’s Dependence on the USSR and the Socialist Countries

In 1982, Soviet economic assistance to Vietnam amounted to nearly $1 billion; other Communist assistance totaled around $560 million. As a result of agreements signed in 1981, most of these funds have been directed toward financing new key projects and sixty others already under way. This list includes the enlargement of Haiphong harbor, the completion of the Thanh Long bridge over the Red River, and such industrial enterprises as the Hoa Binh hydroelectric scheme, the Pha Lai thermal power plant, the Lam Thao superphosphate fertilizer plant, the Bim Son and Xuan Mai concrete factories, the Phu Rieng rubber plantation, the Tinh Tue tin mine, and the Song Cong diesel-motor factory. The USSR is also engaged in supporting a wide variety of agricultural projects designed to help Vietnam to develop a tropical products export industry whose major consumer will be the Soviet Far East.
Besides all this, a joint fishery commission and a joint enterprise to assist the Vietnamese in the exploration and exploitation of offshore oil and natural gas have been established between Vietnam and the USSR.20

For several years now, Vietnam has maintained one of the worst trading balances of any nation in the world. In 1981 alone, Vietnam owed the Soviet Union the equivalent of $800 million and the COMECON countries an additional $520 million.21

Vietnam has become increasingly dependent on the socialist countries for essential imports. Vietnamese authorities concede that over two-thirds of their imports of fuel, raw materials, food, consumer goods, equipment, and machines come from COMECON sources. The USSR alone supplies Vietnam with 90–95 percent of its imports of steel, iron, petroleum (1.5–1.6 million tons a year for the past seven years), grain (200,000 tons in 1982), nitrogenous fertilizer (550,000 tons in 1982), cotton, and trucks. On the other hand, Vietnam’s imports from the West fell from 50 percent of the total in 1977 to 25 percent in 1981, and exports to the West amounted to only $80 million in 1981, while the figure for the Soviet Union was equivalent to $600 million.22

In order to pay for assistance from the USSR and other socialist countries, Vietnam has mortgaged much of its mineral, marine, and tropical resources. It has also signed labor contracts with the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. By these contracts, Vietnamese workers are sent to work in factories, mines, and irrigation or land-reclamation projects in the above countries. It is estimated that there are now between 50,000 and 100,000 Vietnamese workers in the USSR and the other socialist states.23

Soviet-Vietnamese Military Cooperation

Less than two months before it invaded Kampuchea in December 1978, Vietnam signed a formal treaty with the USSR, of which Article 6 states:

In case either party is attacked or threatened with attack, the two parties signatory to the treaty shall immediately consult each other with a view to eliminating the threat, and shall take appropriate and effective measures to safeguard peace and the security of the two countries.

It was under this article that the USSR began sending military assistance to Vietnam. From then on, Vietnam has become heavily dependent on the USSR for military and economic aid. The USSR and other Warsaw Pact countries supply Vietnam with all its military weapons.24 The Soviet Union alone provides most of Vietnam’s arms.

The arms sent to Vietnam since 1980 have cost more than $1 billion. It is believed that without this massive Soviet support Hanoi could not have conducted its expensive operations in Kampuchea and Laos while confront-
ing the Chinese on its northern border. Thus, Vietnam has become so over-
extended in its expansionist programs in Indochina and in meeting the
Chinese counteractions that it has had to accept a position within the
Soviet-bloc system in exchange for the military and economic aid it has
required. In compensation, the USSR has been allowed by Vietnam to use
the military facilities at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang. Soviet naval and air
forces, based at or utilizing Cam Ranh Bay, can project their power into the
Southwest Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Straits linking these two oceans,
and Southeast Asia. This is the first time that the USSR has gained a
military foothold in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam, which is the strongest military power in Southeast Asia and
which has the fifth largest armed forces in the world, has become the
USSR’s closest ally in this region. The Soviet supply of military equipment
to Hanoi since the invasion of Kampuchea in 1978 and Vietnam’s resistance
to China’s armed incursion in 1979 still remain at the same level. Thailand
and other ASEAN nations view this policy of the USSR as a threat to their
security. Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savetsila said in a press conference at
the Thai Foreign Ministry on 17 January 1985: “Vietnam was then—and
still is today—the strongest military power in Southeast Asia. Its conquest
of Kampuchea has brought real danger to our doorsteps...”25 Thai Prime
Minister Prem Tinsulanondha said, on the occasion of addressing the open-
ing of a conference on Southeast Asia on 17 January 1985, that Vietnam’s
decision to bring in outside assistance to subsidize its “expansionist adven-
ture in Kampuchea” was the biggest unresolved source of tension in South-
east Asia.26

It is without doubt that the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty significantly
reduced the chances of peaceful coexistence between the ASEAN nations,
especially Thailand, and Vietnam. International relations in the region were
further polarized by the normalization of American diplomatic relations
with China (15 December 1978), the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea
(25 December 1978), Deng Xiaoping’s visit to the United States (late Janu-
ary 1979), the founding of the Heng Samrin regime (11 February 1979), and
several intrusions by Vietnamese forces onto Thai soil.

Thailand has moved closer to the PRC as the latter has demonstrated a
willingness to confront Vietnam and to help Thailand if its is attacked by the
Vietnamese. In Thailand, it is widely believed that, in addition to the U.S.,
China is another important deterrent to a possible Vietnamese attack. The
most important reason is that China is the biggest power in the region and
strongly opposes Vietnam’s occupation of Kampuchea. Both the Chinese
and the Thais see that Vietnam’s occupation of Kampuchea, supported by
the Soviet Union, is a real danger to the security of Southeast Asia.

However, for the most effective guarantee of their security, five
ASEAN members whose military capabilities are insufficient to meet exter-
nal threats are pleased to rely on American deterrence in the form of U.S.
Pacific air and naval power. The United States now supports conventional force improvements in the ASEAN states through its Foreign Military Sales programs and is expanding its Seventh Fleet in the Pacific Ocean. As of 1985, the United States is again paying a great deal of attention to Thailand and Southeast Asia. However, the U.S.'s direct security role will be confined to protecting its regional allies in the event of a conventional external attack and to maintaining the freedom of sea and air lanes.

The Problem of Kampuchean Refugees

Since the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea in January 1979, Vietnam has sent about 170,000 soldiers to help stabilize the Heng Samrin regime and to drive out the Khmer resistance forces. The westward drives of these Vietnamese forces, which (until 1985–86) have been conducted in the dry season of every year since 1979, have also pushed tens of thousands of the Kampuchean people toward the Thai border.

In 1983, Thailand received a total of 157,807 Indochinese displaced persons: 74,955 Laotians, 71,976 Kampucheans, and 10,876 Vietnamese. In addition, there were about 200,000 Kampucheans encamped along the Thai-Kampuchean border. Each year, when the fighting between the Khmer resistance forces and the Vietnamese becomes violent, these people move westward deep into Thai territory.

Thailand has had to bear the heaviest burden of these Khmer refugees (or "Kampuchean illegal immigrants," as they are called by the Thai government). Thailand has had to accept this grave burden for humanitarian reasons, and "without anyone helping her to solve the problem decisively." The Thai government would like every concerned party to share this responsibility until the last refugee in Thailand has left for a third country or has returned safely to his homeland in the near future.

The Thai government will uphold its humanitarian principles side by side with the principles of sovereignty and national security concerning the Kampuchean and other Indochinese refugees, on the condition that the other countries and international organizations concerned remain faithful to their commitments, act in a serious and concrete manner, and fully share the burdens imposed upon Thailand.

Among all the illegal immigrants in Thailand, the Kampucheans most show their desire to return to their homeland. The Thai government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Thailand have started working on a program of voluntary repatriation. Unfortunately, little progress has been made, since Vietnam and the Heng Samrin regime have strongly opposed the plan. If it could be carried out without interruption, according to the Secretary-General of the Thai National Security Council, the repatriation plan could serve the long-term objective of solving the problem of Indochinese refugees.
In 1982, the resettlement countries welcomed only 33,000 Indochinese refugees from Thailand: this was only 2,750 per month, as opposed to 102,564 in 1981 at a resettlement rate of 8,550 per month. The rate of outtake for resettlement in 1982 therefore dropped by almost 70 percent. The United States, which is the world’s largest recipient of refugees, having taken more than a million from Indochina since the early 1970s, took 131,000 in 1981, but reduced its intake to 74,000 in 1982. U.S. refugee officials put the estimated number of acceptances for 1983 at only 40,000. France, Australia, and Canada, who rank behind the United States in the number of refugees they have accepted, have also lowered their resettlement rates. The number in 1984 seems to have been even further reduced. One explanation for the sharp decline of the resettlement rate is that many resettlement countries have laid down more selective measures and difficult procedures for accepting these refugees.

The Thai government feels that while Vietnam has caused great sorrow to mankind in this region, the U.S. and Western European countries haven’t given any reassurance to Thailand concerning the large number of Kampuchean and other Indochinese refugees. It seems to the Thais that they have been left alone to bear the heavy burden of these refugees, and the Thai government is disappointed with the reluctant attitude of the U.S. and the Western European countries in this matter.

Conclusion

The Indochina conflict has become apparent since 1975. The years 1979 to 1982 were the period of the highest degree of conflict, but the same period for Thailand brought about reassurance and relaxation on security because Thailand and China began to share common interests by opposing Vietnamese hegemonism to Indochina. Some have even said that the increasing closeness amounted to a de facto alliance between the two countries. At the same time, the U.S. seemed to prefer to leave Southeast Asia under the umbrella of China and Japan. The Thai government at that time created a new relation with China because the latter had ceased giving visible support to the Communist insurgents inside Thailand and had made a strong commitment guaranteeing the security of Thailand if attacked by Vietnam. The Thai government and people were happy to have good relations with China. Various private and official trips have been exchanged between the two countries. At that time, 1978–1981, the Thai government and people did not pay much attention the United States. They thought that only China could deter Vietnam.

However, after the normalization of relations between China and the USSR (1982), the great embrace between Thailand and China began to change. The Thai government and people began to be more cautious in their relations with China. A good number of people began to be afraid of
the increased Communist strength. They feared that the new compromise between China, the USSR, and eventually Vietnam would be realized, thereby threatening not only Thailand but all non-Communist ASEAN countries. That is why the Thai government and people will increasingly look more to the United States and other Western countries, especially with regard to defense and economic relations.

The Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea and the increasingly close military and economic cooperation between Vietnam and the Soviet bloc constitute a real threat to the security of Thailand. Ever since the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Kampuchea on December 25, 1978, Vietnam has maintained 170,000 military men in Kampuchea in order to keep Heng Samrin in power. Hundreds of thousands of the Kampuchean people have fled the Vietnamese westward drive to the Thai-Kampuchean border, and a large number of innocent people have entered Thailand to find safe haven. These refugees cause serious security and humanitarian burdens for the Thai government. Although international organizations and many Western countries have come to share the burdens of the Thai government, the total outside effort is simply not enough. Now it is the seventh year that Vietnam has kept its 170,000-man forces in Kampuchea. The Vietnamese continue to use brutal and inhuman means in killing the Khmer, and they also have intentionally intruded onto Thai soil many times. This, for the Thai government and people, constitutes a real and immediate threat to Thai security. Without the $3–6 million per day in Soviet assistance, the Vietnamese certainly would not be a major threat in the region. Because the other major powers can neither persuade the Soviet Union to stop such aid nor induce Vietnam to withdraw from Kampuchea, the Thais feel that the main challenge is a joint Vietnamese-Soviet threat. Thai concerns were elevated when the USSR and China began to normalize relations because some Thai circles fear that reconciliation between the Communist big powers could be profitable to the Vietnamese and to international communism in the region in general. Some say that Thailand should allow Vietnam to establish its Federation of Indochina without any intervention, but as everyone knows, Vietnam is engaged in imperialism in Indochina rather than creating a voluntary federation.

NOTES


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid., pp. 22–23.

9. Ibid., p. 22.


14. Ibid.


22. Ibid., p. 320.

23. Ibid.


26. Ibid., p. 3.

27. Simon, op. cit., p. 23.


29. Simon, op. cit., p. 32.


32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

The Thai-U.S.-Vietnam Triangle: Perceptions and Interests

Douglas Pike

This paper is an examination of contemporary Vietnam in terms of Thai-U.S. perceptions and interests. It is policy-oriented in that it looks both at Thai foreign policy with respect to Hanoi and at what might be called the joint or shared Thai-U.S. policy for dealing with Vietnam.

The approach employed here is, first, to set down the general perceptions of Vietnam held respectively by the Thai and American governments; then to examine existing goals, policies, and methods of dealing with Vietnam; and finally to look at the future in terms of longer-range interests.

Perceptions of Vietnam

The Thai and U.S. governments do not see Vietnam in the same way. The two perceptions have been shaped by separate geographies, differing heritages, and varying national interests. This is natural and in itself no cause for alarm—one could hardly expect us to see Vietnam through the same prism. What is important is that both Americans and Thai should always bear in mind that two separate sets of perceptions are at work.

The geographic perception is obvious: the U.S. is far away from Indochina, while Thailand, as one ASEAN official observed, "unfortunately lives in a bad neighborhood." The influence of heritage is somewhat more complex: U.S. experience with Indochina is only recent, as history goes, and has been highly traumatic, painful, and what might be called intellectually unsettling. Thai heritage, on the other hand, stretches back for centuries and is vastly complicated—a relationship that has been punctuated by wars, with Thailand sometimes the aggressor and sometimes the victim. Finally, the perceptions of the two countries with respect to national interest varies—although this seems mainly to be a difference in degree, not kind—having to do with Vietnam as a potential aggressor, and when not an aggressor as a destabilizing force in the region. As is discussed below, national-interest perceptual differences tend to turn less on conflicting assessments of Hanoi and more on how to deal with it, particularly in the China and ASEAN contexts.

Thus, Americans and Thais do not see Vietnam in the same light. However, our differing perceptions should not be exaggerated. In point of fact, American and Thai views of Hanoi are far more similar than, say, American and Indonesian perceptions.
The Thai threat-perception of Vietnam takes both a direct and indirect form—that is, the Thais see (1) a conventional military threat and (2) a surrogate or proxy threat through local insurgents supporting Hanoi’s objectives because of dependency or for other reasons. There is another threat, less military and more psycho-political, that could endanger the Thai society as it is now constituted.

The conventional military threat represented by the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) is formidable, to say the least. PAVN is the third largest armed force in the world, while the Thai army is small and lightly equipped and is structured to deal with insurgencies. Although strengthened in recent years by the addition of tanks, heavy artillery, and air power, the Thai army simply could not stop a tank-led blitzkrieg invasion by PAVN forces now numbering more than three million. The Vietnamese probably could occupy Bangkok in a matter of hours and be in all provinces within days. Quite probably, this also would result in a Thai insurgent defense against the invader, turning Thailand into a “super Kampuchea” for Vietnam. There are compelling reasons why Vietnam would be deterred from such an action: that the Chinese would act militarily, as would the U.S.; that ASEAN almost certainly would aid Thailand at some level; that Moscow would disapprove, perhaps strongly. Further, there are elements within the leadership in Hanoi, including important factions in the military, which would regard such a move as sheer “adventurism,” and which would represent important opposition. Thus, such an assault is not probable in the foreseeable future, but the point to be made here is that there is a potential threat and it is so perceived by Thailand.

The indirect military threat to Thailand is posed by Vietnam’s aiding and abetting local insurgencies. This is a difficult threat to evaluate. Some observers believe that the age of the guerrilla is over, although it is unlikely that Hanoi has reached this conclusion. There are in Thailand three potential arenas for insurgency: the north, the northeast, and the south. At one point late in the Vietnam War, Hanoi was involved in Thai insurgency support—exactly how deeply is still debated, but it was involved to some degree. A cadre corps of Thai insurgents, numbering at least 300, were trained in Hanoi, and some of the arms that reached Thai insurgents were traced to North Vietnam.

There is evidence to indicate—although only inferentially, since it is almost impossible to document such things—that PAVN generals in Hanoi took a long, hard look at the insurgency situation in Thailand at the end of the Vietnam War. The Hanoi Politburo at the time had two feasible options in pursuing its objective of moving Thailand to the left, eventually to become a people’s republic. It could openly oppose and confront the Thai government and fund Thai insurgencies out of military stocks captured in South Vietnam. Or it could operate in Bangkok in a deeper game, doing business with the bourgeois society while seeking ways to manipulate Thai
political and social trends and push the system to the left. The latter course was chosen in 1975. Apparently, the deciding factor was the PAVN General Staff's evaluation that none of the three Thai insurgencies was very impressive. All lacked trained leadership, were poorly organized, and were using improper mobilizational and motivational methods. In short, the Thai insurgents "were not serious about guerrilla war," as a defecting PAVN officer later expressed it to the author. The Thai insurgents were judged to have potential effectiveness, but, it was decided in Hanoi, greater opportunities lay with the center in Bangkok than in the Thai backcountry.

The point of this—in reference to Thai threat-perception—is that Hanoi could reverse its policy at any time. Vietnamese agents could recruit potential cadres in Bangkok universities and take them to Hanoi for a few years of training, then infiltrate them back to begin organizational work. Vietnam could field ethnic Lao guerrilla units across the Mekong River into Thailand. Quite probably, what deters the Politburo at the present is that funding insurgencies is a game two can plan. Southern Vietnam is quite vulnerable to such activity—as was indicated with the recent spate of "resistance" show trials there.

The third threat that Vietnam could pose lies in the grey area between war and diplomacy—which might be called the psycho-political threat. This challenge is an extension of Vietnamese ideological thinking, and is partly military (that is, security-oriented) and partly socio-economic. It has been worked out by Hanoi Party doctrinaires in some detail, but at the moment is still on the drafting board. The basic idea of the strategy is to coerce Thailand into cutting its ties with the capitalist world in exchange for less threatening Vietnamese behavior. Hanoi would offer harmonious relations and regional stability if Thailand would alter its relationship with western/Japanese capitalism. This idea, which the author has discussed in detail elsewhere, has been worked out as a full-blown ideological doctrine in Hanoi. Implicit in it is the element of coercion (implied blackmail)—and that obviously is seen as a threat by Thailand.

What is germane here—in comparing U.S. and Thai threat-perceptions—is that while they are similar, they vary in degree and seriousness. Vietnam can threaten the U.S. only indirectly, by striking at U.S. allies and U.S. interests in the region; it can threaten Thailand directly and physically. For both the threat is genuine and ever-present. The different is that for one the threat involves mildly important national interest, for the other, survival. Thailand is obliged to take Vietnam more seriously than does the U.S.

Policy Objectives and Approaches

Just as Thai and U.S. perceptions of Vietnam vary, so do Thai and U.S. policies and diplomatic devices. Vietnam as well as Kampuchea and Laos represent individual problems for Thailand, as they do for the U.S.,
but the problems in each case are not exactly the same. Again, as with perceptions, the differences between us should not be exaggerated. The U.S. and Thailand have many overlapping interests and common goals. What divides us chiefly are methods of approach and priorities.

Ample illustration of this can be found in comparing the diplomatic record of the two countries with respect to Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War. For the U.S., relations with Vietnam, Kampuchea, and Laos after 1975 have ranged from nominal to virtually nonexistent. There has been neither much diplomatic intercourse nor very much of substance to discuss, or at least nothing much that both sides agree is discussable. The U.S. has had no direct intercourse with Kampuchea, and its interests there have been confined largely to problems related to the refugee exodus. Diplomatic relations with Laos were not broken after the Communist takeover and continue today at the representational level of chargé d'affaires. By contrast, Thailand has had extensive diplomatic intercourse with all three Indochinese countries at both the official and unofficial levels.

The Carter Administration in 1978 dispatched the (Leonard) Woodcock Mission to Hanoi to discuss future relations. Hanoi's leaders took a hard-line approach: they spoke of American economic obligations, mentioned the future $3.25 billion, the press using the term "war reparations." Woodcock explained that U.S. foreign aid required Congressional authorization and involved domestic politics that are part of the democratic process. He suggested that embassies be exchanged, after which the newly arrived Vietnamese ambassador in Washington could make aid representations at the Department of State and lobby on Capitol Hill. The Politburo stood by its "precondition": aid before recognition. The Americans demurred, and the mission ended inconclusively. For the next year or so, relations were marked by occasional U.N.-level meetings and deputy assistant secretary level talks in Paris. It was a highly dynamic period, for Vietnam-PRC relations were deteriorating, finally to the point where fearful Hanoi officials dropped the precondition on U.S. relations. However, U.S.-PRC relations were solidifying—it was the time of the "opening to China"—and the Carter Administration decided its choice had come down to China or Vietnam, not a difficult one to make. The U.S. ignored Hanoi's overtures. Then, in late 1978, Vietnam invaded Kampuchea and U.S.-Vietnamese relations were again frozen.

The Reagan Administration's position on Vietnam is that it is always willing (and has the necessary mechanism) to discuss a specific issue with Hanoi officials, but that the question of deeper association (including diplomatic recognition) is being held in abeyance; and that this is a pragmatic policy, not one born of dogma or American vindictiveness. A change here, it is indicated, awaits the withdrawal of PAVN troops from Kampuchea.

There appears to be a certain unease or restiveness in the American government circles concerned with Indochina events or responsible for U.S.
policies there—that is, within the State Department, parts of the Pentagon, and Congress. This condition does not arise out of doctrinal differences or policy arguments so much as from differing perceptions having to do with the service of various national interests—for instance, relations with ASEAN and China, resolution of the Vietnam War casualties issue, Kampuchea, and regional security matters. Central to all of these is the temporal dimension of policy, which asks the question: whose side is time on in Indochina? And, if events continue in their present direction, will this serve Vietnam’s interests more than those of its opponents? There are, of course, no clear or certain answers to these questions. The future is indeterminate, the ultimate outcome of unfolding events ambiguous. Hence the questioning attitude in Washington as to whether or not present policies may unintentionally lead the U.S. in a direction it will later come to regret.

With respect to American public opinion in general, there is a range of outlook on Vietnam and Indochina. Basically, it is a political—that is, conservative-liberal—division, although there are some crossovers: conservatives who want to be forthcoming to Hanoi to facilitate the resolution of casualties issues, liberals who want to punish Vietnam for its recent aggression. The former anti-war activists also are split over Kampuchea and the Vietnam human rights issue. However, this division of public opinion does not seem to have much fire in it; the former passions on Vietnam that once ran so high have cooled.

The meaning of this is that there is no great pressure, in or out of the American government, dictating a new U.S. policy with respect to Vietnam. This could change if U.S. interests change, but that seems unlikely. U.S. interests are largely derivative of Vietnam versus third parties: Vietnam’s actions in Kampuchea, Vietnam’s cold war with China, Vietnam’s intimate association with the USSR: Vietnam’s intrusiveness in Laos; Vietnam as a threat to Thailand and ASEAN. The U.S. watches Hanoi carefully in only one respect: for some flash-point development with the capacity to escalate beyond the region. Other than this there is little more than benign neglect.

Hanoi’s position with respect to U.S. relations is not entirely clear at this writing. Some observers profess to know that Vietnam is nearly desperate to improve relations, including diplomatic recognition. Evidence they offer—usually an interview with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach—does not stand up under scrutiny.

In analyzing Hanoi’s behavior toward the U.S., the safest guide is national interest. There are two overriding interests at work: national security and economic development. Hanoi has badly pursued these two objectives in recent years, but they remain the basic intent. It seems reasonable to believe that the Politburo is of the opinion that, all other things being equal, closer relations with the U.S. would enhance Vietnam’s security (or at least not diminish it) and would contribute (although only modestly) to the nation-building task. This would suggest an active seeking for deeper relations.
What mitigates against this logic, and greatly complicates the matter, is the Politburo’s style of politics: factionalism. In the struggle for power among ruling group factions, the principal weapon is the doctrinally oriented policy issue. A major (perhaps the most sensitive) doctrinal issue is how to deal with the U.S. The dominant faction holds that the way to influence the U.S. is by protracted pressure with a super-hard policy line, that this is the way the war was won and is the only way to extract concessions from the U.S. This is challenged by a faction arguing that a forthcoming approach permits manipulation of the U.S. It is a struggle between the “war lovers” and the “pro-Americans,” to use the pejorative terms each applies to the other. The point here is that the Politburo debate on policies for dealing with the U.S. is part of the bung di (faction bashing) process that operates independently of the merits of the issue.

We now turn to the formulation and practice of Thai foreign policy with respect to Indochina and Vietnam, which, compared to the U.S. policy, is of necessity quite another matter.

Of all Southeast Asian countries, Thailand was most traumatized by the unexpected 1975 Communist victory in Vietnam. Bangkok’s initial reaction was dismay and anxiety, bordering on panic. This lasted a few weeks. Then came moves to make peace with Vietnam, almost at any price. This lasted a few months.11

Hanoi’s initial postwar objectives in Thailand and what happened to them make for an interesting and informative illustration of Thai policymaking at work. On May 22, 1975, only weeks after the end of the war, Phan Hien led a large and important DRV delegation to Bangkok for what was to be a three-day discussion of future Thai-Vietnamese relations. The visit lasted nine days, during which Phan Hien set down (enunciated or implied) Hanoi’s future short-range goals in Thailand:

- An end to the U.S. military base system in Thailand and withdrawal of the 25,000 U.S. troops and 250 planes based there. Phan Hien called these “the great stumbling block to better relations.” (Withdrawal of U.S. military forces was accomplished on March 30, 1976.)
- Thai reparations for war destruction in Vietnam caused by planes flying from Thai bases, the indemnification being tied to normalization of Thai-Vietnamese relations. Phan Hien called this “the need to show good faith by Thailand.” (Eventually dropped by Hanoi.)
- Return to Vietnam of the planes, ships, and other military equipment taken into Thailand by South Vietnamese fleeing the country. (Eventually abandoned by Hanoi.)
- Diplomatic recognition of the Provisional Government of Vietnam, as successor to the Government of Vietnam. (Overtaken by events, Hanoi abolishing the PRG.)
Gestures of Thai deference to Hanoi, specifically Thai foreign ministry officials traveling to Hanoi for the formal diplomatic recognition ceremony, regarded in Hanoi as relatively important. (Accomplished.)

The initial Phan Hien mission did not fare well. Sensing Thai eagerness, it pressed too hard in typical Hanoi negotiational form: reach an agreement, then demand additional concessions. Not as much came out of the meeting as either side had anticipated. This was seen widely as a Hanoi rebuff of Thai Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj.

The first meeting set the tone and pace for the next three years. These were largely given over to the technicalities of establishing formal diplomatic relations, begun in May 1975, then announced in a joint communiqué in Hanoi on August 6, 1976, but interrupted by the October 1976 coup d'état in Bangkok. It was not until December 1977 that embassies were actually exchanged.

At the August 6th ceremonies, SRV Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh and Thai Foreign Minister Phichai signed a four-point joint communiqué that set down the basis for formal relations. It was largely a Hanoi formulation and in fact was almost identical to the one Vietnam had used earlier with the Philippines. The four points were: noninterference in each other's internal affairs and peaceful coexistence; no bases to be used by foreign powers against the other party; resolution of disputes through negotiations; and promotion of regional cooperation in the "interests of independence and neutrality." In separate communiqués, the two sides agreed in principle to accept overflight rights for commercial aircraft and to discuss economic cooperation.

During this period, 1975 to late 1979, Vietnam's general condition, both internally and externally, slowly deteriorated. Economic stagnation deepened. Vietnam became steadily more isolated in the world, eventually to the point where it had only two true friends, the USSR and Cuba. Hanoi's verbal treatment of Thailand during this period vacillated between sporadic overture and tough-line rhetoric. At the same time, Bangkok was cautiously moving toward Beijing. The chief Thai interest at the time was to dissuade Vietnam from encouraging increased insurgency in Thailand. Hanoi's chief objective appears to have been to find ways to divide Thai public opinion and to split Thailand from the other ASEAN states. There was by all concerned a great deal of maneuver, diplomatic bluff, and self-cancelling intrigue, particularly at the United Nations.

What could be called the pinnacle of postwar Thai-SRV relations came in September 1978, with the visit of SRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong to Bangkok. He and Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand agreed in principle to economic cooperation and participation in negotiations to repatriate Viet Minh war refugees. Vietnam agreed to release thirty Thai fishermen detained by Vietnam and to drop demands for the return of
planes and ships used by fleeing South Vietnamese in 1975. However, Pham Van Dong's general policy approach did not change. He told the Thais bluntly that truly better relations were not possible as long as the Thais "persist in hostile policies," employing a standard Hanoi diplomatic gambit: put all the blame on your opponent.

The initial post-Vietnam War period in Thai-Vietnamese relations ended abruptly on Christmas Day 1978 when the Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea. Since then the relationship has been marked by confrontation, border war, and international diplomatic campaigns of mutual vilification. Hanoi policymakers, after a decade of experimentation, seem to have lost some of their initial confidence that they know how to move and shake Thailand. Their record is marked by much misjudgment and miscalculation.

Based on early behavior, it is clear that Hanoi officials initially believed that the most effective way of getting their way in Bangkok was to combine pressure and implied threat. They operated on the widely encountered notion that the Thais are like bamboo, bending with the wind. But Hanoi officials found Thailand remarkably stubborn, even bold. In retrospect, it is clear that Hanoi's 1975 tough approach was a miscalculation. The Vietnamese also did not anticipate Thai moves with much success. They were surprised that Thailand did not bend with the wind in 1975. They were surprised by the militancy of Thai policy after the invasion of Kampuchea. This is not to say that Hanoi has altered its basic approach to Thailand; Vietnamese officials still behave in a way which suggests that they believe that pressure and a war of nerves can nudge Thailand to the left, possibly engendering chaos and confusion.

All things considered, Thailand's handling of Vietnam in the past decade has been reasonably effective, and its policies in general must be judged to have been successful.

Long-Range Interests

The discussion to this point suggests a conclusion: that while Thai and U.S. perceptions of Vietnam and Indochina are dissimilar, and while certain contradictions exist in their respective policies and methods of dealing with Hanoi, neither perceptual nor policy differences are serious impediments in the working relationship. In short, there is much in the circumstances that unites us, little that divides us.

This is true for the short run. For the foreseeable future—the next few years—it seems probable that Thailand and the U.S. will continue a mutually beneficial relationship. It also seems probable that the intent of the leadership in the two countries will be to maintain close, amicable, and mutually beneficial relations. It seems less certain that they will be able to do this, or that the present harmony will continue indefinitely. There are two dark clouds on the horizon—both small and distant at the moment—
which eventually could engender divergence in national interests. One is China and the other is the future political configuration of Indochina (discussed below).

In speculating about the future of Indochina, we must always be tentative in our thinking, never forgetting that the history of this peninsula in the twentieth century is the history of one improbable, unexpected, "impossible" development after another. Only a foolish analyst would claim he can see into the future of Indochina by more than a year or two. In terms of our interest in Thai-U.S.-Indochina relations, what makes the future so problematic, so difficult to chart, is that much depends on what happens (or does not happen) in Hanoi during the next decade or so. And that is the ultimate imponderable.

To the extent that we think we can discern long-range Thai and U.S. interests in Indochina, they appear to be ordinary and obvious. Thailand’s overriding interest will be national security—to achieve, by one means or another, a diminution of the Vietnam threat. At present this threat exists on three levels: border incidents of the sort that have been going on for five years; significant incursion—for example, PAVN seizing Aranyaprathet and holding it for a week or two (i.e., a teach-Thailand-a-lesson attack); and full-scale war. It seems probable that Thai-Vietnamese relations will always remain poor—the two have much to quarrel over—hence Bangkok will seek to dampen the hostility, not to eliminate it entirely. If Hanoi had its choice, it would like Thailand to become a people’s republic, and it has a range of options if it chooses to press for this. Vietnam’s other long-range interests appear to be rapprochement with China; diplomatic relations with the U.S.; a federated Indochina; and becoming a major regional force in Southeast Asia. China’s interests in this respect are to oppose Indochina federation, to improve its relations with Vietnam while containing it, and to continue to have significant influence in Bangkok.

Of equal importance to Thailand will be relations with Kampuchea. These will turn largely on Indochina-wide developments (discussed below). Thai competition with Vietnam over Laos seems inevitable and eternal. There is a special character in Thai-Lao relations, and in fact it can be argued that Thailand and Laos are a single ethno-linguistic entity with similar physique, language, religion, and customs, which means that the relationship will always be unique.

Long-range U.S. interests will turn on regional stability, open sealanes, and a prosperous and unthreatened Thailand/ASEAN. Theoretically, the U.S. options consist of rollback of communism by funding and backing the resistance in Vietnam; determined continuing containment of Vietnamese influence; or minimal "normal" relations as a kind of holding operation pending change of attitude and policy in Hanoi. It is the U.S. long-term interest to have normal diplomatic relations with Vietnam, as well as with Kampuchea and Laos.
With respect to joint long-range Thai-U.S. interests, the two most important considerations are China and the future governing structure of Indochina. It is to these two that we turn in conclusion.

The China factor will always represent something of a complication for Thai-U.S. relations. What in fact now exists, and will continue, is a triangular relationship: Thailand, the U.S., and China, each with interests that put strain on the respective bilateral relations with the other two. Given the nature of world politics, this is a more or less natural condition. However, the triangle is asymmetrical: two world powers and one small power. In any case, it seems an inevitable condition and probably permanent, regardless of internal political change in any of the three countries. What is involved here is China's perceptions of, and its national interests with respect to, Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. While there is not room here to examine the complex subject of the past, present, and future Sino-Vietnamese relations, a few comments are in order.

China and Vietnam are locked into a semi-permanent cold war that occasionally turns hot. Eventually, it must be assumed, this will end and relations will improve. But such change will come with glacial speed. Each of the two has genuine grievances against the other. China's major grievances are Vietnam's intimacy with the USSR, an alliance in all but name; Vietnam's intrusiveness into Kampuchea and Laos; the mistreatment of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam; and Hanoi's lack of deference and generally unappreciative attitude toward China. Vietnam's chief grievance against China is as a security threat: the "multi-faceted war of sabotage and destruction" along the Sino-Vietnamese border, "bleeding" PAVN in Kampuchea and attempting to flank Vietnam by turning ASEAN into military opposition. Also seen as grievances are China's general efforts to isolate Vietnam on the international scene by maneuver and vilification, and its historical perfidy in betraying the progressive socialist cause.

Thailand today is in relatively intimate association with China. This represents a deliberate choice by Bangkok—in the name of national security. It is a choice that has stood Thailand in good stead to date. The question remains, however, will the safety of Thailand in the future be served best by continued close association with China? And will the Chinese continue to regard the present arrangement as best for their national interests?

U.S.-Chinese relations, despite much official explanation from both capitals, remain highly ambiguous in nature. There has been an astounding turn of events: who, a few years ago, would have imagined American gunboats back on the Yangtse? The direction of the relationship is clear—away from belligerence—but its destination remains at some yet undefined point of association. Some observers believe that the fundamental U.S.-China relationship has now been set, and that the limits of the association in key matters—such as military cooperation—have been reached. Others hold
that the relationship is still in the process of becoming. Still others maintain that the trend is not actually linear and predict that, rather than a steady course, the future will be marked by an up-and-down relationship, reflecting developments on the broader international scene.

The triangular policy approach by China, the U.S., and Thailand/ASEAN in recent years—since the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea—has generally worked well. Motives vary but the three are bound together by a commonality of interest. Such difficulties as have developed have been over means, not ends—disputes over parliamentary strategy, over Kampuchean representation in the U.N., and over the modalities of an international conference that possibly could negotiate an end to the war in Kampuchea. In these, Beijing has tended to be dogmatic, displaying the certitude, even arrogance, that it knows best how to deal with Vietnam, and implying that the U.S., Thailand, and others do not. It has brooked no argument to its contention that the way to get PAVN troops out of Kampuchea is by increasing the costs involved, by “bleeding” Vietnam. When first broached five years ago, the arguments favoring this strategy were more persuasive than they are today. Despite its long experience, China has proved no more successful than anyone else in bending Vietnam to its will.

The eventual test for the triangular policy, of course, must be its effectiveness, its ability to deliver results. The three actors remain patient, but their patience may be wearing thin.

Federation of Indochina

If there is a single unifying construct to facilitate our thinking about the future of U.S.-Thai relations with Indochina, a single entity to meld the two respective sets of future individual bilateral relations with Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea, one consideration that sweeps together most of the difficulties the world will have in this region, it is found in the matter of the future political configuration of the Indochinese peninsula. Is the governing arrangement to be a Federation of Indochina, a Confederation of Indochina, an Alliance of Indochina, or some lesser form of integration among three semi-sovereign states? This issue goes to the heart of the region’s entire future. It involves not just international diplomacy, but the internal politics, economic advancement, and ideological orientation of the three Indochinese countries. It is an issue that transcends Thai-U.S. relations, and one in which China has considerable stake. What eventually emerges will greatly influence the history of all Southeast Asia. Finally, the subject serves as a good organizing principle and permits better analysis of future relations than would be the case in wading through the morass of Thai, U.S., Chinese, and ASEAN policy pronouncements and monitoring the activities of a dozen foreign ministries in the region.
The term used here for ease of expression is *federation*, meaning the institutional integration of the three Indochinese states in which some degree of sovereignty is surrendered (at least by Laos and Kampuchea). This can range in theory from the loosest form of confederation to a unitary monolith. A working assumption employed here is that three independent and fully sovereign Indochinese states is beyond the realm of possibility, that Hanoi intends to dominate the future political configuration on the peninsula and cannot (or will not) be stopped in this.

Policy thinking about a federation of Indochina by interested outsiders—in Bangkok, Beijing, and Washington—is still in the rudimentary stage. As far as can be determined, none of the three foreign ministries has examined the matter in a way that could be termed systematic, extensive, or judgmental. The Thai government has said at times that it strongly opposes federation, at other times that it is indifferent. Washington’s thinking, as far as it goes, appears to be that the U.S. objects to the idea of federation but that it may be inevitable. China finds the idea an anathema, but, as far as can be determined, this attitude is reflexive, not based on analysis of the factors at work or on consideration of alternatives. What is needed now is for the U.S. and Thailand—and China if it can be persuaded—to address themselves to the idea of federation of Indochina in terms of acceptable scenarios. Each must determine what it can live with as far as an integrated Indochina is concerned and what is beyond the pale. Then, perhaps, the three could agree on a position that would be the basis for dealing with Hanoi on the matter. Until this is done, and unless it is done, there can be no hope of halting the federation process.

In long-range policy terms, the positions taken in various capitals toward federation will be a function of saliency, how important it is seen to be. With national interest as a criterion, it would seem that opposition to the idea will range, in descending order, from Thailand to China to the U.S. The idea is strongly opposed by the people of Kampuchea and Laos, if not by their present leaders, but that may not count for much.

Even in Hanoi, the only actor favoring federation, support for the idea is not what could be called overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The dominant faction in the ruling Politburo has made it firm policy, and agitprop agents in the name of “international socialist duty” are busy selling the idea to the general population. Its critics in the Politburo—most importantly, perhaps, the professional generals—do not oppose federation flatly, but appear to question the pace in pursuing it and its present feasibility. It can be argued, and probably is argued by opposing Politburo factions, that five years of combat in Kampuchea to solve the Pol Pot problem has polarized, if not alienated, the Khmer to the point that no degree of federation will work for the time being and that the effort should be postponed for at least a generation. This can be countered by the ruling faction’s argument that 150,000 troops in Kampuchea represent a golden opportunity to install
in Phnom Penh (once the country has been pacified) a government that will take Kampuchea into federation, and that if this opportunity is lost now it will never again present itself.

The great danger here is what might be called creeping toward federation—the gradual, in many ways inadvertent, federating of Indochina by a Hanoi that does so because it has all those forces present, and because it encounters no significant organized opposition from outsiders.

Finally, a concluding thought on Thai-U.S. long-range interests. There is the universal and unchanging truth of international affairs that in unity there is strength and in solidarity there is security. In the years ahead, the only truly great threat to Thai national interest—and by extension, U.S. interest—is disunity, disarray, a loosening of bonds. As long as the U.S. and Thailand/ASEAN are firmly bound together, and as long as Thailand remains internally cohesive, Vietnam will not be inclined to move. Should weakness develop, or opportunity present itself—for example, a series of coups d’état in Bangkok or a breach of U.S.-Thai relations—Hanoi would be tempted to strike. The lure of opportunism could overwhelm its own better judgment. Anarchy, breakdown in government, is the worst enemy of the Thai-U.S. relationship. However, if Thailand and ASEAN remain ordered, and if relations with the U.S. remain firm, none need fear the future.

NOTES

1. This article is based on source materials from the University of California Indochina Archive file SRV/For.Rels./Thailand, about 3,500 pages of documentation. Most of this is primary source material—that is, official statements and documentation by the governments involved. There is no full-length study of this subject, as far as the author is aware.

2. Nor, of course, do their respective constituencies. The perception of Vietnam in certain circles in both the U.S. and Thailand—academic circles, for example—varies greatly from the official view. A major difference here is threat-perception: non-government observers tend to see Hanoi as more benign and more given to compromise than do their governments.

3. Neither Thailand nor the U.S. has a "relationship" with Indochina, because Indochina is only an abstraction. What each has is separate sets of bilateral relationships with Vietnam, Kampuchea, and Laos, and that is what is meant here in using the term Indochina.


6. As part of the Paris Agreement arrangements, representatives from the
United States (Agency for International Development) and the DRV held a series of
technical-level meetings in Paris in 1973 to discuss U.S. economic assistance to
Vietnam to which the United States had agreed as part of the "binding up the
wounds of war" effort. Among the documents coming out of those meetings was a
Hanoi-supplied list of desired U.S. assisted reconstruction aid. The price tag on the
list totaled about $3.25 billion. Another document was a White House
memorandum (that may or may not bear Richard Nixon's signature, the matter
being in doubt) in which the United States acknowledged this level of economic
need, and implied that the United States would make such money available.
However, at these meetings and in various other ways (including Kissinger press
conferences), the United States stressed that it considered any economic assistance
for North Vietnam dependent on Hanoi's military restraint in the South. In any
event, there never was a clear and legal U.S. debt obligation.

7. During this period, the U.S. acquiesced (by refraining from veto) in U.N.
membership for Vietnam; it also pledged to end trade restrictions and other
embargo measures once diplomatic relations were established.

8. For a period in the late 1970s, elements of the business community,
spearheaded by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, pressed for U.S.
recognition of Hanoi. However, that pressure group dried up with the breach of
relations between Hanoi and China, when these businessmen, who were in the
export-import business, were told by Beijing to choose, and most of them
understandably chose China.

9. Contributing to the slowdown in movement toward formal relations were
other factors: the refugee exodus, Hanoi's decision to join the Council for
Economic Mutual Assistance (CEMA), and the rise of influence of a small but
powerful group of U.S. congressmen who, in the name of the
resolution-of-casualties issue, signaled the White House that it faced a heavy
political battle on Capitol Hill if it proceeded.

10. The past few years have seen the rise of a new pressure group in the U.S.,
the emigre Vietnamese. These number about 600,000, and while most of them
remain apolitical, they are becoming increasingly organized; most of their
organizations are opposed to U.S. recognition.

11. Thailand earlier attempted to open a dialogue with Hanoi. There were Red
Cross delegation meetings in 1970–71 to discuss repatriation of the Vietnamese
refugees in Thailand. Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman tried to contact the
tried to get Australia to act as intermediary, but this effort also failed. Then there
were a number of moves and meetings beginning in May 1974 and continuing for
the next year.

12. Some 40,000 Vietnamese migrated from northern Vietnam to Thailand
from 1945 to about 1954, and have represented a problem ever since. Hanoi
accepted some back in the early 1960s, then halted repatriation. At times these
people have been a potential insurgency threat. The total is now about 55,000.

13. For instance, in October 1975, Thai Deputy Interior Minister Prakop
Prayunphokharat told reporters: "We have learned that [Vietnam's] new policy is
to set up an Indochina federation. Our government has no policy to oppose or
object to this idea. Since we have joined ASEAN, why can we not get along with an
Indochina federation . . . ?" (Radio Bangkok, October 15, 1975.)
V.
Thailand and the Great Powers
Thailand and the Great Powers:
A Thai Perspective on
Security-Dominated Relations

Theera Nuchpiam

Thai diplomacy is most notable for its efforts to deal with the great powers—the European powers of the colonial era, the Japanese during the Second World War, and the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the post-war period. As its subtitle suggests, this paper focuses on Thailand's security-dominated relations with the great powers, particularly the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. Each of these powers has a different role and strategic outlook and has thereby created a different great-power environment within which Thailand has to operate. We shall look at her efforts to deal with the environmental challenges and/or opportunities arising from her relations with these powers and assess their implications for her security concerns.

Thai-U.S. Relations

Thai-American security relations may be said to have actually began in the post-World War II period. Major security arrangements were made in the 1950s, and these have served as the basis for Thailand’s close cooperation in support of the U.S. war effort in Indochina and as the basis for the present Thai-U.S. security links. The salient feature of this relationship is Thailand’s dependence on the U.S.

Dependence on a great power is not a new experience for the Thais. But Thai-American relations are distinct from Thai relations with all other great powers, in that the United States has never posed a security threat to her smaller partner. That partly explains why Thailand chose, after World War II, to depend on America for its security. How have the Thais managed this dependent relationship? What implications has it had for Thai foreign policy?

Like most dependent relationships, Thai-U.S. relations have been faced with a major problem arising from the differences in the strategic outlooks of the two unequal partners—in their mutual security role expectations and in their perceptions of threat and their ways of countering it. Thai-American security relations, particularly during the Cold War, may be said to have been founded on mutual interests, with the common aim of containing Communist expansion. However, in the post-Vietnam War per-
iod, uncertainty has clouded the relationship. America does not appear to have well-defined goals and objectives in Southeast Asia. Her behavior is far from predictable, and her foreign policy has thus suffered from a kind of "credibility" crisis.

Credibility, it must be emphasized, is not an exclusive post-1975 problem. It has existed since the very inception of the Thai-American alliance. That explains why the Thanat-Rusk Communique of March 1962 had to be issued—as a clarification of the already existing commitment under the Manila Treaty. However, it is in the post-Vietnam War years that we have experienced the most acute credibility crisis. This has been for the Thais a period of painful adjustment, characterized by attempts, on the one hand, to salvage what was left of the formal security arrangements with the United States and, on the other hand, to come to terms with the new power factors in the region—Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union.

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the credibility issue was further complicated by growing anti-Americanism. But this does not fully explain the Thai request for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Thailand. The elected government at that time naturally had to take into account the growing domestic opposition to the U.S. military presence; and in his inaugural policy statement of 19 March 1975, Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj pledged to bring about "the withdrawal of foreign troops from Thailand within one year, taking into consideration the situation in this region, and through friendly negotiations." However, there are reasons to believe that the request for the U.S. withdrawal was less a reflection of anti-Americanism or a total loss of confidence in American commitments than an effort to accommodate Hanoi, which repeatedly demanded an end to the Thai "collusion with the U.S. in its policy of aggression against neighboring countries" as the fundamental condition for improving Thai-Vietnamese relations. Even though Premier Kukrit would not publicly admit this, asserting that "the reason behind our action was not our desire to curry favor with countries of Indochina," the Seni government, which succeeded his, made it clear that "the top priority of Thai foreign policy is to reach a proper understanding with the countries of Indochina." Therefore, it would do everything possible to achieve that aim.

Thailand’s normalization of her relations with the PRC and her overture to the Soviet Union should also be understood in much the same light. With U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia imminent, Thailand seemed to be preparing for an "independent" foreign policy by fostering, in particular, a "balance" of great-power interests in the region. There was, even before the spring 1975 Indochina debacle, much talk in Thailand about de-emphasizing U.S. military cooperation and stressing a more "balanced" relationship. As a response to changes in American foreign policy, these moves were, I believe, more of a reactive search for additional security guarantees in a period of uncertainty than a deliberate attempt to revise or
reshape Thai relations with the United States. In fact, these post-Vietnam War activities might at the same time have been intended to be a warning to the Americans of the need to retain an interest in Southeast Asia. The Thai military, in particular, was strongly in favor of retaining a U.S. interest and presence. This is a factor that imposes severe limitations on any genuine move to change the existing structure of Thai-American relations.

The Thai military, in fact, seemed quite unhappy with the handling of the U.S. withdrawal by the civilian government. To its leaders, U.S. military cooperation seemed almost indispensable. Not only was a termination of Thai-American security ties quite unthinkable to them in those circumstances, but a significant decrease in U.S. military aid was likely to have an adverse impact on both Thai military capability and the prestige and standing of the military in Thai politics. (The F-16 affair, which involved a request for a purchase of a squadron of the aircraft with a view to strengthening both the Royal Thai Air Force and the power and prestige of General Arthit Kamlang-ek, then the most powerful figure in the Thai military, amply shows how important U.S. contributions to the strength and standing of the Thai military establishment could be.) This attitude has had profound implications for Thai foreign policy.

The SEATO question also shows how important American security commitments, despite their uncertainty, are to the Thais and how they managed to keep them. The termination of the treaty organization on 30 June 1977 was, in fact, long overdue. That it had been retained despite its anachronistic existence was explicable in terms of America’s recognition of Thai security needs and her intention to preserve the credibility of U.S. commitments. It was the Thais who finally relieved Washington of this embarrassing legacy of the Cold War cooperation. Thailand’s consent to the phasing out of SEATO was given on the condition that the Manila Treaty be preserved.

The existence of SEATO was, in fact, an obstacle to Thai reconciliation with Hanoi. The organization was an obvious testimony to U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia; terminating the organization was thus a way of eliminating the criticism that was coming from friends and foes alike. Most significantly, however, terminating SEATO was perhaps the only way of saving the parent treaty. The organization did not serve any purpose anyway, but the treaty did and does. "The Treaty," writes Les Buszynski, "together with the accompanying Rusk-Thanat agreement of 6 March 1962, remains a point of entry for possible United States intervention in the region." Hence, instead of putting an end to Thai-U.S. security arrangements, the termination of SEATO had the important effect of preserving them.

It is often asserted that with her failure in Vietnam, it is very unlikely that America would enter any future conflict in this region. But has there not always been some degree of uncertainty about U.S. commitments?
Wasn't the "constitutional process" provision in the Manila Treaty just as effective before the U.S. withdrawal as it is now? The Thais are well aware that despite its uncertainty, or rather because of its uncertainty (since it has never been tested), the Manila Pact has a deterrent value. Intervention could be effected in many ways and would not necessarily take the form of a dispatch of ground combat units, which is virtually impossible now. Indeed, if there were an overt assault on Thailand, the possibility of the U.S. taking action short of sending ground forces to her defense can never be ruled out.16

Clearly, the problem for the Thais in the immediate post-1975 period was to induce the United States to retain at least some interest in Southeast Asia. Formal commitments, no matter how definite they may be, depend for their practical value on the availability of physical means of putting them into effect. In this respect, there were some causes for serious concern, most notably the adoption prior to 1978 of the Seventh Fleet's "swing" strategy, whereby some of its naval units would be transferred to Europe. That move, in the face of the growing Soviet military presence in the Pacific, seriously disturbed America's friends and allies in Southeast Asia.

The events of 1978 were decisive in reshaping America's attitude. Vietnam's alliance with the USSR and her invasion of Kampuchea, in particular, led to a shift in President Carter's posture toward China and Vietnam17 and in his Southeast Asian security policy. Vietnam’s behavior had the important effect of reactivating the seemingly moribund Manila Treaty, under whose obligations the United States sped up the delivery of military aid to Thailand. Indeed, since then there have been vigorous reaffirmations, which the Thais were seeking, of U.S. security commitments to their country.18 And with the cancellation of the "swing" strategy in the spring of 1980, Washington made it clear that the United States was still actively engaged.

Two important implications for Thai security may be inferred from these developments. On the one hand, despite America's renewed interest in, and confirmation of existing commitments to, Thai integrity, we can safely say that in a situation below the threshold of open invasion (for example, internal security problems or localized border incursions), Washington would at most provide military equipment and training. On the other hand, the Thais can more or less rest assured that with the Seventh Fleet remaining at full strength—and with the presence of American military forces in the Pacific as well as in Japan, Korea, and the Philippines to deter Soviet power and the PRC's influence—Thailand and ASEAN can pursue an "independent" foreign policy, especially in the sense that they will not be compelled to choose sides in the Sino-Soviet conflict. Are Thais satisfied with this U.S. security role? Not quite.

Safe under America's security umbrella against direct external aggression, the Thai people are still seriously concerned about another type of security challenge, to which American power and influence might not be
entirely relevant—namely, subversion, which for the Thais is a kind of external threat, particularly from Vietnam. Under the Manila Treaty, the obligation of the signatories in such cases is merely to “consult.” The Thais perceive the threat from Vietnam in terms of both direct aggression (such as border incursions or even open invasion) and subversion. While incursions have been frequent during the past several years and the possibility of an overt attack can never be ruled out, subversion poses a long-term problem. Hanoi has not really renounced its support for the Thai Communists in northeastern Thailand; and with Vietnam now consolidating her de facto Indochinese Federation, the Thai concern with subversion is understandable. The primary goal of Thai foreign policy is naturally to get the Vietnamese out of Kampuchea (and Laos) and to restore these two Indochinese states as a buffer between Thailand and Vietnam.

To the Thais, obviously, the prospect of a Vietnamese-controlled Indochina is quite disturbing. Washington’s limited influence, and its reluctance to get directly involved, in this matter, as well as its China policy, have “pushed” Thailand toward the Chinese, who share some of her concerns. Clearly, U.S. commitments are not entirely suited to Thailand’s security situation—to say nothing of their unpredictability. But for this uncertain security guarantee, Thailand has had to pay the heavy price of being dependent on the United States. This dependent relationship has imposed severe limitations on Thai foreign policy. To begin with, there are obvious limits on “anti-Americanism.” The post-1975 events in Thailand amply demonstrated how the military (which was likely to be most affected by a possible reorientation of Thai-U.S. relations) resisted the movement in that direction, which they finally crushed after the coup d’état of 6 October 1976.

Thus, even without the events of 1978–1979 (the Third Indochina War), the possibility of Thailand pursuing an “independent” foreign policy or a “balanced” relationship with the great powers, in keeping with the spirit of ZOPFAN (zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality), is very unlikely, for such a policy is predicated first and foremost upon a disengagement from the major powers, which, in practical terms, would mean taking “steps to eventually abrogate the Manila Pact of 1954” linking Thailand with the United States. Clearly, in the Thai view, such a policy is totally unacceptable, because it would almost be tantamount to unilateral disarmament.

Thai freedom of action has been further constrained, to a less clear-cut extent, by America’s security posture. It might be argued in this connection that Thailand’s de facto alliance with the PRC is more or less America’s choice. This is not simply to say that an erosion of confidence in U.S. commitments has driven Thailand to rely on the Chinese. Rather, this reliance is related to America’s China policy, which has in practice had the important effect of encouraging the PRC’s “united front” strategy—the formation of an anti-Soviet coalition comprising China, Japan, and the
ASEAN countries. America’s attitude, as reflected, for instance, in Secretary of Defense Harold Brown’s speech at the time of his visit to Beijing in January 1980, is that Thailand should pin her hopes on the PRC’s restraining influence on Hanoi. As we shall see, this has had the effect of forcing Thailand to become dependent on the Chinese. But before examining this situation in some detail, let us first briefly discuss Thailand’s relations with the USSR.

Thai-Soviet Relations

Relations between Thailand and the Soviet Union have been more or less security-dominated since the end of the Second World War. Although in joining an anti-Communist alliance with the United States, Thailand was concerned about the Chinese, rather than Russian, threat, at the height of the Cold War the image of the Communist world was one of a monolithic bloc directed by Moscow. However, it was not until the late 1970s that the Soviet Union became a direct security concern for the Thais.

Thailand has always recognized the Soviet Union’s superpower role in Southeast Asia. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, in particular, the civilian-dominated Thai government approached Moscow (and Beijing) seemingly with a view to developing a “balance” of great-power interests in the region, hoping, at the same time, that the Soviets could act as a restraining force on Vietnam. Even after Vietnam’s invasion of Kampuchea at the end of 1978, the Thais still entertained some hope of inducing the Soviet Union to restrain Hanoi’s behavior. Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanand went to Moscow in March 1979—almost immediately after his visit to Washington. The Thais attempted to explain to the Soviets that Vietnam’s aggressive policy in Indochina was incompatible with Moscow’s aim of creating an “Asian collective security system,” because Vietnam’s behavior had given rise to fears and suspicions in the region. However, the Soviets, believing that Thailand was in urgent need of a security guarantee now that her principal ally, the United States, was suffering from “Vietnam trauma” and lacked credibility, urged the Thais to accept Hanoi’s domination in Indochina in return for Moscow’s security pledge. These terms were unacceptable to Bangkok, and by the early 1980s the Thais seemed to have lost all hope that the Soviets would restrain Vietnam.

In geopolitical terms, Southeast Asia is of secondary, if not peripheral, interest to the Soviets, their primary concerns lying elsewhere—in Europe, Northeast Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Nevertheless, as a superpower with global strategic interests, the Soviet Union can hardly exclude any region from her security considerations, especially if her adversaries are involved. Southeast Asia is no exception. Soviet involvement in this region is largely attributable to the gains she hopes to make from Vietnam’s conflict with the USSR’s major rival in the area, China. The
situation, in other words, has given Moscow an opportunity to "encircle" the PRC through an alliance with Hanoi. Vietnam has therefore become a valuable ally, who at the same time serves Moscow's several other interests, particularly by providing facilities for a buildup of its Pacific forces as part of its strategic global competition with the U.S.

The Soviet Union has significantly expanded her naval forces in the Pacific, with a deployment of two aircraft carriers, the Minsk and Novorussisk, in 1979 and 1983 respectively, which have enhanced Soviet ability to project power over a wide area, including Southeast Asia. Moreover, access to Vietnam's port and air-base facilities has extended the range of Soviet aerial reconnaissance and brought U.S. installations in the Philippines within the direct range of Soviet aircraft and ships. Thailand has been very concerned about the buildup of the Soviet military presence. However, from the Thai point of view, the security threat from the Soviet Union is not so much this military expansion as her support for Vietnam's expansionist aims in Indochina.

Thailand's concern about Vietnam's aggressive tendency is related to a traditional rivalry for control and influence over Laos and Kampuchea—a buffer zone between the two countries. In the post-World War II period, this rivalry was somewhat overshadowed, insofar as Thailand was concerned, by fears of Communist expansion through North Vietnam and the PRC. Thailand's anti-Communist alliance with the United States was an attempt to deal with this prospect of Communist encroachments. With the Communist takeover of Indochina in 1975, Thailand was indeed confronted with the likelihood of Vietnam, her traditional rival, incorporating this buffer zone into a Vietnamese-controlled Indochinese Federation.

Hanoi's success in this hegemonic enterprise, however, depends to a large extent on Soviet assistance. The poverty-stricken Vietnamese economy surely cannot sustain a huge armed force of more than one million troops and the grinding military campaign against the Khmer resistance, which has been going on for more than half a decade. Indeed, even though the possibility of an overt assault on Thailand can never be ruled out, it is the prospect of a Soviet-backed Vietnam making encroachments on Thailand, especially through subversive activities, that seems to have worried Thais the most.

As I indicated earlier, Vietnam has never really announced her support for revolutionary struggles by other peoples. Although when Pham Van Dong visited Bangkok in September 1978, a joint communiqué was issued which committed both countries to refraining from subversion "either directly or indirectly," Vietnam has not actually abandoned her ideological aim of assisting the people in Southeast Asia in their struggle for "independence" and "freedom from imperialism." In fact, as a Thai general has pointed out, Vietnam and Laos made a pledge of such support in the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty they signed in July 1977.
long-term implications of this commitment can only be viewed by the Thais with genuine concern.  

When Hanoi signed a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviet Union in November 1978, ASEAN leaders lost all hope of seeing an "independent" Vietnam. Even though it was considered unlikely that Vietnam would become a "Southeast Asian Cuba," serving Moscow's interests, her diplomatic moves even before the invasion of Kampuchea were regarded with suspicion. In 1978, when its relations with China deteriorated, Hanoi frantically began to solicit ASEAN's favor, particularly with an assurance of its "peaceful intentions." Of all ASEAN members, Thailand, the "front-line" state directly faced with the threat from Vietnam, was understandably the most responsive to the latter's approach. However, the invasion of Kampuchea, just a few months after Pham Van Dong's visit to Bangkok, destroyed the whole basis for reconciliation. How has Thailand managed this threat—this Soviet-backed, if not Soviet-inspired, threat?

It must be reemphasized that the Vietnamese threat, at least at this time, is not a matter of open aggression against Thailand; rather, it is Hanoi's Soviet-backed attempt to "colonize" Laos and Kampuchea. (Apart from Kampuchea, Vietnam has also established a military presence in Laos.) Thus, it is essentially in this sense that Thais say that the Soviet Union is a security threat to them. Thailand's interest naturally lies in securing Vietnam's withdrawal from Kampuchea. However, for the Thais to resort to open force of arms is not advisable—to say nothing about whether it is possible. Thailand therefore has relied on diplomatic and indirect military pressures against Hanoi. On the diplomatic front, she has, together with ASEAN, succeeded in forming a U.N. majority that has consistently called for Hanoi to pull out of Kampuchea and has kept Democratic Kampuchea's seat in the organization. A coalition government led by Prince Sihanouk was formed in 1982, principally with a view to reducing opposition to Democratic Kampuchea (whose rule under the Khmer Rouge had disgusted virtually the entire civilized world). The United States and her Western allies, as well as Japan, have played a vital part in the diplomatic and economic isolation of Vietnam. However, the Thais are well aware that Hanoi is unlikely to be moved by diplomatic measures. And so long as Vietnam can rely on Soviet assistance—on a scale no other country could provide—it will not be seriously affected by an economic blockade. Additional measures to put pressure on Vietnam are needed, and the Thais have found these in the Khmer resistance forces, which have stubbornly held out against Vietnam's superior forces since the end of the last decade.

It is true that, verbally at least, the Thai government has all along maintained a neutral position vis-à-vis the fighting in Kampuchea, despite its occasional spillover onto Thai territory. But press reports have confirmed that Thailand has permitted arms and supplies from the PRC to find their way through Thai territory to the Khmer resistance. Moreover, Hanoi has
alleged that Thailand has also provided sanctuaries for the resistance forces. The Thai government has naturally denied this allegation, arguing that it has simply given shelter to refugees on humanitarian grounds.

It is perhaps impossible to ascertain the scale and form of Thai assistance, if there is any, to the Khmer resistance forces. Of greater interest to us is that the Thais, true to their tradition of “fighting the war outside our territory,” are concerned to keep the Khmer resistance alive. Its forces are, from the Thai point of view, fighting a frontier war for Thailand. They have bogged down Vietnam in Kampuchea (which the Thais often refer to as “Vietnam’s Vietnam”), diverting substantial amounts of material and human resources from the task of reconstructing her war-torn economy and, more importantly from the Thai point of view, from consolidating her grip on the whole of Indochina. So long as Vietnam persists in occupying Kampuchea, the Thais, with their concern about her subversive influence and activities, naturally have an interest in keeping her weakened by the fighting in that country. Here Thai and Chinese interests converge, and it is this convergence of interests that has in large part given rise to a strategic and diplomatic cooperation (some might say a de facto alliance), which at the same time serves as an additional deterrent (the possibility of a second “punitive war”) against Hanoi’s direct attack on Thailand. Let us now turn to Sino-Thai relations. How has the close cooperation developed? What are its implications for Thai foreign policy?

Thai-PRC Relations

The Thais have never underestimated Beijing, either as friend or foe. China is a “resident” power in Southeast Asia—a permanent factor that the countries in the region always have to take into account. Both the PRC and Hanoi are Thailand’s erstwhile enemies. However, in a move to adjust herself to the post-Vietnam War environment, Thailand normalized her relations with the PRC in 1975. The move, it seemed, was a necessary step after the emergence of a reunited Vietnam. At the same time, the need to accommodate Hanoi, which had made conciliatory gestures, led to the establishment of diplomatic relations in August 1976, although an exchange of ambassadors did not take place until December 1977, after the overthrow of the Thanin government. It is interesting to note that although the invasion of Kampuchea a year later created a grave security concern for Thailand and completely destroyed what was left of her faith in Vietnam’s “peaceful intentions,” she did not immediately turn to the PRC for help. The close collaboration in putting pressure on Vietnam to withdraw from Kampuchea arose only after it became apparent that the Soviet Union was unwilling, or perhaps unable, to exert a restraining influence on her regional ally.
As we all know, the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations after the end of the Vietnam War enabled the Soviet Union to acquire a very valuable Southeast Asian ally, Vietnam, and hence to establish a foothold in Indochina in the pursuit of her policy of encircling China. China, anxious to build a global united front in a counter-encirclement attempt, steadily improved her relations with the ASEAN countries, especially Thailand. The PRC’s only true ally in Southeast Asia, however, is the Khmer Rouge, whose ouster by Vietnam late in 1978 was not only a blow to China’s prestige but in effect almost succeeded in eradicating the last vestiges of Chinese influence in Indochina. Therefore, like Thailand, China has an interest in keeping the Khmer resistance forces (especially the Khmer Rouge) alive as an instrument of pressure against Hanoi.

This commonality of interests, nevertheless, did not immediately lead to Sino-Thai strategic cooperation. Premier Kriangsak, searching for security guarantees after the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, went to Moscow in 1979, but not to China, which he had visited a year earlier. The Prime Minister, it seemed, wanted to give at least an appearance of “strict neutrality” by not identifying himself with Beijing, which had just launched a punitive campaign against Vietnam, but one that had failed to compel the latter to withdraw from Kampuchea. There were evidently limits to the PRC’s restraining influence. She had, after all, failed to protect her close ally, the Pol Pot regime, and her military drive into Vietnam did not seem to have weakened the latter’s determination to carry out hegemonic control over the rest of Indochina. The Thais, naturally, sought a Soviet pledge to control Hanoi’s aggressive behavior.

Moscow would certainly not have risked alienating Hanoi by attempting to force the Vietnamese out of Kampuchea in return for only a prospect of strengthening the Soviet Union’s prestige and standing, let alone influence, with the ASEAN countries. Nevertheless, Kriangsak left Moscow with the impression that Vietnam would not attack Thailand. However, only a little more than a year later, Vietnam made a major incursion into Thai territory at Non Mak Moon. Regardless of whether or not this outrageous behavior was Soviet-inspired, there was no longer any doubt in the mind of the Thais that not only would the Soviets not disturb their position in Indochina, but they were probably unable to restrain Hanoi. Their continued support for the latter’s expansionist policies would, from now on, be a long-term security threat to Thailand. It was at this point that the Thai government, now led by General Prem Tinsulanond, began to develop close cooperation with, and a kind of security dependence on, the People’s Republic of China.

Sino-Thai collaboration has been most apparent at the diplomatic level—sometimes at the expense of unity in ASEAN (some of whose members, most notably Malaysia and Indonesia, have misgivings about Beijing’s motives and intentions in Southeast Asia). More significant, however,
is the military cooperation whereby not only have the resistance forces been sustained by Chinese arms and other supplies, allegedly through Thai territory, but at the same time the Chinese military pressure on Vietnam’s northern border has served as an additional deterrent (apart from U.S. security commitments) against an all-out attack on Thailand and has created a massive strain on Vietnam’s meager resources, arising from the need to maintain a very large army. It should be noted that no matter how credible this deterrent is, what really matters to Thailand is that a substantial part of Vietnam’s best troops are concentrated in the northern border areas, thereby relieving the Khmer resistance forces (and the Thai army) of much military pressure.

It is essentially in this sense that Thailand’s relations with the PRC, especially since 1980, have been characterized, to a significant extent, by security dependence on the Chinese. It might be argued that as Thailand and the PRC have a common interest in keeping Vietnam weak, with a view to preventing her from carrying out hegemonic expansion in Indochina and beyond, their relationship is one of strategic cooperation rather than a form of security dependence. However, there are obviously important differences in the strategic positions of these two de facto allies. China depends on Thailand for channeling arms and supplies to the Khmer resistance, which serves as an instrument of pressure against Vietnam; that is, as a means of coercing Hanoi into settling outstanding issues with the PRC, such as border and territorial disputes and, most important of all, Hanoi’s alliance with Moscow. But these issues are much less of a direct security threat to China than the prospect (now perhaps reality) of Vietnam’s hegemonic control over the whole of Indochina is to Thailand. Furthermore, and this is probably the most salient difference of all, while China has her own deterrent capability, Thailand has sought to depend on that capability.

What are the implications of this dependent relationship for Thai foreign policy? Clearly, dependence on the PRC has deepened the polarization of Southeast Asia. Thailand has, in other words, entered into an informal alliance with China, and by that very fact has further polarized the region. This alliance, like any other, has the important effect of limiting each side’s freedom of action. Thailand has particularly limited her ability to pursue an “independent” policy on the Khmer issue. Now that the PRC has become an important factor influencing Thailand’s Khmer posture, any Thai initiative or choice is by definition more or less susceptible to Chinese pressure.

An often cited example of this was the disagreement between Beijing and ASEAN at the International Conference on Kampuchea in July 1981. The Thais derailed the position they had earlier jointly worked out with other ASEAN members by siding with the Chinese. Briefly, the central issue was ASEAN’s attempt to achieve a peaceful settlement with Hanoi, based on a recognition of the latter’s security concerns in Indochina (the “Kuantan Principle”), by disarming all Khmer factions, including the
Khmer Rouge, prior to a U.S.-supervised general election. This would have precluded the possibility of the Khmer Rouge returning to power. The issue is a matter of insignificance now, and since then the PRC has made a number of "concessions" to ASEAN.\textsuperscript{31} In retrospect, moreover, it appears quite unlikely that Hanoi would have accepted this compromise proposal. However, what is of interest to us here is that the incident amply shows the limitations on Thailand's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy. It is true that the position of the PRC (which was opposed to any prospect of effectively eliminating the Khmer Rouge) was enhanced by the endorsement of the United States. But this fact does not detract from the Chinese influence, which was already there.

Thailand's dependence on the PRC, to some extent like her dependence on the United States, has been further complicated by the problem of uncertainty. This is not just a matter of the great power's reluctance to give definite commitments or a question of whether the commitments, however definite, will be honored. It is also concerned, especially in the Chinese case, with the stability of the great power's leadership. It is true that a change in the U.S. administration could well result in a change in U.S. foreign policy orientation and commitments. But in the PRC, a change in leadership could produce a radical shift in her whole foreign policy posture. The stability of the present leadership, it seems, depends a great deal on the success of its modernization policy. The failure of that policy, it is feared, could put the Left back in power. This is obviously an important element of uncertainty in Sino-Thai security relations.

The impact of change in the relationship depends in turn on the extent of Thailand's dependence on the PRC. Presently, that dependence has not gone beyond a kind of strategic cooperation; that is to say, Thailand "depends" on China's cooperation in deterring Hanoi with her superior armed forces and in weakening its will and ability to pursue an expansionist policy in Indochina. The Thais have not yet, I believe, depended on Chinese arms supplies or other forms of military assistance, like those for which they have made arrangements with the United States. In this situation, a termination of Sino-Thai security cooperation is unlikely to have any immediate serious impact on Thailand's security situation. And even though the Thais have yet to assess how important the PRC's cooperation in weakening Vietnam (or more precisely, perhaps, Thai support for Beijing's strategy of "bleeding Vietnam white") is to Thailand's long-term concern over Hanoi's subversive influence, the really frightening prospect is that Beijing's attitude toward Thailand could change overnight to outright hostility.\textsuperscript{32}

One important consequence of Thailand's current dependence on the PRC is that China's influence in Southeast Asia has increased. China is a permanent factor in the region; and as such she is always a source of discomfort, if not outright threat, to the Southeast Asian countries. Suspi-
cion and concern about the PRC’s support of local Communist movements and fear of her manipulation of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asian countries have been major stumbling blocks in developing close relations between China and these nations. Insofar as Thailand is concerned, her dependence on China is not merely a source of strain in ASEAN unity but also poses a problem of how to deal with the security threat of Chinese support for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). As indicated above, a worrisome possible consequence of a change in Sino-Thai relations is indeed the prospect of renewed Chinese hostility toward Thailand and a stepping up of Chinese support for the CPT, which has been Thailand’s major internal security concern.

Most Thais believe that the Communist movement in Thailand has been effectively dealt with. There are now only sporadic guerrilla attacks, which are increasingly indistinguishable from highway robbery. Many factors account for the CPT’s recent decline. Apart from the increased effectiveness of the government’s counterinsurgency efforts, international conditions (particularly the rift between Hanoi and Beijing and even the practices of the Pol Pot regime, which did a great disservice to its Thai comrades) have been, if not decisive, at least highly important in changing the party’s fortune. However, the Thai Communists are still there, waiting for a resurrection, especially under favorable international circumstances. A renewal of the PRC’s hostility toward Thailand could easily reactivate the CPT.

The Thai Communists remain loyal to Beijing. Even though China has lately concentrated her attention on government-to-government relations (without terminating party-to-party links) at the expense of local insurgents (including the shutdown of the radio station in Yunan), the CPT remains a major force that could be used by Beijing as an instrument of pressure against the Thai government. China’s party link with the CPT is therefore a long-term security threat to Thailand. Given the importance of external support to the success of Communist insurgency, this threat could be quite serious. Although Sino-Thai differences have been played down in recent years, with priority being given to strategic cooperation regarding Kampuchea, a problem remains: How long will this cooperation last? Quite possibly, it will last as long as Vietnam persists in occupying Kampuchea. However, a conceivable danger of this cooperation is that it might result in Thailand becoming further dependent on the PRC. The adverse consequences of such a development need no elaboration here.

Conclusion

Both aspects of security relations, security threat and security dependence, have posed complicated problems for Thailand. The most serious threat has come from Vietnam’s Soviet-backed occupation of Kampuchea.
In dealing with this threat, Thailand has depended on the PRC, apart from the United States, for a deterrence against Vietnam's open invasion as well as for putting pressure on her to leave Kampuchea. But managing such a dependent relationship is in itself a very difficult problem. Dependence is not always worth its price. Thailand has accepted the cost of dependence on the United States without all her security concerns being taken care of. Even if the Thais currently seem content with Washington's support for ASEAN's diplomatic efforts to isolate Hanoi, a worrisome prospect is that the United States will change her present direction and, instead of following ASEAN's lead, take steps toward ending the Kampuchean crisis by normalizing relations with Vietnam. Such an orientation has been advocated by a growing number of American academics and public officials who have been dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. Naturally, no nation wants to depend on others perpetually; but so long as dependence is unavoidable, some degree of predictability on the part of the great powers is helpful to a dependent nation. Nevertheless, no security guarantee is totally credible. As one observer has pointed out, "Vietnam got a stronger defense commitment from Moscow than the one Thailand has from the United States under the Manila Pact of 1954." However, that commitment neither deterred the PRC's attack on Vietnam nor produced a response thereto by the Soviet Union.

It is extremely difficult for small nations to avoid security dependence. Small states are almost by definition those that cannot depend on themselves for their own safety. Thailand can nevertheless reduce her dependence on others by reducing the conditions that are responsible for it. If she can reduce her vulnerability to subversive influences—in particular, by eliminating the internal conditions favorable to social discontent and revolutionary war—then she can reduce her dependence on external support for counterinsurgency. This would be the best way to ease her dependence on the PRC in respect to any threat she might pose through the Communist Party of Thailand. As for Thai-U.S. relations, a reorientation involving a greater emphasis on economic and science-technology cooperation to boost Thailand's political stability and economic strength is probably worth far more than any number of troops the United States could possibly station on Thai soil.

NOTES

1. A recent Thai view of the Thanat-Rusk agreement—in fact, the only analysis by a Thai scholar of this particular Thai-U.S. security arrangement that I am aware of—was presented, in Thai, by Thamsook Numnond, "Thanat-Rusk Communiqué of 1962," Thammasat University Journal, Vol. 9 (2), October–December 1979, pp. 69–104.
2. Anti-Americanism was spearheaded by university students and a group of intellectuals associated with, or voicing their views through, Social Science Review, an allegedly "left-wing" journal, but by Western standards simply a "liberal" publication. A major figure in this anti-American movement was Punsak Win-yarat, whose column "Pla Yai Kin Pla Lek" (literally, "Big Fish Eat Smaller Ones") specialized in revealing the "ugly" face of the United States.

3. Strictly speaking, the controversy over troop withdrawal concerned the status of the "residual force" (noncombat personnel) scheduled to remain in Thailand. See, in particular, the interview given to newsmen by Anand Punyarachun, then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 18 March 1976, in Foreign Affairs Bulletin (Thailand), henceforth FAB, Vol. 16 (2), April–June 1976, pp. 8–10.

4. There were also strong "pro-American" pressures. This was evident during the domestic debate on the withdrawal issue. Deputy Prime Minister Pramarn Adireksarn himself came out in fervent support of the Americans, claiming that "the anti-American groups in Thailand wish to see her stand alone amid Communist countries. . . . We have been indebted to the United States much more than any other country. . . . Those groups calling for U.S. withdrawal are slaves of the Communists." Siam Chotmaihet (Siam Chronicle), Vol. 1 (24), 10–16 June 1976, p. 569.

7. FEER, 2 April 1976, p. 11.
9. Bichai, in an address delivered over all radio and TV networks on 1 June 1976, told the Thai people that the sophisticated U.S. monitoring system, especially the Ramasun Project, was not vital to Thai security, and "to continue the operation of the Ramasun Project might make Thailand's neighbors question Thailand's sincerity in wanting to be friends with all countries." For a summary of this address, see ibid., pp. 45–47.

10. In his first major policy statement, in January 1974, Charunphan Isarangkun Na Ayuthya, the Foreign Minister in the government formed after the overthrow of the Thanom-Prapas military regime, said: "Thailand's future relations with the United States will have to be modified and adapted to changing circumstances. During the past decade, one characteristic of our relations with the U.S. has been our emphasis on military cooperation. This needs to be adjusted in order to achieve a more truly balanced relationship." FEER, 18 October 1974, p. 3.

11. While China could counterbalance Vietnam, Moscow could, hopefully, act as a further restraining influence on Hanoi. Bichai Rattakul, in the interview with a foreign correspondent mentioned above, said: "The Thai Government values highly the close relations between Thailand and the United States. . . . We believe that the U.S. . . . will continue to have an important role to play in the region of Southeast Asia." Asked to elaborate on the idea of "equi-distance" as a policy orientation in Thai diplomacy, the Foreign Minister made it clear that "we wish to maintain existing close relations while at the same time improving on those which have been deficient." See FAB, Vol. 16 (3), July–September 1976, pp. 2–3; or FEER, 23 July 1976, pp. 13–14.

12. It was understood that though the withdrawal arranged by the elected government was approved by the Supreme Command, certain Thai Generals were opposed to complete U.S. withdrawal. The presence of some "residual force" was to them a continuation of the U.S. commitment to Thailand, which, in concrete
terms, meant a flow of substantial military support in the form of supplies and equipment. (General Boochai Bamrungpong, Army Commander-in-Chief, warned in February 1976 that a coup d'etat could take place before the election scheduled for 4 April, and that there could be violence on 20 March, the date the Kukrit government had set for a withdrawal of all American forces. FEER, 27 February 1976, p. 21.)

13. In fact, the Thai elite, in particular, seemed to have been so obsessed with the Communist threat after the Communist takeover in Indochina in 1975 that what they should at that time have feared most was "fear" itself. The rundown of U.S. bases in Thailand further accentuated a confidence crisis in Bangkok.


15. Ibid., p. 46.

16. It is widely believed that, in case of an open invasion, the U.S. might even resort to air and naval forces in the pacific.

17. President Carter was initially interested in reconciliation with Hanoi. Most of the major differences had been fairly well worked out by the summer of 1978. Hanoi's decision to enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union and its aggression against Kampuchea, as well as the "boat people" exodus, resulted in the undoing of everything that had been accomplished in the direction of normalization and prompted Washington's decision to proceed with the normalization of relations with the PRC.

18. These have been made on various occasions, especially at the time of the visits the leaders of the two countries exchanged during 1978–1984. Vice President Mondale visited Bangkok in 1978 (prior to the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnam); Premier Kriangsak went to the United States in 1979; and Premier Prem paid two visits to Washington, in 1981 and 1984.

19. U.S. influence in Thailand as a result of this dependence is quite substantial. In 1976, the Thai Army Chief of Staff, General Charoen Pongpanich, admitted that the Thai armed forces were modeled almost entirely upon those of the United States. Thailand depended on the U.S. even for ammunition. Siam Chotmaihet, Vol. 1 (12), 19–25 March 1976, p. 285. Moreover, a large number of Thai officers have been trained in America. There were 12,147 of them from 1950 to 1969, and 5,567 from 1970 to 1979. Surachart Bamrungsuk, The United States and the Thai Military Establishment: The Case of Post-Vietnam War Military Assistance (in Thai) (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1982), p. 85.


21. In fact, had the Third Indochina War not erupted—or more precisely, had it not been for the Sino-Soviet split—the Thai security situation could have been much worse than it is now. In that case, the U.S. security guarantee would have been even more essential—if the United States still had any presence in the region.


23. It was not the post-Vietnam War period that first witnessed Thailand's overture to Moscow. In 1961, for example, the Thais, hurt by Washington's favorable treatment of India, a nonaligned nation, by supplying her with 17,000,000 tons of food grains, responded by making encouraging references to the Soviet Union. Field Marshal Sarit said in July of that year: "Ideology should not
enter into Thai-Soviet relations. Thailand could have better relations and good understanding—even trade relations with the Russians.’’ Cited by Ganganath Jha, *Foreign Policy of Thailand* (Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1979), p. 75.

24. The Soviets, it was reported, were surprised by the encouraging tone with which Foreign Minister Charunphan referred to Thai-Soviet relations. *FEER*, 18 October 1974, p. 5.


26. In a press conference the day after the communiqué was issued, Pham confirmed that noninterference in each other’s internal affairs also meant a termination of Vietnam’s sympathy and support for Thai insurgents. *Siam Chotmaihet*, Vol. 3 (37), 8–14 September 1978, pp. 1017–18.


28. See ibid., pp. 28–44, for a typical perception by the Thai elite of the Vietnamese threat.

29. Hanoi has refused to be associated with Soviet commitments outside Indochina and has resisted granting base rights to the Soviet Union.

30. In an interview during his visit to Thailand in February 1981, Zhao Ziyang said: ‘‘If Vietnam invades Thailand we shall resolutely stand on the side of Thailand and support the Thai people’s struggle against aggression. As to the specific situation, . . . it would also be a matter of close consultations between the Chinese and Thai authorities.’’ R. K. Jain, ed., *China and Thailand, 1949–1983* (Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1984), p. 311.

31. Most significantly, ‘‘China seeks no self-interest on the question of Kampuchea. China is willing to refrain from any form of interference in the internal affairs of Kampuchea, and to respect the result of the Kampuchea people’s choice made through a genuinely free election to be held under U.N. supervision.’’ The fifth point of the five-point plan enunciated by the PRC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 1 March 1983; cited here from Kishore Mahbubani, *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1983/1984, p. 418.

32. The most threatening prospect (which is not impossible) is a concerted Sino-Vietnamese subversive campaign.

33. For example, if the Indochinese states become bases for the Thai Communists through which weapons and supplies (from Hanoi and/or China) could be channeled to them, the CPT could launch a much more effective campaign against the Thai authorities.

34. Lt. General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, Deputy Army Chief of Staff, said in his recent review of the Communist insurgency situation in Thailand that the CPT had lost its ability to maintain its armed struggle against the government and no longer posed a serious threat to Thai security without assistance from foreign forces. See *Thailand Foreign Affairs Newsletter*, Vol. 15, November 1984, p. 3.

35. Recently, there have been indications that Washington might give military aid to the Son Sann and Sihanouk factions (but certainly not to the Khmer Rouge).

Japan as a Factor in Thai-American Relations

Likhit Dhiravegin

Introduction

Japan's political role in the Asian region may not be as discernible as its economic role, at least for the moment. However, given its enormous economic power and its potential in asserting itself in regional politics, Japan is a factor which a keen observer of regional politics cannot overlook. Indeed, of late, Japan has become more active in voicing its political opinions regarding the political issues of the region, most notably the Kampuchean problem.

Japan is also seen at times as a country with the potential of acting as a counterbalance against the influence of the Soviet Union. However, this latter point is still controversial; in fact, it is a dilemma for many Asian countries. On the one hand, a militarily strong Japan may serve to put a check on the Soviet Union, but it could also pose a threat to the region itself. The memories of a militarized Japan and its aggressive policies during World War II are still fresh in the minds of many Asians. As a result, Japan is viewed by its neighbors with mixed feelings.

On the one hand, Japan stands as an Asian country which has proven beyond any doubt that it has become a successful economic power. Many countries will need Japan for their industrial development programs. Many countries, including the newly industrializing countries, will continue to depend on Japan for technological know-how. In fact, a few countries want to emulate Japan. Malaysia's "Look East Policy" and Singapore's desire to fujixerox Japan's work ethic and management style are cases in point. On the other hand, Japan is sometimes viewed by Asians as a country which behaves like an outsider. Because of its economic success and its wide-ranging commercial interests on a global scale, Japan behaves like a Western country rather than an Asian neighbor. This may well be the case, but it would be tempting to argue that Japan is just behaving like an industrial country, i.e., a country which will seek to market its products for greater revenue. Resentment against Japan, tinted with a feeling of envy, is to be expected.

Whatever the situation, one thing is clear: Japan is here to stay; and whether the countries of Asia like it or not, they have to continue dealing with Japan. The main issue to which the Asian countries will have to address themselves is how they can best deal with Japan, rather than whether or not they should deal with their economically powerful neighbor.
Thai-Japanese relations reflect the general scenario discussed above. While Thailand and Japan have had a cordial relationship for centuries, there are still areas where differences remain unsolved. These differences have at times flared up into unpleasant verbal exchanges, and in the early 1970s led to anti-Japanese demonstrations when Prime Minister Tanaka came to visit Bangkok as part of his ASEAN tour. Recently, there has been an outcry against Japan’s economic dominance and its unwillingness to help ameliorate the trade deficit which has been plaguing Thailand for over two decades. Complaints in other areas, such as Japan’s reluctant and slow transfer of technology to Thailand, have also been voiced. Most recently, there has been the complaint about the differential tariff for boneless chickens. While Thai exporters have to shoulder an 18% import tax, the U.S. only has to pay 10.3%, a big discrepancy which will make it impossible for Thai exporters to compete in the Japanese market. Although this last issue is a complex one, since it is concerned with both the technical aspect of Japan’s tariff policy and the quality of the product (Japan claims that American chicken is of a better quality), one thing is clear: the ill feeling over Japan’s discriminatory treatment, justifiable or not, will continue to affect Thai-Japanese relations negatively.

I have dwelled briefly on Thai-Japanese relations to provide a background against which we can put Thai-American relations and see how the Japan factor can affect them. This is the main focus of this paper, to which we now turn.

Japan and Thai-American Relations

If one is to analyze the Japan factor on Thai-American relations, one has to take into account how the three countries interact. It is advisable, perhaps, to regard Thailand as the base of a triangular relationship. However, when one probes deeper into the triangular relationship, one finds that the most salient features are bilateral—that is, Thai-Japanese or Thai-American. Thus, the best way to illustrate our case is as shown in the figure below.
While Thai-Japanese relations have been characterized mostly by economic and, to a certain extent, political relations (e.g., Japan’s support of ASEAN, on the Kampuchean issue), Thai-American relations have been noted most for political and, to a lesser extent, military and economic relations. Thai-Japanese relations are most discernible in the areas of trade, investment, technological transfer, and aid. Indeed, Japanese influence in the economic sphere is so pervasive that it is even said in Thailand that as soon as one gets up, everything one touches is made in Japan except one’s wife!

Thai-Japanese relations date back for centuries, as already mentioned. But for the modern period, the relationship between the two countries started in the late 1950s, when Japan and Thailand signed a trade agreement on December 28, 1957. Ever since, Thai-Japanese relations have continued to grow. At the present time, Japan, Japanese goods, Japanese investment, etc., are a part of life in Thai society. The Sogo Department Store which was opened recently only adds to the already pervasive Japanese influence. The physical appearance of Japanese department stores such as the Sogo only help to buttress the fact that Japanese products have become part of Thai economic life. In fact, the development of the Thai economy, especially the industrial development plans which requires Japanese capital and technology, will further plunge Thailand under Japan’s influence.

Against the above situation, how do Thai-American relations fit in? As already mentioned, Thai-American relations have been a mixture of political, military (mutual defense or security concerns vis-à-vis the Communists), and economic relations. One can cite the U.S. intervention after World War II on behalf of Thailand to ward off the British desire to deal with Thailand as a war loser. One can also cite the friendly relations between the two countries in a later period starting from the Korean War and running through the Vietnam War. Also, Thailand became a member of SEATO in 1954, and its security was assured in a separate agreement which came in the form of the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué of 1962, which bilaterally served as an assurance that in the event of a Communist attack, the United States would come to Thailand’s assistance. At the present, despite the closing down of the SEATO headquarters, the Manila Pact, theoretically and legally speaking, is still binding. In essence, relations between Thailand and the United States can still be counted as very close; in fact, they can probably be regarded as allies, if one is to interpret the letter of the law literally, especially the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué. Politically, the United States has continued to give Thailand moral support for its fight against its unfriendly neighbor. Military aid, although minimal, has also been given, signifying a concern for Thailand’s security. Being a power on a global scale, the United States will continue to play an important role in the Asian region. The presence of its Seventh Fleet in the area still has
significant military and political implications. Thailand will hope to continue to have the benefit of this friend, who is expected to come to its aid in the event of a real crisis.

From the above discussion, it is obvious that Thailand's relations with Japan and the United States are bilateral. Thus, in the diagram presented above, the United States and Japan are connected with dotted lines, signifying that the linkage between the two countries vis-à-vis Thailand is still minimal. However, in general, one will see that in most areas Thailand has benefitted from the fact that the United States policy toward Thailand and Japan's policy toward Thailand have to a large extent concurred. This may be due to the fact that, except in the area of economic relations, Japan and the United States have a similar policy. In fact, in regard to defense and foreign policy, Japan has been following the American path. In defense policy, the two countries have a security agreement: Japan has been under the protective umbrella of American nuclear power since the end of the occupation. In foreign policy, with the major exception of Japan's hasty normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China after President Nixon's visit there (which was intended as a "protest" against the American Administration for its failure to have prior consultations with its close Asian ally), Japan has been following a foreign policy which does not substantially differ from that of the United States.

The areas where Japan's role may affect Thai-American relations can be broadly identified in terms of Japan's political, security, and economic roles.

Japan's Political, Security, and Economic Roles

Japan's Political Role

Because of its economic interests and its wartime history, Japan has chosen to focus its role in Asia on economic matters: finding markets for the outlet of its industrial products, guarantees for raw materials, and locations for investment so that its technological skills can be translated into economic assets. By necessity, Japan shies away from any serious political dispute or conflict in the region. In fact, what Japan has been trying to do is to play safe by not getting overly involved in regional political conflicts. Indeed, one cannot help wondering if Japan's political stand on the Kampuchean issue, giving support to ASEAN and withdrawing aid from Vietnam, has not stemmed principally from pragmatic considerations, given the necessity of wooing ASEAN and supporting the American policy, in addition to maintaining its new relationship with the People's Republic of China. As a result, what one sees is a Japan with a low profile. Only at the urging of the ASEAN leaders did Japan start to show some commitment toward the cause of ASEAN. Henceforth, pledges were made by Japanese
leaders to take more responsibility for regional affairs, especially in regard to peace and stability. In the Fukuda Doctrine, Japan also offered to become a mediator between ASEAN and the Indochinese states.

In the area of foreign affairs, one sees, as already mentioned, that Japan has been pursuing a foreign policy which is more or less in line with that of the United States. Japan has overtly voiced its support for ASEAN on the Kampuchean issue. This is clearly substantiated by its withholding of economic aid to Vietnam. In this sense, there is "no conflict of interest between Japan and the United States, and thus it does not negatively affect Thai-American relations." On the whole, "Japan's policy toward Thailand and the region is in line with that of the United States, and in this sense it does not hinder Thai-American relations." The relationships among Japan, the United States, and Thailand are indeed "triangular, complementary, and positive."

**Japan's Security Role**

The most controversial issue is Japan's security role in the region. As already mentioned, many Asian countries are faced with a dilemma. A militarily strong Japan may serve the positive function of counterbalancing the Soviet Union, but there is also apprehension that a rearmed Japan will pose a threat to the security and stability of the region. This apprehension is especially pronounced among those countries that were adversely affected by Japan's aggressive policies and military operations during the Second World War, notably the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In the case of Thailand, the leaders are more or less aloof, mostly because their wartime experience with Japan was quite different. However, if the United States for some reason urged Japan to increase its military spending beyond the present 0.9% of its GNP, ASEAN and "Thailand may not like it."

Nevertheless, if hypothetically the United States for some reason decided to disengage itself from the Asian continent, leaving Japan, ASEAN, and the People's Republic of China to manage their own affairs, Japan might be welcomed as America's substitute. "This line of reasoning is the most logical, although one cannot utter it loud and clear. The People's Republic of China is certainly not the choice, given its political system and ideology, which are antithetical to the existing systems in ASEAN and that of Thailand." But then, this hypothetical scenario is at best a mental exercise. The chances are that the United States will feel compelled to continue its presence in Asia. Its role as a superpower will make that a necessity, even if against its own will.

**Japan's Economic Role**

If there are areas of conflict with the potential of bringing about negative consequences for Thai-American relations, they are the areas of
trade, investment, and, to a certain degree, economic aid. Trade competition, in particular, is the area where Japan and the United States have come into the most conflict, although it is still on a small scale.\textsuperscript{25}

One problem is that Japan allegedly refused to open its markets to American and Thai products. American businessmen also resent the way Japan treats the other Asian countries.\textsuperscript{26} And as Japan has become more dominant economically, this has naturally been at the economic expense of the United States. At the same time, many ASEAN countries, including Thailand, have shared the American feeling about Japan. It is thus conceivable that, to counterbalance Japan’s increasing economic influence, Thailand may request the United States to increase its economic role. This is only hypothetical, but at least it is conceivable.\textsuperscript{27}

More specifically, Japan has started to use Thailand, as it has already used Singapore, as a place in which to process its products and then export them to the United States, thereby avoiding the quota imposed on Japanese goods.\textsuperscript{28} If this trend continues, it may affect Thai-American trade relations, for there could be a lowering of the quota allotted to Thailand, which is supposed to be used to promote the exportation of goods manufactured in Thailand, not Japanese goods given “a finishing touch” in Thailand in order to get around export quotas.

In the areas of trade and investment, Japan’s position has become dominant. It is thus difficult for the United States to penetrate or compete in an effective way. This has turned Japan’s economic role in Thailand into a monopoly or semi-monopoly. In fact, many American businessmen resent Japanese investment in Asia because it leaves very little room for them to maneuver, given Japan’s efficiency.\textsuperscript{29}

Although there is some controversy, according to one Thai scholar, in regard to aid, Japan has been pouring substantial funds into Thailand to help Thailand’s economy. However, the substantial amount of aid from Japan will automatically reduce the aid given by the United States, which will turn down Thailand’s request for aid in order to give it elsewhere where Japan’s aid is not available. This process will increase Japan’s dominance as an aid donor, which will allow Japan to pull more strings, leaving the United States only a minor role while making Thailand even more dependent upon its one major donor.\textsuperscript{30} There is thus an absence of balance.

All in all, one can see that Japan’s economic role and its economic activities may have a far-reaching impact upon Thai-American relations. At the present moment, the impact is still not keenly felt. As time progresses, however, it may turn out to be a political issue which entangles the three countries in a web of conflict, with Thailand and the United States lining up together against Japan’s economic dominance in Thailand and the Asian region.
Conclusion

From what I have said above, it is clear that the areas where Japan's role might affect Thai-American relations are trade, investment, and aid. These are the areas where some conflict has already been discernible. On the other hand, competition for trade, investment, and aid between Japan and the United States could benefit Thailand, because Thailand will be in a position to make choices. This is, of course, dependent upon how the Thai leaders and the authorities concerned manage Thailand's relationship with Japan and the United States. In fact, Thailand can even manipulate the Japanese-American conflict and rivalry in the region. Thailand can induce more American investment, open more channels for trade, and request more aid from its old friend and ally in order to check Japan's increasingly dominant role.

But one pressing question which comes to mind is, granted that competition between Japan and the United States is real for the moment, and granted that resentment against Japanese businessmen's dominant role in the region is real, how long will this situation continue? This is a great possibility that in due course the two countries, through negotiations and by necessity, will come to some kind of agreement. The chances are that Japan and the United States will come to some kind of an arrangement which will lead to a relationship based upon a combination of cooperation and competition in a framework in which both countries will share whatever they have to offer in the region, including Thailand.

Many self-proclaimed futurologist-economists talk about the age of Asia and the Pacific. Their argument is that the twenty-first century will be the century of Asia and the Pacific, following the dictum that the Mediterranean is the past, the Atlantic is the present, while the Pacific is the future. One scholar has even said that the age of Asia and the Pacific has already dawned. In the new century, it is very likely that the countries of the Pacific will be divided into three categories, broadly speaking. The first group will consist of high-tech industrial countries. This group will include the United States and Japan, and probably Canada and Australia as well. The second category will consist of industrialized countries with strong heavy industries and capital goods production. This group will include the present newly industrialized countries and probably some new members such as Malaysia, and possibly Thailand too at some point in time. The third category will consist of countries that are mainly producers of agricultural produce and consumer goods such as garments, textiles, foodstuffs, canned foods, and handicrafts. This group may include Burma and some countries in South Asia and the Indochinese states, most notably Laos and Cambodia.
If the preceding analysis is correct, it will follow that cooperation between Japan and the United States will affect Thai-American relations. Of course, one can always argue that such a development may turn out to be healthy for Thailand because it will then have two important friends who are on good terms. This may well be the case, but it may also work the other way around. Inevitably, countries of the same status, like human beings of the same status, will talk the same kind of language. As Japan and the United States become more and more like each other, there is a possibility that their policies toward the poor countries of the region will gradually turn out to be similar—in which case, Thailand, as one of the poorer countries, will only lose its bargaining power even further. There is only one alternative left: rapid industrialization. This is easier said than done, and needs to be undertaken with a strong political will. Only in this way can Thailand cease being totally dependent on and at the mercy of the stronger powers, and begin to bargain more or less on its own terms.

NOTES

3. Discussions with a number of ASEAN scholars and government bureaucrats. However, Yusuf Wanandi, Director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Indonesia, said: “We should not be too panicky about Japan’s increasing military spending.” This view was expressed at the Conference on ASEAN in the Regional and International Context, Chiangmai, January 7-11, 1985.
7. Ibid.

10. When the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Liberal Democratic Party visited Thailand in late 1984, an anti-Japanese campaign was launched by the students’ organization of Thammasat University. The Chairman of the Committee voiced his concern about this to the present writer at a reception held in the Chairman’s honor at the Rector’s Office, Thammasat University.

11. This discontent was mentioned to the present writer by a number of Thai authorities, including a Minister attached to the Office of the Prime Minister, in January 1985, prior to the visit of Keidanren.


13. Discussions on January 17, 1985, with Masatada Tachibana, Japanese Ambassador to Thailand; Saburo Okita, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan; and Kinya Niiseki, diplomat and Chairman of the Japan Institute of International Affairs, Bangkok.

14. This is the impression of many observers of Japan, especially in the ASEAN countries.


16. See note 2, above.

17. This part of the Fukuda Doctrine essentially states that Japan would endeavor to help create a Southeast Asia in which ASEAN and the Indochinese countries co-exist peacefully. See Dhiravegin, *ASEAN and the Major Powers*, op. cit., p. 25.

18. Okita, op. cit.


20. Tachibana, op. cit.


22. Discussions with Leonard Unger, former U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, presently at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, January 12, 1985.

23. Arthayuti, op. cit.

24. Unger discussions; Kiiseki, op. cit.; and Scalapino discussions.

25. Tachibana, op. cit.; and Okita, op. cit.


27. Unger discussions.


29. Scalapino discussions.

30. Akrasanee, op. cit.

31. Okita, op. cit.; and Viraphol, op. cit.

32. Viraphol, op. cit.

33. Scalapino discussions.

34. This point was made by Wiwat Mungkandi, Director, American Studies Program, Chulalongkorn University, 1984.

35. This point was made by scholars at the Conference on Security, Stability, and Development in Asia and the Pacific held at the University of California at Berkeley, March 15–21, 1984.
Comments of Douglas H. Pressman  
(Deputy Manager 1981–1984, The Bank of California,  
Bangkok Representative Office)

Mr. Chairman, I would like to direct several comments toward one of  
the issues broached by Dr. Likhit’s excellent paper and presentation, which  
has been the only commentary thus far to focus attention on the key role of  
Japan in the economic future of Southeast Asia. I will first begin with what  
may sound like an anecdote:

Three years ago, Bank of California’s regional manager took the ini-  
tiative of looking at the potential of developing business in Burma. I put  
together some statistics, and the regional manager flew off to Rangoon. He  
returned to Bangkok seven days later in an absolutely depressed state of  
mind. We sent back from Bangkok a report to our San Francisco head  
office with the unpromising conclusion that when the day ever comes that  
Burma opens itself to the world, choosing to not be perpetually passed by  
in the region’s economic transformation, Bank of California as well as  
other American businesses and banks can write off Burma as a prospective  
customer. The reason? Burma is already in the back pocket of Japan, which  
has for years been cultivating a future monopoly role in Burmese trade and  
economic development.

I speak as one who has some experience in studying the Japanese, and  
as one whose former employer—the oldest bank in the western United  
States—became a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Mitsubishi Group last  
June. Those who know me also know that several weeks ago I voted with  
my feet and resigned from Bank of California. I also would like to state  
from firsthand experience that U.S. business does not have anything resem-  
bling a coordinated strategy vis-à-vis the Third World, and American busi- 
nesses, whether multinational in character or not, basically pursue their  
own particularistic interests overseas, heedless of anything except what  
competitors in their own line of business might be doing.

I would like to submit that the same does not seem to apply in the  
case of the offshore operations of Japanese business. In my opinion, Japan  
envisions, and for years has been creating, a division of labor among Asian  
ations—a division of labor designed to permanently institutionalize Japa-  
nese economic preeminence and domination. The Japanese model is purely  
and simply mercantilism, and the example cited by Dr. Likhit of Japanese  
food processors using Thailand as a vehicle to circumvent U.S. import quo- 
tas is, in this light, uncannily reminiscent of the old Caribbean triangle  
trade.

How is this significant? Even the harshest critics of conventional the- 
ories of economic development commonly acknowledge that the phenome-  
non of dependency is an unintended and unfortunate result of the “center’s”  
interaction with the “periphery.” Japanese economic policy
toward the Third World, on the contrary, appears to have dependency as a specific objective. Anyone here who has read the terms of a typical Japanese joint-venture agreement will, I think, be able to agree with me: the Japanese aim to give much less than they get in return. And that arrangement is meant to be perpetual.

So I believe the Thai policymakers here might well be mindful of what I feel is a very disturbing element in the economic process taking place in the Pacific Rim. In the case of Thailand, what I am saying is that, in the Japanese view of things, Thailand can reasonably aspire to be a market for Japanese products, a source of cheap raw materials, and a pool of cheap labor, while its relative position compared to Japan on the development scale (though improving in absolute terms) will remain unchanged—which is to say that Thailand will be permanently subordinate. The bottom line also might suggest to Thai policymakers that the Japanese pattern of operating in Thailand poses a threat to Thai economic autonomy. It suggests to me something further: that the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere is a living reality.

To end my remarks, I can see a time in the future when, at a conference like this, Americans and Thais will find themselves having another thing in common with each other—that we have both become mere players in an economic symphony composed and directed in Tokyo.
Thai Relations with the USSR, the PRC, and Japan: An American Perspective

Robert A. Scalapino

When an American surveys the long history of Thailand's foreign relations, he is likely to be puzzled. How does one account for the relative success that has attended that country's goals of survival and independence—goals not easily achieved in a region rife with domestic conflict, warring neighbors, and imperialist powers? In apportioning credit, what portion should be given to the skill of Thai leaders? What portion to Thai political culture? What portion to the special geopolitical position of the nation? And what portion to luck?

Whatever the credit to be assigned to these factors, all have been present in some degree, and in all probability the relative importance of each has varied with the era and the circumstance. As an outside observer, I would define the central attributes of Thai foreign policy as those of realism, flexibility, and effective timing, combined with a shrewd sense of coalition politics at the international as well as the domestic level.

Thailand-USSR Relations

In this context, let me turn to Thailand's current relations with the two major Communist states, commencing with the Soviet Union. Thailand first established relations with the USSR in 1946, compelled to take this step in order to join the United Nations.1 For nearly three decades, however, the Soviet Union remained a distant power, of scant importance or interest to Thailand's leaders. It was recognized, of course, that the USSR loomed ever larger on the global stage. In an indirect sense, moreover, Thailand confronted the Soviets, first in Korea, later—and more prominently—in Indochina. Yet, from a Thai perspective, the Soviet Union was an American problem. Throughout these years, there was little doubt that the United States had both the will and the power to contain the Soviets effectively. It was only the early 1970s that doubts about Washington mounted rapidly.

In truth, Southeast Asia was a region of secondary importance to the Soviet Union despite Moscow's growing involvement in the Indochina war.2 From an economic, political, and strategic standpoint, many other regions were of greater importance, among them Northeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and, above all, Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, when opportu-
nities presented themselves, the Russians could not refrain from responding. Thus, during the Khrushchev era, the Soviet presence was temporarily elevated in Burma and Indonesia. The heightened commitments in these countries, however, turned out rather badly, perhaps confirming a feeling in Moscow that this was not a region, generally speaking, where substantial resources should be expended. Yet, major assistance to North Vietnam could not be avoided, both because it represented an opportunity to confront the United States at minimal risk and because it was a means of further containing China.

Even in the years during which Thai participation in the struggle against Hanoi was at its height, Russian activity in Thailand was minimal, especially in comparison with PRC activities. Thus, it was relatively easy for Thailand to adopt a pragmatic attitude toward the USSR in the immediate post-1975 period. The swing was toward nonalignment, with U.S. forces requested to leave Thailand and an effort made to accommodate to the Soviet Union as well as China. The climax was the trips to Moscow and Beijing made by Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanand.

The Soviet Union took a jaundiced view toward ASEAN at an early point, believing it to be an instrument of the United States. But it was the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia that changed Thai perceptions and policies toward the USSR. For the first time in many decades, Thailand faced a situation where a global power was aligned with a neighboring enemy. The Soviet-Vietnamese alliance threatened to alter fundamentally the regional balance of power by enabling Hanoi to establish hegemony over Indochina. In point of fact, given Hanoi's victory over the South Vietnamese and Americans, its drive for control of Cambodia and Laos was virtually inevitable, having long been signaled by the words and actions of the Vietnamese Communist movement. Only the timing and the means were in doubt, and these were determined in considerable measure by the actions of the Pol Pot regime. But it was the military muscle of the Soviet Union that enabled the Vietnamese invasion to be executed and sustained.

It is thus not surprising that the USSR and Vietnam in combination came to be perceived as the prime threat to Thailand's security. Control over Laos having been established earlier, with the Vietnamese thrust into Cambodia, Vietnamese power extended to the banks of the Mekong and the borders of eastern Thailand by 1979. The Thais could not hope to match the power of one of the world's largest armies.

Soviet military actions in Indochina bear witness to the fact that, in this age, global and regional strategic considerations are intertwined. The use of Cam Ranh Bay, Danang, and Kampong Som enhances the Soviet military position in the China Sea and provides additional flexibility with respect to the Indian Ocean constituting a challenge to the long-held American naval dominance in the region, although the likely effectiveness of Soviet military forces in the region, especially in wartime, is questionable.
In any case, Thailand must be concerned about the Soviet presence for different reasons. The Soviets are strengthening the already formidable power of the Vietnamese in ways that can have long-range implications for Thailand.

Whatever the future of Soviet-Vietnamese relations—an intriguing question that cannot presently be answered—the alliance seems firm for the present. The USSR, aware of a lengthy tradition of xenophobia in this secluded land and wary of Vietnamese long-range intentions, insisted that Vietnam come into the Soviet economic as well as political bloc in exchange for massive assistance. For Vietnam, the alliance is an absolute necessity as long as it confronts China. At some point, it seems virtually certain that Hanoi will have to reach an accommodation with Beijing unless it chooses to be permanently militarized and wholly dependent upon outside assistance. When that times comes, new problems will be posed for Thailand.

For the present, however, Vietnam and the Soviet Union speak as one in condemning Bangkok's position with respect to Indochina. Thus, one Tass commentator, Vasily Kharkov, recently asserted: "Gangs of Pol Pot men and other Khmer renegades use as their lair Thailand's border districts and try from those areas to penetrate the Kampuchean territory in order to commit murders, set off explosions, and set things on fire. Forces of imperialism and hegemonism providing aid to these gangs are striving to keep up tension around Kampuchea, banking on confrontation between ASEAN countries and the countries of Indochina. . . . Under outside pressure, Bangkok disregards the initiatives [of the Heng Samrin government for normalization]."

More ominously, Vice Foreign Minister M. S. Kapitsa, in a Moscow meeting with Japanese officials, declared that Thailand was in a state of undeclared war with Vietnam, but appeared to be like ripe fruit, ready for plucking. On another occasion, it was asserted by a high Soviet official that the real threat to Asia was Chinese hegemonism, but that eventually an alliance among India, Indonesia, and Vietnam would emerge to block such expansion. Whatever Thai concerns there may be about China's long-range policies in the region, the prospect of such an alliance, even if unlikely, could scarcely be comforting.

Despite the heightened presence of Soviet power in the near vicinity and the intensified propaganda that emanates from Moscow, the Soviet threat is seen primarily as one that is likely to be exercised against Thailand through a surrogate Vietnam. In terms of direct impact, the USSR remains foreign and remote. Its ability to penetrate Thai society has been essentially limited to the purchase of an occasional civil servant, although efforts are currently going on to establish contacts with students and the labor movement. Yet, only if a Thai Communist movement under the aegis of Vietnam were to acquire strength would the Soviets be in a position to enter the Thai political scene in a manner even remotely comparable to earlier PRC
achievements. As yet, this has not happened. As for the broader, regional threat posed by the USSR, Thailand must count upon others—notably the United States and China—to serve as deterrents. How seriously to take the Soviet threat, therefore, remains a matter upon which there are differences of opinion in Bangkok.

Thailand-PRC Relations

In contrast to Russia, China has always figured prominently in Thai society and politics. While Chinese have been assimilated more successfully in Thailand than in any other ASEAN state except Singapore, which stands apart as a Chinese community, every Thai is conscious of the Chinese factor—in business, politics, and intellectual life. The Thais once resided in territories now a part of China, and even today a sizable Thai population lives in southern Yunnan province as well as in Burma. Thus, ethnic and political lines do not precisely correspond, as is also the case in most other Southeast Asian states. Given these factors, together with its geographic proximity and sheer size, China is not just another nation to the Thais. It is a part of Thai culture, a presence in Thai society, and a political force with which to reckon.

There is an irony in the fact that China played a major role in bringing the ASEAN states together initially—as enemy, not as friend. In the aftermath of the collapse of South Vietnam, many Southeast Asian leaders feared that China would take advantage of the situation to penetrate the region more deeply, using such instruments as the indigenous Communist parties of the area.7

There was reason for concern. In the case of Thailand, for example, the PRC had long nurtured the Communist Party of Thailand. Close contacts were easy because the top leadership of the CPT was almost exclusively Sino-Thai. The key figures made frequent trips to China and sometimes lived there for extended periods. Training was provided as well as sanctuary. Moreover, a clandestine radio—the Voice of the Free Thai People—operated under Chinese aegis in south Yunnan province, dispensing Communist propaganda to Thailand.8

Maoist China, even in periods of less militance than the years of the Cultural Revolution, pursued foreign policies that played upon a combination of three types of relations: state-to-state, people-to-people, and comrade-to-comrade, varying the mix as the occasion seemed to warrant. In the case of Thailand, prior to the mid-1970s, the emphasis was strongly upon the latter two categories, since no official relations existed. Moreover, the pronouncements of both the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party were unrelentingly hostile to the Thai government, which was defined as reactionary, a lackey of American imperialism, and an
enemy of the "progressive peoples of the world," especially the "heroic Vietnamese fighters for liberation."

As is well known, a dramatic change in PRC attitudes toward the Thai government took place as Sino-Vietnamese relations worsened in the late 1970s. The shift was abetted by the fact that Bangkok had established diplomatic relations with Beijing by that time, enabling official contact. At that point, the PRC was seeking to shift to an almost exclusive reliance upon state-to-state relations throughout the ASEAN region—with varying degrees of success. To be sure, Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders acknowledged that party-to-party relations would not be totally abandoned, but various governments were assured that such ties would be confined essentially to moral support, with material assistance ended or sharply curtailed. To their party comrades abroad, the Chinese Communist Party stressed the line of "self-reliance," emphasizing the thesis that revolution could not be exported and that each movement had the obligation to prepare the internal conditions for its victory.9

This thesis is at best a half-truth, since few if any guerrilla movements have succeeded without external support—a fact understood by most guerrilla leaders. For the Thai Communists, the late 1970s and the years that have followed have been extremely difficult. The Yunnan radio station was shut down. Mao, long sacrosanct to the Thai Communists, has been denigrated in his own country. And the bitter attacks exchanged between Beijing and Hanoi naturally affect the policies as well as the morale of the Thai Communists. Above all, the Communist Party of Thailand has been requested to adjust to the priorities that Chinese leaders have assigned their national interests over "proletarian solidarity." It is not surprising that disillusionment and divisions have ensued.

As noted, the key to the current Thai-PRC relationship is the Indochina issue. Thailand and China have a common cause in opposition to Vietnamese hegemony over Cambodia and Laos. Thus, they cooperate in channeling supplies and providing sanctuary to anti-Vietnamese Khmer; and as long as that cooperation continues, the Vietnamese—however many dry-season offensives they may conduct—cannot eliminate their opponents.

In a broader sense, China now stands as the guarantor of Thailand's security. PRC leaders have made it clear that if Vietnam were to strike heavily into Thailand in an effort to liquidate their Khmer opponents, China would retaliate. And in this threat the Chinese are credible. Not only did they once seek to teach the Vietnamese a lesson (with mixed results), but they have a huge military force on Vietnam's northern border that engages the Vietnamese in border skirmishes more or less constantly, forcing Hanoi to keep upwards of 700,000 of its best troops on that border to guard against another major Chinese assault. The Chinese, to be sure, have had to concern themselves with Soviet responses to an attack upon Vietnam. At the time of the brief Sino-Vietnamese conflict, Russian forces on
the Manchurian border were activated, with large-scale maneuvers conducted, even though the Chinese had earlier signaled that this was to be a limited operation. But with the tension in Sino-Soviet relations reduced, can Hanoi count upon a meaningful Soviet response should China decide upon a second "lesson"—especially since, even on the first occasion, the Soviets responded cautiously?

Thailand has also been given American support, with additional military supplies provided and a pledge given that the commitments of the Manila Pact remain intact. In the light of the Vietnam War, however, the credibility of the United States can be questioned, both in Thailand and in Vietnam. It is China that counts, especially with Hanoi, particularly since Washington has proven reluctant to provide the non-Communist Khmer resistance forces with military support.

As long as the struggle over Cambodia continues—and no political solution acceptable to all parties is in sight—the de facto alliance between Thailand and China is likely to remain in effect. On the surface, at least, relations between the two countries have not been closer in this century. High-level visits are regularly exchanged; trade, while not extensive, is growing; cultural ties have been strengthened; public pronouncements on the Indochina issue are in harmony; and Beijing is careful to support the Thai government and Thai leaders in all media commentaries.

Are the positions of the two governments identical with respect to Indochina? The Chinese position, public and private, is that time is on the side of the anti-Vietnamese Khmer resistance, and if full pressure is applied to Hanoi, it will ultimately have to accept the fact that it cannot dominate Cambodia without paying an unacceptable price. It is the Chinese position that there is reason for optimism regarding the capacities of the resistance, especially the Khmer Rouge. Chinese evaluations highlight the ability of the resistance to operate widely throughout Cambodia in guerrilla fashion. And they insist that they are providing assistance to all anti-Vietnamese forces in accordance with their ability to use such aid. On the most delicate issue, the future role of the Khmer Rouge in a coalition government, Beijing, after considerable pressure, has indicated some flexibility—a flexibility that may at some point be put to a decisive test. For the time being, however, the Chinese take the position that the Khmer Rouge are the major fighting force and hence must be a prominent element in the coalition—with pressure being exerted on all parties to keep the coalition together.

For the most part, these positions appear to be shared by the government of Thailand, although Bangkok, like other ASEAN governments, has no desire to see the Khmer Rouge play the dominant role in the future of Cambodia, and there may be some question about the basic Chinese attitude in this regard, recent assurances notwithstanding. Some fissures exist, moreover, within Thai society, as well as among the ASEAN states, as to whether or not time is on the side of the anti-Vietnamese Khmer and,
hence, what type of political settlement should be sought or accepted. Hanoi is seeking to cultivate these fissures both by its recent military actions and its political maneuvers. Thus far, however, the Vietnamese have been their own worst enemies, alienating even those who are potentially accommodationists by putting forth contradictory signals. At this point, any settlement would have to be on Hanoi’s terms, and that deters those ASEAN states most anxious for a settlement.

Meanwhile, the inner politics of Thai-PRC relations are more complex than is suggested on the surface, and a full appreciation of the complexities requires that they be viewed both in their bilateral dimensions and in the context of ASEAN relations. Traditionalism still plays a role in Chinese attitudes and behavior toward the small states on its peripheries. The Middle Kingdom complex is not dead. Thus, lavish hospitality and liberal praise are accompanied by a willingness to punish recalcitrant barbarians when they misbehave and by an element of rigidity in dealing with issues determined by the Chinese to be those of “principle” or national interest. In their negotiations with Beijing, Thai diplomats have been made aware of the latter trait.

Certain other ASEAN states—most notably Indonesia and Malaysia—having stronger qualms about China, are concerned lest the Thai-Chinese relationship become too close. This can serve Thai purposes, since it provides a leverage that Bangkok can apply in upholding its position within ASEAN. In truth, the attitude of many Thais with respect to China and the present Thai alignment with Beijing is aptly revealed in the old saying that one must worry about the tiger at the door, taking care of the tiger in the jungle later. Vietnam is the tiger at the door. Many Thai leaders are prepared to accept the possibility that China, as it garners economic and military strength, may be a growing problem for the Southeast Asian states, but the more immediate danger is from a militant, chauvinistic Vietnam on the Thai doorstep. In meeting this challenge, the Chinese are indispensable.

Thai-Japanese Relations

However paradoxical it may seem, the true revolutionary agent in Thailand today is not the USSR or the PRC but Japan. Japanese products—television sets, motorcycles, small trucks, and tractors—have flooded the Thai countryside as well as the major urban centers, having a profound impact upon every aspect of life. Japan’s economic penetration of Thailand has been paralleled, of course, by a similar pattern of events in the other ASEAN states. Today, Japan occupies the leading trade position with each of these states except the Philippines, and all except Indonesia run large trade deficits with Japan. Japan is also the leader in foreign
private investment, and is gaining momentum in this field, with current investments surging ahead of those of the United States and Europe.

It is thus not surprising that Japan, together with the United States, has become a crucial factor in the economies of Southeast Asia, vital to the economic development of all of the ASEAN states. Japan accounts for 27 percent of ASEAN exports and 22 percent of its imports, well in front of the United States (17.2 percent and 15.3 percent, respectively). Direct Japanese investment in the ASEAN region was estimated to be $7 billion in 1981, and has continued to increase.10

Given these figures, why is Japan in very considerable trouble on the economic front throughout the ASEAN community? The specific complaints are remarkably uniform, and echo the concerns of other nations, including the United States: access to the Japanese market has been restricted both by tariff and non-tariff barriers, and in some cases ASEAN products have not received the same treatment as identical products coming from the United States; Japanese investment has been channeled largely into natural resource exploitation or facilities serving the Japanese market, such as the production of parts, instead of into processing industries and other labor-intensive fields; too few host-country managers have been hired and trained; economic assistance, while promised, has been slow in being advanced.11 Behind these specific complaints, there is a strong feeling, justified or not, that Japanese economic policies are self-centered and exclusivist, with little or no appreciation of the need for balanced, reciprocal treatment.

In its relations with Japan today, Thailand is not set apart from its ASEAN neighbors. However, there are differences of a historic nature. In comparison with states like the Philippines, Malaysia, or even Indonesia, Thailand's experiences with Japan and Japanese soldiers during World War II were largely benign. Accommodating to Japan at an early point, Thailand suffered very little from the Japanese presence. Thus, no legacy of bitterness has existed.

Yet, it was in Bangkok that the first overt protests against Japanese policies broke out in the course of the 1974 Southeast Asia trip of Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei; and recently, Thai students have sought to conduct a boycott of Japanese goods as a protest against Japanese policies. While the Thai government does not officially support this movement, it has strongly objected to certain Japanese policies. At the end of 1984, Thai Deputy Prime Minister Bichai, visiting Japan, urged a five-point program on Japan's part to improve bilateral economic relations:

1. acceptance of increased primary product exports in the Japanese market and, specifically, an immediate lowering of the tariff on boneless chicken;
2. the further expansion of Japanese joint ventures and direct investments in Thailand;
increased Japanese economic cooperation in promoting a climate for Thai export promotion;
the utilization of Thai-produced rice by Japan in its food aid programs;
the creation of an organ for administrative consultation between the two governments covering the whole range of trade, economic cooperation, and investment issues.\textsuperscript{12}

Japan had earlier sought to alleviate tensions in its relations with ASEAN by enunciating the so-called Fukuda Doctrine in August 1977. Prime Minister Fukuda pledged that Japan would not become a major military power; that it would cooperate with the ASEAN states in their quest for economic development, with a pledge of $1 billion in assistance to ASEAN industrial projects; and that Japan would endeavor to aid in the creation of a Southeast Asia in which the ASEAN and Indochina states could coexist peacefully. The grant program, however, did not materialize as anticipated, due to delays and disagreements over the feasibility of projects; and Japan's efforts to play an economic-political role in ASEAN-Vietnamese relations lapsed with the Cambodia invasion.\textsuperscript{13}

In his trip to the ASEAN region in 1983, Prime Minister Nakasone reiterated Japanese policies toward the ASEAN community in terms similar to those set forth by Fukuda: a political but not a military role for Japan in the region; economic cooperation stressing agriculture, energy, human resource development, and assistance to medium and small enterprises; and cooperation with ASEAN on the Cambodian issue.\textsuperscript{14}

The difficulties in meeting the specific proposals of Deputy Prime Minister Bichai, however, were signaled in the public remarks of the Japanese Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in early December 1984, when he asserted: "I will not retreat even one step from the position of protecting the agriculture of Japan. Agriculture is the basis of our country. It is important to protect Japan's self-supply in food from the position of food security."\textsuperscript{15}

And when a new tariff schedule was proposed in mid-December, the Thais protested strongly, with the permanent secretary of the Foreign Ministry of Thailand remarking: "We have all along tried to resort to quiet diplomacy. But it hasn't worked. Although we understand that the Japanese Foreign Ministry is sympathetic with our grave concern on the issues, Japan's local political pressure and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries have strongly opposed the Thai requests."\textsuperscript{16}

The reference to local pressures was well taken. In recent years, private-interest groups in Japan, operating through leading politicians, have steadily expanded their influence at the expense of bureaucratic authority. In this instance, as in many other cases, however, one branch of Japanese officialdom is pitted against another, and in such situations the Ministry of Foreign Affairs generally comes out second best.
Thai unhappiness with Japanese economic policies is not likely to disappear. Since the end of World War II, the excess of imports from over exports to Japan has amounted to approximately $15 billion, nearly one-half of Thailand's foreign trade deficit. Certain ASEAN products—boneless chicken among them—have a higher tariff imposed upon them than is imposed upon similar U.S. products, as Japan seeks to reduce American pressures through bilateral agreements. Thai spokesmen have asserted that the market liberalization measures taken recently have mainly benefitted the advanced industrial nations, with very little benefit to ASEAN exports. Moreover, as Thailand shifts its economic strategy, moving from import-substitution to export-oriented industries, it wants Japanese investment in the latter area, and particularly in industries that will make maximum use of Thai labor and raw materials.

Against this background, it is understandable why the ASEAN nations, Thailand included, have had reservations about earlier Japanese-sponsored Pacific Community concepts. This has often been seen as a plan to extend Japan's economic control still further, although in some quarters it has been seen as an effort to create an American-Japanese economic condominium in the region. Japan has responded by backing away from the initiation of any regional proposal, stating that ASEAN would have to take the lead, and the United States has followed suit, adopting a similar stance. Yet, in recent times, there has been a growing recognition within ASEAN, as elsewhere, that bilateral negotiations, important as they are, are not sufficient to cope with the economic issues—and opportunities—of the Pacific region. Although it will be radically different from the EEC and much less structured, some councils or organizations of a regional nature are destined to emerge at a later time, as the recent meeting of the six (ASEAN) plus five (the United States, Japan, Australia, Canada, and Mexico) indicates.

Apart from the economic issues, Thailand-Japan relations are relatively untroubled by political and security issues. Thailand does not have the same deep-rooted reservations about Japanese military growth as are to be found in some of the other ASEAN countries, although it would presumably not desire a Japanese military presence in Southeast Asia. There is a suspicion in Bangkok that Japan is anxious to advance its economic ties with Vietnam under whatever conditions may prevail, despite Prime Minister Nakasone's pledge to the contrary. Thus, when it was announced that a Japan-Vietnam Friendship Committee of Japanese Diet members would visit Cambodia in connection with a trip to Vietnam, the Thai government indicated its strong opposition, asserting that it would cause Japanese policy toward Cambodia to be misunderstood, especially since the head of the delegation, Sakurauchi Yoshio, was close to Nakasone. The scheduled visit to Cambodia was cancelled.
Thailand will continue to interact economically with Japan on an ever more extensive scale, its grievances notwithstanding. In all probability, trade, foreign investment, and economic assistance will increase at a somewhat slower rate than in the immediate past, but in each sector the growth will be significant. Some Japanese adjustment to Thai requests is likely, but at a pace and in a degree that will not satisfy the Thai government or people. Consequently, combined with an admiration for Japanese efficiency of the type that has led Singapore and Malaysia to “Look East” campaigns, resentment will remain strong, with periodic outbursts of anger. To some extent, such demonstrations mask frustrations with domestic policies, with Japan serving as scapegoat. But the problems are real even if the solutions are difficult to find.

**In Summary**

From one American’s perspective, the current foreign policy of Thailand serves that nation’s national interests reasonably well. Adjustments have been made to the fact that the United States now shares power in the region with several other major societies. None of these societies will depart from Southeast Asia. For the ASEAN states, therefore, some collective approach to political and security issues becomes all the more desirable. At the same time, since a capacity for collective action within ASEAN is limited—whether the issues be economic, political, or matters relating to security—bilateralism remains important.

Thailand is friendly and aligned in different ways with both the United States and the People’s Republic of China. This provides a shield against Vietnam and, indirectly, against the USSR. The hostility toward the USSR, however, stems almost wholly from the Indochina issue, and is not likely to be activated. Finally, Thailand has established the type of cooperative-conflictual relation with Japan that is not uncommon in Japan’s relations with other Pacific-Asian states. Japan will play the primary external role in Thai economic development amidst continuous countervailing pressures from both societies requiring constant negotiations.

These various relations satisfy Thailand’s elemental security and economic requirements as well as can be expected in a complex, rapidly changing regional and global environment.

**NOTES**

1. For two general studies dealing with the recent role of the USSR in Asia, see Donald Zagoria, ed., *Soviet Policy in Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); and Herbert Ellison, ed., *The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective*


11. See Narongchai, op. cit.


VI. Future Prospects
Current Trends and Future Prospects for Thai-American Relations

Thanat Khoman

Before embarking on this subject, it seems advisable to reemphasize a few historical facts.

The first one is the position of Thailand in the context of U.S. foreign relations, particularly in regard to Asia. Thailand, or Siam as it was then, was the first Asian country with which the U.S. entered into diplomatic relations, over 150 years ago, the celebration of which was observed only two years ago. The celebration was undoubtedly a legal and sentimental landmark in the long Thai-American history. On that occasion, which coincided with the bicentennial anniversary of the capital city of Bangkok, President Reagan movingly recalled: “We Americans are proud of our long history of close relations with Thailand. One of the bonds that has held us together is our shared love for individual and national freedom. We are well acquainted with Thailand’s successful record of maintaining its independence and managing its own affairs. Let me assure you that the U.S. stands with you as a partner and friend. Our commitment to freedom and friendship has served us well in the past, and I believe the shared values that link us across half the globe will continue to help promote the well-being of both our nations.”

The U.S. Congress also sent a congratulatory message, saying, among other things, that “the U.S. and Thailand share common goals of preserving national independence and individual freedom and of improving the lives of our respective peoples.”

Thus, from the beginning, the relationship between the two countries has been based on immutable values, not just on the expediencies of the moment.

That is why, after the First World War, when Thailand joined with the Allies against Germany, the U.S., animated by high moral and international principles, was the first Western power to renounce the concept of the White Man’s superiority and the regime of Extraterritoriality, that is, the “capitulations” that were imposed upon the “less civilized countries” of Asia and the Near East, including Thailand. Such a system required that nationals of the Powers enjoying extraterritorial rights could not be tried before local jurisdictions, but would be sent to a special tribunal, the so-called “consular court,” at which the consult of the Power concerned sat as judge.
The campaign which culminated in the abolition of the Extraterritorial Regime was conducted by the then Adviser on Foreign Affairs, an American by the name of Francis B. Sayre, President Woodrow Wilson's son-in-law. The U.S. example was promptly followed by the European Powers. For this outstanding service, the Thai Monarch bestowed upon Mr. Sayre a high total of nobility. He became “Phya Kalyana Maitri” (the Lord of Beautiful Friendship), and a street in Bangkok was also named after him.

Another milestone in the history of Thai-American relations was the decisions of the U.S. Administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt not to recognize the declaration of war by the Thai Government under Field Marshal Pibul Songgram. An American professor at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy, Tufts University, W. Scott Thompson, has ascribed this generous act not to magnanimity but to utter “condescension” on the part of the American President. Actually, it was probably due to the fact that the Thai Minister to Washington at that time, M. L. Seni Pramoj, who later became head of the Free Thai Movement abroad, did not deliver the inane and ill-advised declaration to the U.S. Government and kept it locked in a drawer of his desk. Whatever the real cause may be, the attitude of the U.S. restrained other Western Allied governments, the U.K. in particular, from imposing a harsh punishment and overly stiff reparations on Thailand, which already had to deliver a million tons of rice as reparations in kind.

The Thai nation, having the Asian virtue of gratefulness, never forgets the favors and gestures of friendship extended to it. So whenever the U.S. has asked something from us, the Thai Government has always obliged. Such an occasion arose when the Communist Pathet Lao threatened to take over the neutral government of Prince Suvanna Phouma in Laos. Thailand was asked to authorize the stationing of U.S. Marines on its soil, and the Thai Government readily acquiesced, setting only a minor condition—namely, that it be announced that the Marines were stationed in Thailand “at the request of the U.S. Government.” The U.S. Ambassador, Kenneth Young, who took part in the discussions during a weekend with the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Sarit Thannarat, and myself, agreed to the Thai request. However, when the White House communique appeared shortly thereafter, it was said that the Marines were sent to Thailand at the request of the Thai Government. Much later, another U.S. Ambassador, who took no part in the discussions, claimed that such was the agreement reached on that weekend. As two of the participants are already dead, it has become a question of whom to believe, an ambassador who was a complete outsider or me, the only survivor of the meeting. With the passage of time, it matters little, if at all. This incident is mentioned only to show that in a relationship between “unequal partners” there can be surprises.

Thailand’s involvement became more pronounced in the second part of the Vietnam tragedy, especially during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, when U.S. participation in the war became more intense. The
American Administration then needed bases in the rear to support the ground operations in Vietnam, and no place could be more suitable than northeast Thailand, which is only a few minutes away from North Vietnam by air. This area gradually become an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" for the U.S. The establishment of Korat, Takhli, and Udorn bases for use by the American Air Force was negotiated secretly and directly between U.S. and Thai military authorities. Even I, as Foreign Minister, did not have an inkling about the "deal" until the news broke from Washington when the American press and the U.S. Congress joined hands in attacking poor little Thailand for daring to cooperate with the U.S. Administration by allowing its territory to be used as a springboard for air operations against Vietnam. U.S. Senator Fulbright even called Thai soldiers sent to Vietnam at the urging of the U.S. Government "mercenaries," forgetting that U.S. forces in Germany and Japan have received billions of dollars from the governments of those countries but have never been considered mercenaries.

In the Thai cabinet, I vehemently protested against this secret deal, on the constitutional ground of the collective responsibility of the government. If one or more members are not informed of commitments entered into by other members, how can responsibility be devolved upon them? The Prime Minister, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, accepted the validity of my protest. Therefore, when possession of the B-52 air base at U-Tapao, on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Thailand, was to be transferred to the Thai Government, I was entrusted with the task of concluding an agreement with the representative of the U.S. Government. This time, the agreement was authentic and legal, not a private and secret deal as before.

For more than ten years, until the end of the Vietnam ordeal in 1975, the relationship between the giant and the dwarf was hectic and confused. So also was that between the numerous U.S. agencies that were set up in Thailand. W. Scott Thompson has tried to unravel the threads of these events.

In truth, the difficulties strewn along the road of bilateral relations stemmed from the fact that many people in the U.S. did not understand, or refused to understand, that the U.S. forces came to Thailand not to defend that country but to use it as an instrument to fight the Vietnam War. Many in the ruling American circles, particularly some of the legislators who at one time had supported the war by voting, for example, for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, began to back down after the widespread discontent and protest on the campuses and in the press, and joined with the war's detractors to safeguard their own electoral interests. Unethically, instead of showing appreciation for our cooperation, they attacked Thailand, considering our country as accomplice with their own government in involving the U.S. in the wretched conflict. Such was the unfortunate treatment meted out to an ally. Not only that, but Thailand, after the American withdrawal, has had to live to this day with the sequels of the Vietnam debacle: hundreds of thousands of refugees swamping our land, using up our limited resources,
and posing a danger to our national security. Furthermore, the fighting close to our borders has caused many casualties and has forced many people to flee from their homes to become refugees in their own land. All this has been in addition to the Vietnamese armed incursions into Thailand and the vociferous threats coming in our direction from the neo-colonialist regime in Hanoi, supported with arms, money, and cadres in its expansionist conquests by the self-styled “greatest peace-loving country” in the world, which is, in fact, deeply engaged in a murderous war in Afghanistan, while fueling another war in Kampuchea.

This heavy legacy became glaringly apparent when, after protracted negotiations conducted by Henry Kissenger (the American Nobel Peace Prize winner), a ceasefire agreement was reached with North Vietnam. This notable achievement enabled the U.S. to withdraw its troops from Vietnam to a staging area in northeast Thailand and then back home. South Vietnam, left to itself, fought on with little confidence or hope for ultimate success. Then, unexpectedly, the U.S. Congress cut off funds destined for the U.S. Air Force in Thailand, thus clipping its wings and preventing it from engaging in any air operations in the war theatre. This was promptly followed by the drying up of aid to South Vietnam, presaging the fastcoming end of the tragedy and the victory of the Communists in Indochina.

As the curtain drew over the Vietnam drama, the U.S. Administration hastened to wash its hands of Southeast Asia, disengaging from the region in order to placate public opinion at home and perhaps also to forget about the most painful episode in its otherwise glorious history.

How did this unbelievable failure come about? The latest explanation has been ventured by General Bruce Palmer, former vice chief of staff of the U.S. Army, who attributes the unsuccessful outcome of the inability of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to articulate military strategy that they could persuade the Commander in Chief and Secretary of Defense to adopt. As to the claim that the war could have been won by an all-out bombing campaign, the General says that the Army and Navy were “actually skeptical” about massive bombing because, in their opinion, “North Vietnam did not possess industrial targets to justify strategic bombing.” Finally, he concludes by saying that fighting “limited” wars is difficult for a democracy.

The abrupt 180-degree shift of U.S. policy induced politicians in Thailand to adjust their own policy. The democratically elected government of the time began to let leftist activist elements vent their aspirations and even desecrate the U.S. emblem at the American Embassy. Many Thai politicians and government espoused a liberal stance by making ill-advised demands for the dismantlement of U.S. electronic installations which provided useful information about Vietnamese and other Communist movements in Indochina. They even went so far as to fix a date for the complete withdrawal from Thailand of U.S. military forces and the closing down of SEATO headquarters. All these shabbily though out moves undoubtedly
pleased the U.S. Government, which was searching for a graceful way to move its military presence out of this part of the world, which it believed was of no further importance to vital U.S. interests. Thus, the Thai Government of that period provided the U.S. with a welcome pretext for an easy exit without a sacrifice of principles.

These matters are recalled as a background against which to assess current trends and future prospects.

Because of past emotional upheavals on the American domestic scene, which led the U.S. leaders of the time to enunciate the policy of disengagement from mainland Southeast Asia, and because of the unwise foreign policy adjustments in Thailand which sought to appease Vietnam and its acolytes, the relations between Thailand and the United States cooled off, leaving behind the tumultuous imbroglio prevailing during the war period. The U.S. has no more military role to play, and Thailand is not needed as a springboard for air operations. Furthermore, on the U.S. side, the high-priority areas for policy concern lie elsewhere—in the Middle East, Europe, Northeast Asia, and Central America. In Southeast Asia, the U.S. keeps repeating the slogan that it follows ASEAN policy, while providing only $5 million per year in nonlethal aid to non-Communist members of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). Meanwhile, the U.S. is pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the coffers of the Mujahedeen resistance against the Soviets in Afghanistan and into those of the “contras” fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. This is the kind of logic we have to face in our relations with a big power which often pursues a very eclectic policy. It also prefers, no doubt for good reasons, to play second fiddle to the PRC, which, it is presumed, will not allow developments detrimental to American interests in this part of the world to take place. Moreover, Vietnam has done everything possible not to induce the U.S. to normalize relations with it, either because of its own stupidity or because of Soviet constraints which keep protégés in line.

The U.S., therefore, has no particular reason to pay much attention to this part of the world, the memory of which remains bitter, traumatic, and abhorrent in the minds of many people. Furthermore, the American pundits still cling to the idea that the USSR is not much interested in seeking control of the area, an idea which may have been true a decade or so ago but seems somewhat unsubstantiated by the existing realities after the increasing use of the military facilities at Danang and Cam Ranh Bay. While the authorities on the American side realize that those bases give the Soviets certain advantages in the surveillance and monitoring of U.S. fleet and other shipping movements, they are not overly alarmed by the increased Soviet presence. There are still many drawbacks affecting the Soviet position: a long logistic supply line from the Soviet Asian bases, and the high vulnerability of those two bases, which in time of conflict could be neutralized with a minimum sacrifice.
But despite this relatively relaxed attitude, the present U.S. Administration is now paying somewhat greater attention to the potential danger posed by the increased Soviet presence, especially when it is related to U.S. preoccupations in the Middle East and related concerns with communications with and in the Indian Ocean and the importance of protecting the supply line from that ocean to the China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Thus, Southeast Asia, including Thailand, is gaining a renewed strategic significance and is becoming a factor not to be neglected in the global contest between the major powers.

At the present time, although Thai-American relations are considerably less intense than during the Vietnam War days, a number of "irritants" still exist. One of them is the question of narcotic drugs, concerning which some Americans, among them Congressmen and Senators, persist in holding Thailand and a few other nations responsible. They forget, or pretend to forget, that the drug problem, at least in Southeast Asia, started and became acute during the Vietnam War, when American GIs used military aircraft to ferry drugs for distribution among the troops. However, since this truth is too painful to admit, scapegoats must be found to cover up their failure to combat drug abuses in their own lands. Instead of collaborating more effectively and wholeheartedly with the authorities at the source of problem, they prefer to place blame on others, hoping thereby to avoid their own heavy responsibility. Let them remember this simple truth: if the demand did not exist, drugs would not be produced and distributed. Nevertheless, Thailand has been doing more than its share to fight against this scourge, and has not hesitated to send troops into action, which has resulted in casualties. But the accusers only turn down their thumbs and make unjustified charges. It is time for them to talk less and do more.

Another "irritant" has to do with the refugees. In faraway places in America and Europe, some "armchair philosophers" are indulging in theories that people who decide to leave their homelands for any reason, whether economic or political, irrespective of whether they can be considered refugees in the true sense of the term, must be admitted by neighboring lands. It matters little to them whether or not the involuntary hosts have adequate means to care for these people, or whether or not the influx of many hundreds of thousands of people is destabilizing and even dangerous. For these "humanitarian" preachers and advocates (or devil's advocates), the mission has been discharged and they can now bask in the sun and enjoy their affluence. Let the lands of "first asylum" manage as best they can to accomplish their part of the "humanitarian" duty—such is their attitude.

In this kind of cynical charade, even some high international officials have colluded with less than respectable journalists in trying to blackmail countries like Thailand, which has endured enormous sacrifices for those unfortunate refugees, without hope for an early end.

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Recently, a U.S. Senator, perhaps believing that Thailand lies in his own state, saw fit to express his concern over the alleged decision of the Thai Government to turn away Laotian refugees, and he asked the State Department to put pressure on Thailand to desist from that decision. The State Department obligingly complied with the request out of moral solicitude for the soul of the Thai nation, which might be endangered if Laotian refugees were pushed back. However, this tender concern vanishes when it comes down to hard bucks—as when Thailand's sugar quota is mercilessly slashed and countervailing duties are ruthlessly imposed on Thailand's textile imports to the U.S.

In this connection, let me as a simple citizen of Thailand affirm that this country of mine has been enduring with courage and steadfastness the painful consequences of the Vietnam debacle. To us the trauma has not yet ended. We have faced with equanimity and resoluteness the threats and militancy of the Hanoi regime supported to the hilt by the great imperialist power in Eastern Europe. We are flooded by continuing waves of refugees, the news ones and the old ones (as far back as the end of World War II) and whom the country of origin, Vietnam, refuses to repatriate. For all these reasons, I cannot help repress a sense of revulsion against those insincere, not to say hypocritical, manifestations of false humanitarian expressions designed only to secure domestic political gains.

With the problems of Southeast Asia’s stability and security still alive, the U.S. can only congratulate itself for choosing a wise course in recognizing the continued validity of both the Manila Pact and the Rusk-Thanat Communique, rather than following rash decisions of some past governments in Thailand to abruptly sever security relations with the U.S. With the continuing destabilizing activities of Vietnam, abetted by the communizing-motivated Soviets, the need to ward off those attempts is more imperative than ever. Without having to mention it openly, Thailand and free Southeast Asia should be on the ready to counter the expansionist moves individually and collectively and, if need be, with outsiders.

The development of relations between the U.S. and Thailand, and, beyond that, between the U.S. and the rest of Southeast Asia, unavoidably depends on events and happenings, first, in Indochina, and then in the Middle East. Although there is no likelihood of seeing U.S. ground forces on Thai soil (nor are such forces likely to be asked to come to Thailand's rescue), the seas and the air will be used in lesser or greater measure by the ships and planes of many powers, particularly the major ones, which will need airfields, ground stations, and harbors. The shape of things to come will depend on the aggressiveness of the Soviet presence in this part of the world. If the Soviets are content with counterbalancing the weighty influence of the U.S. or keeping tabs on that power's movements in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, no clashes are expected. But if the Soviets show signs that they are preparing to make moves affecting the present status quo
in the Middle East, in the Indian Ocean, or in Southeast Asia, then a scenario of global conflict will come into play. It seems plausible at the present time that the U.S. wants to reserve the global role to itself, leaving it to the local powers and the PRC to deal with local or regional problems like that of Kampuchea.

Economically, free Southeast Asia is an area of dynamic growth, and its relations with the U.S., the greatest economic power, remain of utmost importance. In this domain, however, there exist nagging problems, particularly those relating to the trade deficits that led the U.S. to take stringent protectionist measures, which have seriously affected trade relations between Thailand and the U.S. The quotas that the U.S. imposed on Thai products such as sugar and textiles have gravely affected Thai exports to the U.S. The textile industry in Thailand has been hard hit, while the tuna industry has narrowly been saved by successful legal suits before the U.S. courts, which invalidated the restrictive measures taken by the Administration as a result of pressure from U.S. tuna interests. Since then Thailand has been dealt a heavy blow by the Farm Act.

All this goes to show that while Thai-U.S. political and cultural relationships have developed rather smoothly, the computerized way of life in the U.S. reveals an impersonal and insensitive side that makes no distinction between friends and foes, with blows freely hitting anyone and everyone coming near it. This is a reality which the sentimental Thais will have to learn to accept in their economic dealings with the U.S. They may do well to remember the saying: "May God preserve us from friends; enemies we can deal with." In particular, they will have to sharpen their wits and forsake the kind of innocence and naivete they showed in responding to U.S. enquiries on the textile matter, when Thai producers provided information honestly and straightforwardly. In return, the U.S. authorities mercilessly clamped countervailing duties on imports from Thailand, wrongly charging that subsidies had been extended by the Thai Government. As this case readily shows, honesty and straightforwardness do not pay, for those countries that chose to ignore the U.S. enquiries escaped from the duties.

One aspect of the Thai-U.S. relationship which looks more promising is the transfer of technology and technical and scientific cooperation. In this domain, the recent agreement on cooperation in science and technology may assist Thailand, if not in the area of high technology, at least in the less advanced and less sensitive activities which may still be useful for Thai economic development.

While the newly industrialized countries (NICs) are making great strides, Thailand is practically crawling along, lagging far behind in technological development. This is due partly to the antiquated educational system, which fails to take new discoveries and inventions into account. Even the science departments of our universities sadly trail behind those of neighboring countries. Some supposedly educated people have never even
heard of laser technology, genetic engineering, or micro electronics. Other new concepts of research and development which are being implemented in the U.S. may as well be happening in outer space, as far as most Thais are concerned. Only the Asian Institute of Technology manages, more or less, to keep up with the advances in other countries. And yet, there are friends in the U.S., Europe, and Asia who are willing to cooperate with us and share their experience and success. It is time for us to be more alert and energetic, rather than lumbering along.

Looking into the future, the Thai-U.S. relationship appears to be evolving in a more propitious way. It will be more diverse, and with less friction, rather than being circumscribed by a narrow and hardly productive military framework. Military elements, often supported by the United States and its agencies, may still have a dominant voice in national affairs by discreet or forceful intervention, but the ailing economy points up the need for increasing the nation's productive capacity while lessening the emphasis on spending. No doubt, defense must be maintained and strengthened, but more and more people are being won to the idea that true security rests on a strong and sound economy, not the reverse. A mismanaged economy undermines national security and hampers progress and development, at the same time causing privations and hardships to the entire nation.

It is to be hoped that Thai-American relations will place greater emphasis in the future on economic cooperation, either on a bilateral basis or within an enlarged framework, such as the proposed Pacific Economic Cooperation system. Trade should be developed and increased for mutual benefit, not restricted by quotas and other devices such as subsidized trade or protectionist measures. Many opportunities already exist, and others will present themselves in the future, provided that exploratory research is conducted realistically.

In the cultural field, which includes scientific and technological cooperation, past efforts should be enlarged and increased. Although I am not U.S.-trained, I readily admit that the numerous Thais trained in the U.S. since the Second World War have brought many worthwhile contributions to the development of the country. Future efforts should be directed toward scientific and technological development, as Thailand is moving far too slowly, in my opinion, toward NIC status. The U.S. can play a very important—perhaps dominant—role, compared with what Europe and Japan can do. And if the U.S. realizes its own potential in this, it may be reminded that Thailand is not alone—it stands in the midst of ASEAN, which comprises seven dynamic and progressive countries. A more vigorous scientific and technological advance for this group will be highly beneficial not only to the members concerned but also to the helpers, as the progress will bring about greater purchasing power and create variegated needs for consumption and other development projects.
These are some of the prospects for the future Thai-U.S. relationship which both sides, in my view, should cultivate and enhance. The gains from such joint endeavors will certainly be highly rewarding, with fewer frustrations and complications. This new path of cooperation will bring greater security for all concerned—for the region and perhaps even for the world at large. Let us pursue it with consistency and determination.

NOTES

Current Trends and Future Prospects for U.S.-Thai Relations: A U.S. Perspective

Leonard Unger

Introduction

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Thailand and the United States were working together in a closely knit pattern of political and military cooperation. This relationship had its roots well back in the 1950s but was focused in the later period on Indochina and, in particular, the Vietnam War, and "making Southeast Asia safe for democracy"—or at least for the limited democracy prevailing in those days in the countries of that region. The collapse of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in 1975 brought this era to an end for Indochina and Southeast Asia in general. Given Thailand's key position in relation to Indochina and its long-standing security and economic—as well as cultural and political—links with the United States, the potential impact of these profound changes on Thailand's international orientation was strong.

In the "Thai way," however, the reassessment of national and foreign policy was undertaken with moderation. In seeking an explanation for this, a second factor should be taken into account, i.e., Thailand's membership in ASEAN. That community of more or less like-minded nations provided a solidarity and sense of unity and cooperation heretofore missing in Southeast Asia. ASEAN had already been in existence since 1967—and the idea of regional cooperation well before that—but ASEAN's existence was especially fortunate in a period when Thailand might otherwise have been tempted to try out some extreme foreign policy turn. ASEAN made it possible, instead, for Thailand to find a new focus and instrument for developing constructive relations within its region and for conducting its foreign policy worldwide without giving up the central objectives and principles which had guided it for the several decades.

The moderate ambiance of ASEAN also made it possible for Thailand in the period after 1975 to retain and rebuild its relationship with the United States, but in a new and more realistic context. Thus, the military and economic support which the U.S. relationship had represented for several decades before was resumed, albeit reshaped and reduced, and the continuing, and sometimes heightened, security threat posed on Thailand's eastern flank could be dealt with successfully.
In this same period, the Sino-Soviet split deepened and the ensuing accommodation between the United States and the PRC reduced considerably the severity of Thailand's concerns about possible Chinese political, subversive, or even military pressures. The intensified Soviet-Vietnam relationship (including a Soviet military presence at Danang and Cam Ranh Bay) has presented Thailand, as well as ASEAN and the PRC, with renewed reasons for caution and concern. However, the overall security problem in Southeast Asia—external and internal—appears, at least at present, to have moved away from the acute stage and toward one calling more for adroit diplomatic management—where Thai talents appear to lie. This is not to minimize Thailand's concern over having a Vietnam-dominated Kampuchea next door. Moreover, Thailand must cope with a heavy refugee burden and the preoccupations faced each dry season as Vietnam moves militarily to the very border of Thailand in pursuing the Khmer forces opposed to Heng Samrin, forces which are receiving ASEAN and some other outside support.

Meanwhile, the stresses and strains which in the middle and later 1970s characterized Thai-U.S. relations have been considerably reduced. Today there is in effective operation a renewed relationship expressed in close consultation and, where appropriate, close cooperation on the international scene. Renewed U.S. military assistance by no means meets all the Thai requests, and U.S. tariff and other import barriers tempt some Thais to raise questions about the sincerity of the relationship on the American side. The U.S. use of PL480 and similar devices to subsidize U.S. rice exports has recently raised especially sharp complaints from Thailand. But overall communication is close, cooperation frequent, and a new, somewhat more equal partnership seems to have taken its place on the international scene. Foreign Minister Siddhi Sawetsila gives this wise and warm support. It takes place, moreover, in the generally more favorable setting in which the U.S. is a friend of ASEAN as a whole as well as of its component parts, and in which there is a new, more constructive American relationship with the PRC. The U.S.-Japanese ties continue strong, which is also significant for Thailand and its manifold financial and economic ties with that latter country.

If there are warning signs in Southeast Asia in addition to the central Indochina strains, they are to be found in the Philippines, with the threat to ASEAN's solidarity and accomplishments which those internal stresses posed as the Marcos era came to its end in February 1986. Given the special role of the U.S. there, a crisis and serious instability in the Philippines could hardly avoid having some impact also on U.S.-Thai relations, but the outlook has steadily improved as President Aquino has taken firm hold and begun to institute a complex of constructive reforms. Otherwise the outlook for Thailand and its ASEAN ambiance is a generally acceptable one from an American point of view. This means living with an Indochina
status quo which is less than satisfactory, but in which Vietnam desists from further pressing its advantage, and in which there appears to be a solid consensus among Thailand, the other ASEAN countries, and the U.S. about holding the line.

Within Thailand the path ahead—for a few years, at least—appears to be winding and, now and then, rough, but without major dilemmas or disasters impending. Prime Minister Prem, to the surprise of many and in some contrast to the earlier years of his stewardship, appears comfortable and confident in his leadership and appears to have received renewed endorsement from that indispensable source, the Monarchy. It also appears that he has neutralized the threat to his position which earlier seemed to be developing in the person of Gen. Arthit. As for the appearance and disappearance of other Thai political parties and leaders, it does not seem germane to this discussion of U.S.-Thai relations to dwell on them. Suffice it to say that domestic political developments in Thailand in recent years suggest that there is today wider support in the body politic for a functioning democracy than existed in earlier decades.

U.S.-Thai Relations

Thailand has been referred to as America’s “first friend in Asia,” in recognition of a relationship that began over 150 years ago. In recent decades—surely since the mid-1950s—there has developed a further “special” relationship between Thailand and the United States. This can be traced back as far as the years immediately after World War II, when the United States, compared to Britain, spoke for a much less punitive postwar treatment of Thailand, in spite of the Thai collaboration with Japan during the war. While the British insisted on exacting substantial reparations for themselves, the United States chose to require only that Thailand must return the territories taken from Cambodia and Laos, which were still under French rule at that time.

As the Cold War set in the 1950s, and the line was drawn between North and South Vietnam (in 1954), and Laos was also in fact divided, even though not formally, Thailand sensed a congruence of interest and opted for the Free World, as the U.S.-led associations and alliances were then described. This relationship was formalized in the Manila Pact (1954), which Thailand and the U.S. have chosen to regard, whatever the other signatories may declare, as a security treaty in which the U.S. is committed to respond should Thailand come under attack. The Rusk-Thanat Communiqué of 1962 reaffirmed (and perhaps reinterpreted) this obligation when aggressive North Vietnamese action against Thailand seemed to threaten and the Thais were concerned over the neutralization of Laos.
That period, extending into the late 1960s, is one of substantial American economic and military assistance to Thailand, then under the leadership of Marshal Sarit and (from November of 1963) Marshal Thanom. It is a period of substantial economic growth and social and political development in Thailand, although the central government continued its authoritarian mode with only a slight bow toward democratic institutions. This was a period also, particularly in the mid and later ’60s, of a burgeoning insurgency, particularly in Northeastern Thailand. Both North Vietnam and the PRC contributed to the insurgency through the provision of weapons and supplies and the training of the insurgents.

These years also saw the growing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, and the involvement of Thailand as well. This took the direct form of a Thai military unit deployed to Vietnam in 1966. A further and perhaps even more significant involvement was Thailand’s admitting onto its territory a massive deployment of American military personnel, reaching a maximum of almost 50,000 men in 1969. These forces were made up primarily of air units stationed at six major airfields, mostly in Northeastern Thailand, and also at U Ta Pao on the Gulf of Thailand. These were the units that administered the pounding of “Rolling Thunder” to North Vietnam, bombed the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos and Cambodia, and supplied extensive air support to the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces and their allies fighting on Vietnamese territory.

Even as doubts and protests began to mount in the United States, so also some Thai officials (perhaps most numerous in the Foreign Ministry) and others began to question more closely the U.S. strategy and ultimate intentions and Thailand’s involvement. This was rarely articulated publicly, and the internal differences in the Thai body politic—most notably between the Foreign Ministry and the military—were given little public discussion. Domestic attention was focused primarily on the internal insurgency, serious especially in the Northeast but a problem also in the North, in the mid-South, and in the South of Thailand near the border with Malaysia.

Miscalculating the growing dissent in many quarters, especially among the students, the Thai government leadership was taken by surprise in October 1973 when a student demonstration grew day by day into a major confrontation. His Majesty the King determined that internal cohesion in Thailand demanded a change, and he requested Thanom’s and Praphat’s departure from the country.

After a short-lived provisional interim government, there began a period (1974–76) of renewed experiments with parliamentary democracy under the several governments led by the Pramoj brothers. It was during those regimes that U.S. forces were sharply reduced and, in due course, totally withdrawn. It was also during the Pramoj regimes that some serious “in-house” dissent over Thai foreign policy came to the surface. In particular, there was disagreement over how closely Thailand’s foreign policy should
relate to U.S. positions. When the Thanin government took over in 1976, this dissent was silenced and several prominent foreign service careers suffered as a consequence.

The Thanin government, which was dominated by the military, was followed in October 1977 by the government of Gen. Kriangsak Chomanan. The General, retired and working in a moderate, civilian mode, gave a renewed role to the Parliament. The United States, in the earlier of those years (1973–75), was preoccupied, above all, with its own traumas, grappling simultaneously with such matters as Watergate and the prospect of defeat in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Thailand was becoming increasingly preoccupied with disturbing developments in Kampuchea, on its eastern frontier. While the brutal Pol Pot regime had been driven out of Phnom Penh in 1978 by the forces of Vietnam, that country then installed in Kampuchea its own subservient regime under Heng Samrin, and Vietnamese power had moved a major step closer to Thailand.

Other major developments affecting the Southeast Asian scene could also begin to be discerned in this period. When the United States, in 1972, worked out with the PRC the Shanghai Communique, Southeast Asian nations, Thailand included, concluded that the time had come to begin their adjustment to that massive presence to the north, especially as it became increasingly clear that China was not an ally of Vietnam and was assuming an increasingly hostile posture toward that country. The PRC, for its part, terminated its hostile radio broadcasts which had been championing the role of the anti-government insurgents in Thailand, and thus made it easier for Thailand to establish normal relations. As time went on, the realignment proceeded to the point where the nations of ASEAN, and Thailand above all, came to see the PRC as a force to deter Vietnam’s aggressive intentions toward Southeast Asia and Thailand in particular.

On the other hand, old fears were rekindled when Vietnam, now in relative isolation in its regions, reinforced its long-standing relationship with the Soviet Union. For Thailand and its ASEAN associates, the most worrying manifestation of this was the deployment to Vietnam—to Danang and Cam Ranh Bay primarily—of Soviet military forces, only 170 miles from the nearest Thai territory. For the first time, Soviet forces took up stations in Southeast Asia, directly across the South China Sea from the U.S. bases in the Philippines and overlooking major lines of communication. These are sea-lanes which pass through the straits—Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok—and which lead from Europe, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean into the West Pacific, specifically into the South China Sea and to the coasts of Mainland China, Korea, and Japan.

Thailand’s ASEAN allies do not always come to precisely the same conclusions, either about the value of the Chinese presence, the problems posed by Vietnam, or today’s expanded and much closer Soviet military
presence. The Association nevertheless tends to respect the Thai view, recognizing that the threat of military pressure hangs more heavily over that associate of theirs than it does over them.

Thailand, the United States, and ASEAN: Indochina and China Issues

ASEAN is the new element, and a central one, in Southeast Asian politics but also in the wider international scene. As a consequence, Japan, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Western Europe have considerably rearranged their relations and their mode of doing business with Southeast Asia. The annual meetings of their Foreign Ministers with the ASEAN Ministers, beginning in earnest in Bali in 1976 and continuing today, have been a major vehicle for building cooperation and reducing conflicts. This is true especially in the political and security realms; there has not been as much accomplishment in economic fields.

It has been through cooperation with the ASEAN governments that U.S.-Thai concerns over the Kampuchea problem have been worked on and managed in the international context. The United States, which perceives Vietnam’s actions not only as hostile to Thailand and ASEAN but also as damaging to Free World interests overall, has consistently backed the ASEAN position, which in turn recognizes the validity of Thailand’s preoccupations. That position has been expressed most consistently and with maximum international impact in the resolutions which have been adopted by the UN General Assembly at its annual Ministerial sessions. A substantial majority, including the U.S., have supported Thailand and ASEAN in their efforts to maintain the recognition of the anti-Vietnamese coalition (Prince Sihanouk, Son Sann, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan for the Khmer Rouge) and withhold it from the Heng Samrin government.

The tragic events in Kampuchea have taken a heavy human toll and have generated a massive flow of refugees, most of them destined for Thailand. With regard to the Indochina refugee situation overall, including those persons fleeing Vietnam and Laos as well, concrete support has been made available under UN, U.S., and other auspices to help Thailand cope with the heavy requirements for accommodations, food, public health, etc. With facilitation by the UN and other channels, the United States, France, and other countries have been gradually absorbing some of the refugee load, whether Lao, Kampuchean, or Vietnamese in origin, but a large number still remain in Thailand. This includes some who may for various reasons not be resettleable and thus threaten to become a permanent burden. Consequently, refugee-related problems have frequently been high on the Thai-U.S. agenda, as Thailand has found its refugee population steadily mounting. There is concern that Thailand will be obliged not only to provide an immediate haven but also to provide virtually permanent homes for
several hundred thousands fleeing oppression. The presence on Thai soil of such a refugee population can, under some circumstances, represent a political hazard as well, exacerbating already strained Thai-Vietnamese relations.

Thus, Vietnam represents to the ASEAN nations, and especially to Thailand, a recurring security threat, because of its initially imposing on Kampuchea, and now continuing to support, the Heng Samrin government. ASEAN sees that government as a puppet regime, bound to support what often appears to be Vietnam’s hostile intentions toward Thai and ASEAN interests in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam problem for ASEAN has been aggravated by that country’s increasingly close bonds with the Soviet Union. These now extend beyond the earlier strong political and economic ties and include the Soviet-occupied bases, air and naval, on Vietnam’s South China Sea coast. While ASEAN—qua ASEAN—rarely expresses itself publicly on security or military matters, there is no question that its member states’ assessment of their security position and problems—as well as strengths—must now give heavier weight to the American military presence in the region, based on the Philippines. It is directly opposite Clark Field and Subic Bay—across the South China Sea—that the Soviet positions at Danang and Cam Ranh Bay lie. Thus, there is a heightened preoccupation in ASEAN with the unstable situation in the Philippines and a worry that the close U.S.-Filipino collaboration in the security field may be undermined. President Aquino’s stated policies, however, have gone a long way to allay these concerns. While these preoccupations weigh most heavily on the “front-line” state, Thailand, ASEAN has recognized the validity of Thailand’s preoccupations with both the Kampuchean situation and the close-in, expanded Soviet military presence.

Laos is another area of Thai concern. There is a historical intimacy of feeling between the Thais and their Lao “cousins” which is not matched in any other Thai association. This has made doubly difficult the Thai adjustment to the imposition of Vietnamese hegemony over all of Indochina, and to the often hostile stance of the Hanoi-dominated Lao government. Occasional references in Indochina’s propaganda to the “seventeen Lao provinces in Northeastern Thailand” awaken apprehensions about Vietnam’s ultimately aggressive intentions against Thailand, in which the direct instrument of Vietnamese-backed aggression might be Laos.

China

In 1972, President Nixon went to Peking and the Shanghai Communiqué was formulated, foreshadowing a reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China—and an eventual considerable warming and expanding of those relations. The ASEAN nations were
somewhat taken aback, being concerned, among other things, with the subversive activity within their borders for which they still held the PRC heavily responsible and which some of the them related to the presence in their countries of Chinese minorities. To varying degrees, some of Thailand’s ASEAN partners still have reservations, and they hope that ASEAN can rely on a continuation of current more moderate PRC policies and positions.

After the PRC actively opposed Vietnam’s occupation of Kampuchea and ended its support of the Thai Communist Party, Thai-PRC relations warmed and suspicions have since been reduced if not entirely eliminated. Thus, a difference in assessments about PRC intentions, which still intrudes itself from time to time in U.S.-Malaysian and U.S.-Indonesian relations, is all but absent with Thailand. Thailand’s preoccupation is with Vietnam and its Indochina operations, which are generally hostile to Thai interests. The countervailing Chinese threat to Vietnam from the north, and the possibility that China may be available to “teach a lesson” now and then, to Vietnam are factors in the Thai policy equation.

No matter how united ASEAN is on Kampuchea, and no matter how much the earlier hostilities toward the PRC have been overcome, the presence of Pol Pot remains a problem which infects all these relationships—including that with the U.S. Realistically—and the PRC, especially, is realistic—Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge have appeared to be the only considerable military force resisting a complete victory by Heng Samrin and the Vietnamese in Kampuchea. In spite of the widespread international distaste for the Khmer Rouge’s involvement, it has been possible now for about six years in succession to rally substantial support for the position of the ASEAN countries in the UN in refusing to accept as a fait accompli the Vietnamese-supported takeover of Kampuchea by Heng Samrin.

That position has carried with it implicit support for all the forces resisting Heng Samrin, i.e., the leadership of Prince Sihanouk, the forces of Son Sann, and, inevitably, also the Khmer Rouge. This is not to say that the Pol Pot-Khmer Rouge problem today actively threatens good ASEAN-PRC or U.S.-Thai relations. There is a realistic acceptance on both sides that this is the lesser evil and that the greater danger would be the acceptance of undisputed Vietnamese hegemony over Kampuchea. The question for Thailand, for ASEAN, for the United States—as it should also be for the PRC—is how to reshape a coalition which will continue to be a viable military obstacle to undisputed Vietnamese rule in Kampuchea but which will gradually be purged of the worst of the evils that Pol Pot’s earlier rule represented in Kampuchea.

Meanwhile, Thailand, as the “front-line” country with Indochina, has for many years had to face the problem of receiving and caring for hundreds of thousands of Indochina refugees. In-country today, about
120,000 refugees (and nearly 300,000 others not classified as refugees) must be housed, fed, and clothed, and in spite of UN, U.S., and other friendly help, the burden on Thailand is heavy. The promptness and volume of U.S. help is a recurring issue in U.S.-Thai relations, whether it concerns funds to support the refugees in place or action to relieve some of Thailand’s burden by absorbing more refugees in the U.S. and elsewhere abroad. There has been a specific PRC aspect of the refugee problem faced by Thailand—namely those, especially among the “boat people,” who were ethnic Chinese and were seen by Vietnam as a disruptive, potentially subversive force. The PRC has been willing to take such persons from Thailand when they can be identified as bona fide Chinese citizens.

With ASEAN becoming increasingly the cornerstone of Thailand’s foreign policy, there is a strength which grows out of regional solidarity, Asian like-mindedness, neighborly cooperation, etc. This is in happy contrast to the rivalries and disputes that had threatened the region in the 1960s and before. In the era of “Confrontasi” (Malaysia and Singapore versus Indonesia and the Philippines), Southeast Asia seemed on its way to becoming a new kind of Balkans—as many had predicted when those countries were first gaining their independence. The Indochina problem persists, but as a problem whose manageability attests to the growing maturity of the ASEAN states.

**Japan and the Pacific**

Japan is the major as yet unmentioned strong factor in the East Asian scene; it presents itself in two chief aspects. First, Japan is the principal economic actor: a significant market for Thai products and a major source of Thai imports. Even more, it plays a role as a leading investor in Thailand, largely responsible for the development there of electronic, textile, clothing, and other industries, some of which depend primarily on Japan as a market. Indeed, there are those who say that the “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere” is already a reality and potentially a problem for the economic independence of not only Thailand but its ASEAN partners as well.

Japan’s second relation to the Southeast Asian scene and, in particular, to Thailand’s situation lies potentially in the security realm. The United States would like to see Japan play a larger role in providing for the security of the West Pacific and East Asia, probably including Southeast Asia. There has been talk of Japan extending its effective naval reach to one thousand miles out from Japan, especially toward the south and southwest. Betraying their apprehensions, Southeast Asians (Thais less than most) earlier tended to ask whether those thousand miles were to be measured from Okinawa or from Tokyo, but a gradually expanded Japanese role appears to be increasingly accepted.
A regional issue, not unrelated to feelings about Japan, is the question of the Southeast Asians’ attitudes toward the various suggestions for Pan-Pacific or Pacific Basin associations or organizations. Clearly, the Thais and their ASEAN associates have been wary and generally unenthusiastic. Probably the principal reason for their caution has been the feeling that their interests and concerns would inevitably be submerged in the larger Pacific-wide and global thinking of Japan and the United States. Perhaps they also mean to be cautious until they feel someone has put forward a good answer to the questions of what will be the relation of such an organization to the PRC, to say nothing of North Korea and Vietnam. Perhaps they wonder, as do others as well, whether such an association would stop at the southern boundary of California in the U.S., or continue through Mexico, along Central America, and down to the Straits of Magellan. On the other hand, it has also been suggested that a Pan-Pacific Forum might provide a means of moving Japan to play a more cooperative, less restrictive role in the economic and business realms.

**Economic Issues**

In earlier years, Thai-U.S. relations remained relatively untroubled by economic and related issues. Rice, rubber, and tin were the major Thai export commodities for many decades; occasional U.S. stockpile issues, the level of U.S. aid, or PL480 sales of U.S. rice were almost the only controversial questions which arose, and not often. Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, new agricultural crops assumed importance, especially corn, kenaf, cotton, sugar, and tapioca. There were other important markets besides the United States in most of these cases, however, and U.S. trade restrictions still only occasionally troubled the scene.

Now, however, Thai industry, which was only in its infancy in those earlier years, has moved forward to take its place as an important employer and also, through growing exports, as a significant earner of foreign exchange. Labor-intensive manufacturing, as elsewhere in the developing Third World, provides an industrial field where Thailand enjoys a comparative advantage. This includes textiles and garments, electronic equipment of the simpler sort, et al. It was predictable that this would bring Thailand into direct competition with many other industrializing countries, including the United States, which latter is increasingly at a disadvantage in trying to compete for the U.S. consumer’s business with foreign sources with their much cheaper labor.

This is a fairly new problem for Thailand, but a highly emotional one. U.S. Congressmen, pressed by their constituent industrialists and labor unions in failing or threatened businesses, are insisting on quotas and other restrictions to limit the amount of competitive goods that will be permitted to enter the U.S. market, year by year. (For fuller discussions of
this, see the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 7, 1985, p. 78.) On the other hand, Thailand, having listened for years to friendly U.S. advice about the need to industrialize to soak up the ever-expanding labor force so as to provide a more adequate income than farming, now says: “How about it?!” And there appear to be very few answers which don’t either enrage the American producer and factory worker or leave the new Thai industrialist—and his workers—feeling abused and cheated.

This is a very large, controversial, and highly technical subject. It is introduced here briefly and in essentially nontechnical terms, but this in no way meant to minimize its importance as a “dollars” and “baht” issue on both sides of the Pacific. Indeed, it could become a political issue of considerable magnitude which could sour what have long been basically sound and genuinely friendly Thai-American relations. In a recent magazine article, it was stated that “the once-liberal American market is turning protectionist, and Thai concern is rising over a squabble concerning import tariffs on Thai fabrics and garments” (*FEER*, February 7, 1985, p. 78). At the same time, some of Thailand’s tariffs—e.g., on certain consumer goods and transport equipment—have been raised largely in recent years.

For the full flavor of the Thai point of view, consider some of the more forthright statements of my companion on the podium today: former Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Thanat Khoman. Speaking recently at a Bangkok conference organized by the Pacific Forum, the Minister said that “economic dangers” were more important to ASEAN at present than military ones. ASEAN now was intent, he stated, on cooperating to ward off these economic dangers from the United States. ASEAN wanted not only a security umbrella but for the U.S. to be more sensitive to ASEAN’s economic problems and to foreign protectionism. Thanat undoubtedly has had these concerns reinforced by renewed competition from the United States in the sales of rice subsidized by PL480.

This is, of course, not only a problem in Thai-U.S. relations, but appears in many places around the globe. As for the capacity of a country like Thailand to produce many of the new crops which compete heavily with American agriculture and to manufacture goods which compete with American industry, the development of such a capacity is something to which the United States made a considerable contribution over many years. This includes the project aid and technical and educational assistance that was provided to Thailand by the United States in the 1950s and ’60s. This assistance contributed to what many Americans now regard as a disturbing degree of competition!

This refers, above all, to the economic aid programs which assisted Thailand in spreading secondary education much more widely through the country and which financed the development of secondary and college-level institutions, including those in the technical and academic fields. American aid programs also included support to road construction, to irrigation—on
a large as well as on a small farm-by-farm scale—to agricultural research, to technical trade schools to develop technically trained workers and managers to staff the budding industrial sector, etc., etc. In this way, the United States contributed to what has been, without question, an admirable Thai achievement. Ways must be found to avoid damaging Thailand's economic progress and new industrial base as far as possible, while simultaneously recognizing the plight of some of its competitors among U.S. industries as well.

This discussion cannot be considered complete without referring also to the Japanese role, especially in the economic realm. Most of us remember the disastrous visit to Southeast Asia of Prime Minister Tanaka in 1974. The Thais, being a polite people, did not treat him as did the crowds in Indonesia. However, feelings ran high in Thailand as well, and they have by no means been completely put to rest. One hears even today in Bangkok the well-worn comments about the Japanese tourists who arrive on Japan Airlines, are met by a Japanese bus which takes them to a Japanese hotel, whence they go forth for dinner in a Japanese restaurant, etc., etc.—all of this prepaid in yen in Japan. No one can deny, on the other hand, the major contribution Japan has made to the Thai economy, especially in the field of industrialization. And there is also the Japan which serves as the market for Thailand's exports, both agricultural and industrial.

What does this have to do with a discussion of U.S.-Thai relations? Japan remains an indispensable partner that will play a quite different but complementary role to the part played by the United States in the economic development of Southeast Asia. Moreover, in the future Japan may have a role in assuring Southeast Asia's security from outside pressures.

**Narcotics**

Much as one might wish to, we cannot review U.S.-Thai relations over recent decades, and today as well, without talking about drugs and the Golden Triangle. The problem has been with us in acute form ever since the circumstances of the Vietnam War introduced thousands of young Americans to opium and its most dangerous derivative, heroin.

Earlier, opium cultivation had become well-established in the mountain areas of the Shan States of Burma, which lie immediately north of Thailand, and the neighboring, physically similar highland areas of Northern Thailand and Laos. In these highlands live a variety of hill tribes. Until recent years, they have been generally unaware of national boundaries and national governments, perhaps with the exception of major groups like the Shans and the Karens. (Furthermore, Kuomingtang remnants left over from the Chinese revolution have continued to play a part in recent years.) Suffice it to say that opium production was endemic until the 1960s, but not on a large enough scale to invite much international attention. It
became a matter of international, and especially American and Thai concern, however, when the alarming spread of heroin addiction among the GIs in Vietnam and Thailand become known.

Since then, Thailand and the United States, with the support and leadership of Thailand’s King, and often with the participation of the UN and other international agencies, have worked closely together to try to eliminate both the production of opium and its traffic. Also with strong support from His Majesty, a variety of programs of crop substitution and policing has been put into effect. Recently there has also seemed to be a greater possibility of gaining cooperation from the government of Burma. Nevertheless, the problem is by no means solved, or even under effective control, and it remains a field in which U.S.-Thai cooperation is indispensable. (The role of Police General Pow Sarasin has been key in this, and the United States government has been fortunate to have him to work with.)

Having mentioned the royal institution, this is an appropriate place to emphasize what a key role the King and Queen of Thailand have played in the development and maintenance of friendly and constructive relations between Thailand and the United States. It is important to remember that His Majesty was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father studied at the Harvard Public Health and Medical schools. In addition, members of the royal family have visited the United States for varying periods, and recently the Crown Prince received pilot training from the U.S. Air Force in Arizona. American audiences have a built-in skepticism about royal institutions, presumably going back to our treatment of George III, but it would be hard to overemphasize what that institution means for Thailand’s unity and political stability, thanks not only to the institution itself but the extremely wise and sensitive way in which the present monarch has used his office for Thailand’s national and international prestige and stability.

Military and Security Factors

The military and security fields have been an area of cooperation and collaboration between Thailand and the United States ever since the 1950s, when the United States and Thailand both became concerned about the purposes and possible uses of Chinese and Soviet power. By 1954, given, among other things, the inconclusive termination of the Korean War and the victory over the French by North Vietnam, there was a conviction, shared by Thailand and some other Asian nations, that pressures from the Communist countries would increase and would have to be contained. Moreover, such pressures would be difficult to resist for small countries on the periphery of the “Free World.” This led to the conclusion, on September 8, 1954, of the Manila Pact, a mutual security treaty to which eight countries (Thailand, the Philippines, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, the
U.K., France, and the U.S.) were signatories. It established the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO, which was disbanded in 1977), but—more important in the long run—it committed the United States to respond to security threats against Thailand. Specifically, the United States was committed to help meet the common danger posed by Communist armed aggression in the region should it be mounted against one or several of the parties to the treaty.

For a number of years, the security situation in Southeast Asia required, in the U.S. view, little more than continuing close consultation among the SEATO partners, some contingency planning, and efforts to upgrade the armed forces of Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines, who might face severe military pressures or even outright aggression. There was also a SEATO Protocol, which in an indirect and loose way brought Laos, Kampuchea (contrary to its declared wishes), and South Vietnam into association with SEATO. (This was cited as the formal basis for Thailand’s involvement in various security actions in Indochina, and in particular the dispatch of Thai forces to South Vietnam from 1966 to 1970.) Even more important in the long run, the protocol provided the rationale for Thailand’s accepting eventually up to 50,000 American military personnel (peaking in 1970) on Thai territory, at six air bases, primarily in the Northeast, and at the U-Tapao Airbase and the nearby Sattahip Naval Facility.

Given Thailand’s direct and indirect military involvement in this period, the United States, under the terms of the bilateral Military Assistance Agreement, was also committed to supplying Thailand with substantial amounts of material aid—weapons, ships, guns, aircraft, and a wide variety of equipment. Military cooperation extended to intelligence programs, detection devices to monitor traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, etc. Also in this period, there was heightened U.S. activity from Thailand’s territory, especially at the airfields from which the B-52s and other aircraft took off to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail, Hanoi, and many other targets, including some in Cambodia.

Since this is not a history of U.S.-Thai relations, but rather a discussion of current trends and future prospects, there is no need to go extensively into the past. But today’s scholars—and even more, today’s students—may need to be reminded of that era of intense cooperation and mutual danger in an enterprise which has since been largely discredited, at least for most Americans. Suffice it to say, however, that the war left scars in Thailand as it did in the U.S., and it introduced some tensions and reservations in U.S.-Thai relations—especially with regard to some individuals whose personal careers were damaged in the internal Thai debate over what should be the nature and degree of Thailand’s cooperation with the U.S. Those episodes have inevitably left their impact on today’s relations. It
is a comforting fact, however, that in spite of the bitter memories and scars of the Vietnam period, it wrought surprisingly little lasting damage to U.S.-Thai relations overall.

Today Thailand, together with its ASEAN partners, has reached an accommodation of sorts with Vietnam. There has been an on-again, off-again dialogue which Foreign Minister (now Deputy Prime Minister) Siddhi, like some of his ASEAN colleagues, has conducted with Nguyen Co Thach, Vietnam’s foreign minister. There remain, however, Thailand’s grave apprehensions about Vietnam’s long-run intentions in Kampuchea and in Laos—apprehensions that are rekindled when Vietnam makes its periodic sweeps through Kampuchea against the resistance forces that support the Sihanouk-led government. This is to say nothing of the possible resumption of subversive action in Thailand’s own Northeast, and more widely in Southeast Asia in general. While there is a spectrum of judgments in ASEAN about the most desirable and effective posture to be taken vis-à-vis Vietnam, Thailand and the U.S. do not have serious differences of view in this respect. They do not reject improving relations with Vietnam, but share the conviction that some sustained evidence of the latter’s good will, above all on the Kampuchea issue, is required to set the stage.

Current, direct Thai-U.S. relations in the field of security, military matters, weapons, etc., are stable and relatively untroubled. There are doubtless aircraft and weapons which some Thai military authorities feel are essential—Gen. Arthit and the F-16 come immediately to mind—but the United States does appear to be helping to meet Thailand’s most urgent and demonstrated military needs. The U.S. military posture in the region is seen by the ASEAN nations as less of a deterrent to aggression—from the USSR? from the PRC?—than it was in earlier times, but this does not appear to be an acute difference between Thailand and the U.S. With a leadership which, while from a military background, is sharing power with civilians, the earlier preoccupation of the Thai leaders with weapons and the desire for a special, close association of the U.S. and Thai military establishments seems to have been reduced. Understandably, it tends to revive, however, each time Vietnam moves its forces into northern and western Kampuchea, on Thailand’s very borders.

Thailand’s concerns could be swiftly reawakened if PRC policies should revert to their earlier, more hostile pattern or if, for example, the reassuring U.S. military presence across the South China Sea, at Clark Field and Subic Bay, were drastically altered following the thorough review of this issue which is expected to be undertaken by the Aquino government. Otherwise, however, assuming always a controlled crisis in Kampuchea, Thai-U.S. relations in the security field should not encounter serious difficulties.
Thailand in a World Perspective

To round out this look at Thai-U.S. relations, let us glance briefly at Thailand's relations with other significant actors on the international scene. Thais pride themselves on their diplomatic skill, and with some justice. In an era when an exceptionally close alliance with the U.S. is no longer such a large part of the picture, it is not surprising that there has been some renaissance of Thailand's emphasis and heavier dependence on traditional diplomacy; evenhanded—at least in principle—among all nations.

With the USSR and its ambassador in Bangkok there is typically a polite, rather cool, relationship. On the other hand, relations with the PRC, a near neighbor separated from Thailand only by a narrow strip of Laos, are a good deal closer than they were some years ago. Some of Thailand's ASEAN partners do not entirely share the Thai perception in this regard and are occasionally troubled by it. From a U.S. point of view, however, this closer Thai-PRC link is in harmony with what the U.S. sees as its own interests as well. And given the U.S. desire, inter alia, to see Thailand as reassured as possible about the Kampuchea problem, the powerful neighbor lying just to the north of Southeast Asia is seen as a salutary deterrent to Vietnamese aggressive action. While the existence of large Chinese minorities in Malaysia and Indonesia, and concern about their being manipulated by the PRC, has hampered the development of cordial relations between those nations and the PRC, this has not been a significant factor for Thailand.

Japan is another major actor on the scene, and given the large area of common policy and perceptions in U.S.-Japanese relations, the generally good and close Thai-Japanese relations are a comforting circumstance. Also, Thailand is less sensitive than its ASEAN partners to a possible expansion of Japan's security role—even extending toward Southeast Asia and the Straits. That is not to say that Thailand does not have problems with Japan, including a large trade deficit, but points of friction tend to center more on Japan's business and economic presence in Thailand.

There are also the “down-under” friends and sometime allies—Australia and New Zealand. Thailand enjoys close and cordial relations with them and is more than content to see them play a role in the security realm in Malaysia and Singapore, which the U.S. also encourages. What the impact will be of the recent impasse over ship visits and nuclear factors in New Zealand remains to be seen.

In recent years, Thailand has also become more conscious of its image and its role in its relations with the Third World. It continues to value close ties with the United States and Japan, and it has not joined the nonaligned movements, as some of its ASEAN partners have. Nevertheless, it does not want to be seen as playing a subservient role and is intent on preserving an independent position on the international scene. The motivations for this are
probably several. For one, in the years of the Vietnam wind-down, Thailand felt that it had been increasingly seen as almost a U.S. puppet in its acceptance of intense military cooperation. Another motivation relates to its participation in ASEAN and that association’s intention of making that association (as the other members do also) the principal focus of its foreign relations. Another reason for Thailand to take a more middle international position has been its desire to secure at the UN General Assembly each year a large and comfortable support for the ASEAN position on Kampuchea, rejecting recognition of the Heng Samrin regime as the government of Kampuchea. While the stated ASEAN ideal or policy of “ZOPFAN” (zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality) tends to defy precise definition, it seems clear that to play up Thailand’s participation, as a matter of policy, in a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality also requires some reduction in its identification as a committed ally in a regional security pact (the Manila Pact, in this case). Thus far, this apparent contradiction does not appear to have raised any serious questions among the parties concerned. (The issue has equal relevance to the Philippines, of course).

A further factor relates to the special Thai-Lao relationship—by which I mean not the stresses and strains presently experienced with the Vietnamese-dominated government of Kaysone and Nouhak, but rather the underlying, long-run Thai feeling about the Lao people as close cousins. The Lao are seen as having been separated from their Thai brothers by accidents of history, most notably French colonial pressures which were later unfortunately taken over and reinforced by Vietnam. The provinces of Northeastern Thailand are inhabited almost entirely by people who speak the Lao dialect of Thai. Vietnamese propaganda tends to cite this as a reason why eventually those provinces, too, should become part of an Indochinese socialist federation by rejoining their Lao brothers on the east side of the Mekong. Needless to say, the Thais are vehemently opposed to any such thing, and this stand will inhibit both a reduction of hostility, especially in Thai-Lao relations, and a negotiated settlement of the Kampuchea question.

Conclusion

Several central objectives which Thailand and the United States share can be identified. First, there is the Kampuchea question and the need to find a peaceful resolution. In that regard, the unity of ASEAN nations orchestrates strong and continuing support for Thailand’s position, especially in the United Nations.

There is also the common objective of reducing or in some way neutralizing the Soviet military presence in Southeast Asia. This presence is a new element which could dangerously complicate moderate settlement of the political and security problems in the region.
A major actor on the Asian scene, the PRC, seems increasingly ready to play a constructive role, politically and perhaps even economically. The PRC's clear objective is to persuade the ASEAN nations that it is a constructive force. In this way, the dangers posed by Vietnamese actions and threats in Southeast Asia could be more readily contained and a broadened basis for security might be established over time. Thailand is not directly involved, as are some of its ASEAN partners, in the dangerous conflicting claims in the South China Sea; perhaps Thai diplomacy could play a constructive role there also.

Success in all of the foregoing depends on many factors, but perhaps more than anything else on the continued unity and wise international functioning of ASEAN as a new and constructive force in the region. It should be recalled how much this region had been rent by all manner of disputes, difficulties, and confrontations. Without ASEAN, all that could return.

For a number of years now, the United States has identified ASEAN as its central partner in Southeast Asia and has given support both to the organization itself and its member nations. This is highly significant for U.S.-Thai relations, for the ASEAN context has provided for Thailand and for U.S.-Thai relations a comfortable and very useful ambiance. Especially in dealing with the most difficult matters of security, ASEAN's existence is a new and happy circumstance.
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