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THE IMPACT OF THE UNITED STATES ON POLITICS  
IN THAILAND

THESIS

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This thesis examines modern politics in Thailand, its policy, and its search for national security, by showing the impact of the United States on Thai politics. The thesis maintains that politics in Thailand are results that come from attempts of the Thai government to adapt to American involvement in Thailand.

The thesis describes the Thai government scene from 1945 to 1972. It analyzes the elements of American involvement and factors in Thai society that are pressured by this involvement. The attempts of the Thai government and its politicians to bring their policy more into line with the changing situations are shown in their reactions to problems of Southeast Asia--the focus of which is on the problems of Vietnam, the problems of China, and the withdrawal of the U.S. to a profile of low visibility.

## PREFACE

Since the end of World War II, a series of American administrations have operated in Thailand on the principle that Thailand, an anti-Communist country, is an asset to the strategic and economic interests of the United States in Asia. The amount of U.S. involvement in Thailand has increased steadily in recent years, and the United States has become Thailand's biggest foreign-policy problem. In the 1960s, Thailand and the United States became allies. The character of the relationship has changed, giving rise to a deeper and more complex set of problems.

The basic elements of Thailand's foreign policy derived from two major objectives. On the one hand, the government was actively pursuing militant anti-Communist policies at home and abroad. On the other hand, it was seeking to restore peace and stability in Southeast Asia through political means of international relations and participation in regional groupings. The Thai government has pursued these policies independently while consistently seeking U.S. participation and support. Faced by an increasingly serious threat of the Communists, Thailand has become the logistics and headquarters base for the majority of the American air war in Indochina.

The Thai government and its people have shown a favorable attitude toward the United States. However, there is still a reluctance on the part of the Thais to speak frankly about their emerging alliance with the United States. To a considerable degree, the presence of the United States in Thailand has posed a challenge to the ideals, political processes, and governmental activities of the Thai society.

This thesis maintains that politics in Thailand are results that come from attempts of the Thai government to adapt to American involvement in Thailand. The most profound influence of the United States is in the realm of government and politics. The problems that need to be considered are those of the Thai reactions to American involvement. What effect does the United States have on Thai politics?

The thesis will be based on an intensive study of politics in Thailand. It will provide insight to the study of government and politics in this non-Western country. Analysis of the United States impact on Thai politics should prove useful to the study of comparative government.

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## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS THE THAI GOVERNMENT SCENE, 1945-1972

#### Historical Background

The study of Western impact on Southeast Asian countries has been a matter for debate of how far the political and economic structure of this region was affected by the political control and commercial dominance. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, several countries in Southeast Asia had experienced direct contact with the Western world, and it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that contemporary Southeast Asian countries came to share similar and profound social and political upheavals caused by modern Western imperialism and colonialism.<sup>1</sup> The nature and extent of Western influence varied from one region to another. The threatening powers of the Western countries have caused changes in political and administrative spheres of the countries in this region. In the process of political evolution, Thailand and her politicians have shown a great deal of flexibility in pursuing her policy toward Western powers. The basis of Thailand's political security has

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<sup>1</sup>John Bastin and Harry J. Benda, A History of Modern Southeast Asia (New Jersey, 1968), pp. 13-14.

been altered from time to time to meet the changing stresses created by these powers.<sup>2</sup> It is helpful therefore briefly to look at the historical background of Thailand which was once known as Siam.

Thailand, one of the leading countries in Southeast Asia region, has had almost seven centuries of autocratic rule unmarked by western colonization. The Thai people have long been ruled by a paternalistic, absolute, and highly centralized government. The present Chakri dynasty was founded in 1782 by King Rama I, (Phra Buddha Yod Fa Chulalok). Before the 1932 coup d'etat performed by the modernizing "promoters"<sup>3</sup> at Bangkok, the King was considered highly sacred. The King held all legislative, executive and judicial powers. Government officials were given titles of honor and high status and were traditionally regarded as the "King's men."<sup>4</sup> The Thai people were greatly influenced by the Buddhist concept of placing spiritual happiness and religious merit above political involvement. They responded

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth P. Landon, "Thailand's Struggle for National Security," The Far Eastern Quarterly, IV (November, 1944), 5-26.

<sup>3</sup>David A. Wilson, Politics in Thailand (New York, 1962), p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Chakrit Noranitipadungkarn, Elites, Power Structure and Politics in Thai Communities (Bangkok, 1970), p. 1.



to the King's policies, claiming little or no political rights.<sup>5</sup>

Among countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand is the only country that has not experienced direct colonial rule. Thailand first met European power in the seventeenth century, but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that this power became so insistent and threatening that it forced substantial changes in the normal order of Thai life.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after King Rama I came to reign, the British began to expand their power over the Burmese kingdom; to the east of Thailand, the French began their subjugation of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. It was noted that at first the Chakri kings adopted the policy of isolation and exclusion, which was to produce such disastrous consequences for the monarchies of China, Vietnam and Upper Burma.<sup>7</sup> The reopening of Thailand contact with the western nations was in the reign of King Rama III (Phra Nang Klao, 1824-1851). The conclusion of a treaty of commerce with Great Britain was made in 1826, but its primary purpose was to settle certain political issues. A similar treaty was made with the United States in 1833, but neither treaty

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>6</sup>Wilson, Politics in Thailand, 21.

<sup>7</sup>Donald Hindley, "Thailand: The Politics of Passivity," Pacific Affairs, XLI (Fall, 1968), 355-371.

permitted the posting of a diplomatic or consular officer in Siam, and there was no "opening up" of the country to trade.<sup>8</sup> Also, the Thai government under the leadership of King Mongkut (Rama IV, Phra Chom Klao, 1851-1868) and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, Phra Chula Chom Klao, 1868-1910) decided to accommodate and adapt to the West. Abbot Low Moffat wrote that before Mongkut became king, the British had felt the need for revision of the 1826 treaty in order to encourage commerce, and the United States was also dissatisfied with conditions under the 1833 treaty. The British sent Sir James Brooke to Bangkok to negotiate a new treaty, followed by an American commissioner, Ballestier. Both Brooke and Ballestier failed in the negotiation with the Thai government and "both were convinced and so recommended to their governments that the only way to secure new agreements with Siam would be by a warlike demonstration."<sup>9</sup>

When King Mongkut came to the throne in 1851, he felt that the only answer to the problem Siam had with those Western countries was a modernized Siam and not an isolated one. In pursuance of his policy of opening up the country to European cultural and trade influences, he made a proclamation which affected the major reforms relating to import

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<sup>8</sup> Abbot Low Moffat, Mongkut, The King of Siam (New York 1961), p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-45.

duties and the export of rice that had been the primary objects of the Brooke mission. As a result, when the British mission headed by Sir John Bowring arrived in Bangkok on March 27, 1855, the agreement was reached in less than a month, and the treaty was signed on April 18.<sup>10</sup> The treaty permitted the right to trade throughout the Kingdom of Siam and thus was the treaty that opened Thailand to Western traders. Similar treaties were concluded with the United States on May 29, 1856, with France on August 15, 1856, and thereafter with Denmark and the Hanseatic Cities (1858), Portugal (1859), Holland (1860), Prussia (1862), and others.<sup>11</sup>

Mongkut was mentioned to be the first king to employ Westerners. He had successfully launched a process of transformation which was carried to fruition by King Chulalongkorn. As noted by Virginia Thompson, "It was Mongkut who initiated the Westernization of his country, but it was left to his successors to force it deep into his national consciousness until it altered the whole Siamese tradition and viewpoint."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Fred W. Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity (Honolulu, 1966), p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>Wilson, Politics in Thailand, 22.

<sup>12</sup>Virginia Thompson, Thailand the New Siam (New York, 1941), pp. 38-39.

In the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the entire structure of the government was reorganized, and traditional departments of government were replaced by modern ministries. Advisors from various European countries were brought in to assist in the creation of the new ministries. The consequence was, as Lucian W. Pye has noted: "By the turn of the century, the Thai government was as advanced as many of the colonial governments, and the country had also been able to preserve its independence."<sup>13</sup>

In 1893, France put heavy pressure on Siam to renounce control over Laos, Luang Prabang, and the provinces of Battambang and Siemriep which had once belonged to Cambodia. On July 20, 1893, France blockaded Bangkok after which Siam yielded to most of the French demands. As a result, Siam succeeded in retaining its independence but lost its territory on the left bank of the Mekong.

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia which could escape from becoming a Western colony. It is explained that in part this was because of "the desire of both Britain and France for a Buffer state between their respective territories in the region."<sup>14</sup> To some extent, Thailand

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<sup>13</sup> Lucian W. Pye, Southeast Asia's Political Systems (New Jersey, 1967), p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Amry Vandenbosch and Richard A. Butwell, Southeast Asia Among the World Powers (Lexington, 1957), p. 158.

had far more experience than its neighbors in making political adjustments to the outside world. John F. Cady, Distinguished Professor of History at Ohio University has noted: "Had Siam continued to pursue Rama III's policy of resisting European representations, the country would most probably have encountered in time the same irresistible military pressure which overtook its neighbors."<sup>15</sup> Cady also mentioned the flexibility of Thailand's policy when he wrote:

Its (Thailand's) traditional policy in modern times was to "bend with the wind" by keeping on good terms with the stronger outside power impinging on the area. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, this power was China; from the 1850s to the 1930s, it was Britain and British India; in the late 1930s, Siam's orientation shifted toward an ascendant Japan; and since 1945, Thailand has been closely associated with the United States.<sup>16</sup>

No matter how this capacity to "bend with the wind" is regarded, as a skill, a luck, or a combination of both, it is one factor that helps Thailand maintain its independent identity in opposition to threatened colonial control. Throughout the modern period, foreign policy has been conducted with the same shrewd and successful design to preserve the country's independence that marked the policies of

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<sup>15</sup> John F. Cady, Thailand, Burma, Laos, & Cambodia (New Jersey, 1966), p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-13.

Mongkut and Chulalongkorn during the critical period of greatest danger to the country's autonomy.<sup>17</sup> It was noted that the most severe crisis in Thailand arose during and immediately after World War II.<sup>18</sup> This period of rising international tension coincided with the emergence of the figure of Colonel (later Field Marshal) Phibul Songkram as the dominant personality in Thai Politics. David A. Wilson referred to Phibul Songkram as one of the promoters of the coup in 1932, "coming from rather obscure origins and rising in the army by a combination of ambition and ability."<sup>19</sup>

In December, 1941, the Phibul government recognizing the impossibility of preventing occupation by Japan, permitted the Japanese to enter and endured a form of Japanese tutelage throughout the war period. It was during the later phases of World War II that the period of pro-American orientation in Thailand began. A "Free Thai" movement came into existence and made plans to open a guerilla movement against the Japanese. The "Free Thai" movement was led by the Leftist-inclined Thai politician, Pridi Phanomyong, and by the conservative Thai Ambassador to

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<sup>17</sup> Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of a Bueraucratic Polity, 52-53.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 53

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, Politics in Thailand, 18.

Washington, Seni Pramoj who refused to deliver the declaration of war against the United States in 1942, discounting it as unrepresentative of the wishes of the Thai people. Cady stated that Pridi established intelligence contacts with Allied headquarters at Kandy in Ceylon in 1943 and prepared during the ensuing two years to assist Allied efforts in the eventual defeat of the Japanese.<sup>20</sup> When it was apparent that the Japanese were losing the war, Phibul resigned as prime minister in July, 1944 paving the way for a "noncollaborator" government to be able to negotiate more advantageously with the Allied powers. For these reasons, the United States elected to disregard Phibul's declaration of war, and to soften the punitive aspects of the treaty terms imposed by British demands made on Bangkok.<sup>21</sup>

Since the war, Thailand has been closely associated with the United States. While insisting that Thailand restore to its neighbors the territories gained through Japanese support during the war, America subsequently supported Thailand's entry into the United Nations and the two countries drew increasingly closer.

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<sup>20</sup>Cady, Thailand, Burma, Laos, & Cambodia, 13.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

### System of Government

Since the 1932 coup d'etat brought an end to the absolute power of the king, Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy and has been suspended between democracy and direct military rule. The status of government was no longer under the control of the king, but not yet in the hands of the people. From 1932 to 1973, Thailand has passed through several constitutions (see Table I), The first permanent constitution was promulgated on December 10, 1932 to replace the provisional one of June 27, 1932. Under the constitution which was promulgated in December 1932, revoked in 1946, and then readopted with amendments in 1952, Thailand adopted a democratic form of government. The sovereign power emanated from the Thai people. The king, as the head of the state, exercised this power only in conformity with the provisions of the constitution. The king exercised the legislative power through the National Assembly, the executive power through the Council of Ministers, and the judicial power through the courts of laws. The constitution provided for a partial separation of powers among the branches of the governments; for a prime minister and a council of ministers (cabinet) appointed by the king and responsible to the legislative body; and for a 246-member unicameral legislature (National



TABLE I

## THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND, 1932-1972

Constitution	Date of Promulgation	Circumstance of Introduction	Countersign
1) The Provisional Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam, B.E. 2475 (39 Sections)	June 27, 1932	Coup d'etat of June 24, 1932, end of Absolute Monarchy	No countersign
2) The Constitution of the Kingdom of Siam, B.E. 2475 (68 Sections)	Dec. 10, 1932	Promulgated by King Prachathipok (Rama VII)	Praya Manopakorn Nitithada, Chairman of the People's Committee
3) The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2489 (96 Sections)	May 9, 1946	Revision of the Constitution under the direction of Pridi Phanomyong in order to abolish the appointed member and create a second chamber	Pridi Phanomyong the Prime Minsiter
4) The Constitution (Interim) of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2490 (98 Sections)	Nov. 9, 1947	Coup d'etat led by General Pin Chunhawan overthrowing Luang Thamrong's Government	Field Marshal Phibul Songkram, Commander-in- Chief of the Armed Forces

TABLE I--Continued

Constitution	Date of Promulgation	Circumstance of Introduction	Countersign
5) The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2492 (188 Sections)	Mar. 23, 1949	The constitutional commission of forty persons chosen by the National Assembly had drafted a new constitution	Chao Parya Sri Thamathiebethr, Chairman of the House of Senate
6) The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2475; as Amended B.E. 2495 (123 Sections)	Mar. 8, 1952	Following the "Silent" coup on Nov. 29, 1951, the Coup Group reinstated the 1932 permanent constitution with amendments	No countersign
7) The Constitution (Interim) of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2502 (20 Sections)	Jan. 28, 1959	Following the Coup d'etat on Sept. 16, 1957, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat seized the government again on Oct. 20, 1958. Pending a new constitution to be drafted, the interim constitution was enacted	Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, Chairman of the Revolution Party

TABLE I--Continued

Constitution	Date of Promulgation	Circumstance of Introduction	Countersign
8) The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2511 (183 Sections)	June 20, 1968	The Government-appointed Committee had completed the drafting of the permanent constitution	Thawi Bunyaket, Chairman of the Constituent Assembly
9) The Constitution (Interim) of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2515 (23 Sections)	Dec. 15, 1972	The Revolutionary Party headed by Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn dissolved the National Assembly, abrogated the 1968 Constitution on Nov. 17, 1971. Pending a new constitution to be drafted, the interim constitution was enacted	Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, Chairman of the Revolutionary Party

SOURCES: Pairojna Chaiyanam, Sathaban Karn Muang Lae Rajthamnoon Khong Thang Prathet Kab Rabob Karn Pok Krong Khong Thai (Political Institution, Foreign Constitutions, and the Thai Governmental System), (Bangkok, Thailand, 1972), pp. 19-22. (In Thai).

Sukdi Phasukniranta, Karn Pok Krong Khong Thai (Thai Governmental System), (Bangkok, Thailand, 1970), pp. 87-99. (In Thai).

TABLE I--Continued

SOURCES:

David A. Wilson, Politics in Thailand (Ithaca, New York, 1962), pp. 266-268.

Thai Village, (Thai Newspaper issued in Los Angeles, California), January 1, 1973, pp. 4-5.

Karn Muang (Politics), Reports of the Political Science Seminar Group, Thammasat University (Bangkok, Thailand, 1970), pp. 131-133. (In Thai).

Assembly) of two equal categories, one appointed by the cabinet and the other elected by popular suffrage.<sup>22</sup>

From 1944 to 1947, the Thai government scene was dominated by several civilian leaders. However, the most influential political figure of the regime was Pridi Phanomyong, the Regent to the young king, Ananda Mahidol. Phibul's government was replaced by Khuang Aphaiwong (August 1, 1944 - July 17, 1945), later by Thawi Boonyaket (August 31, 1945 - September 17, 1945), and then by Seni Pramoj (September 17, 1945 - January 24, 1946). The Seni regime lasted only until an agreement was signed with Great Britain in January 1946. Then, Pridi restored Khuang as prime minister, but he was obliged to take over the post himself on March 24, 1946.

During the Pridi regime (March 24, 1946 - August 21, 1946), the new constitution was promulgated on May 9, 1946, which changed the parliamentary structure from a single house with half its members appointed by the government into a bicameral form with the members of a fully elected lower house voting for members of the upper house.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2475 (1932) as Amended B.E. 2495 (1952).

<sup>23</sup>John W. Henderson and others, Area Handbook for Thailand (Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 45.

The year 1947 marked the return of Phibul and the military faction. On November 8, 1947, a group called the "Khana Rathaprahan" (Coup d'Etat Group), led by two retired army generals with support from Phibul, seized power in a bloodless coup.<sup>24</sup> The coup group appointed the interim government with Khuang Aphaiwong as prime minister. A provisional constitution was promulgated on November 9, 1947. Khuang was retained as prime minister until April 7, 1948 and Phibul took over as prime minister by forcing Khuang to resign at gun point.

A new constitution was promulgated on March 23, 1949. The 1949 Constitution provided for a bicameral form of legislature composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. Members of the Senate were to be selected and appointed by the King at a number of 100 persons, and for a six-year membership. Members of the House of Representatives were to be elected by the people. Neither members of the Senate, the House of Representatives, nor members of the Cabinet were to be government officials.<sup>25</sup>

On November 29, 1951, Phibul dissolved the national assembly. The 1949 Constitution was suspended and the December 10, 1932 Constitution was in force. Shortly after

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 46

<sup>25</sup>Karn Muang, (Politics), Reports of the Political Science Seminar Group, Thammasat University (Bangkok, 1970), p. 126.

the announcement of this change, King Bhumibol Adulyadej returned to Thailand after completion of his education. The King made his first governmental action by insisting that certain revisions be made before the December 1932 Constitution was adopted. The cabinet agreed to this. The revised constitution was promulgated on February 26, 1952, and an election was held on that day for seats in the new, half-appointed single house. By reestablishment of the Constitution of 1932 the principle of tutelage was imposed on the assembly. The government appointed half of the members of the single house, thus, enabled the government to effectively organize a majority group to support it. From 1952 to 1957, the government under Field Marshal Phibul Songkram was firmly in control of the administration of public affairs, the national assembly, and the military services including the police.<sup>26</sup>

In 1955, Phibul returned from a world tour which included a sixty-nine day trip to the United States and European countries. The government sought to reinstitute democratic reforms. A significant move toward democracy

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<sup>26</sup>Phibul was also supported by Police General Phao Sriyanond who was in control of the police and the government parliamentary group. From the military, Phibul was supported by Field Marshal Phin Chanhawan and Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (Sarit later replaced Phin) who were in command of the army.

was seen when Phibul declared that the ill-famed Press Act was to be revised. The government arranged a weekly press conference and allowed for the freedom of the press.<sup>27</sup> Public place for "Hyde Park" was provided at the Pramane Ground. The next step of the Phibul government toward flourishing democracy was seen by the promulgation of the Political Parties Act in September 26, 1955. The Act legalized political parties and laid down the grounds for the formation of political parties although no Communist Party was permitted.

A national election was held again on February 26, 1957. The unicameral system of the national assembly provided for 160 elected members and an equal number of appointed members. The Seri Manangasila Party (headed by Field Marshal Phibul) gained victory over the Democratic Party (eighty-six to thirty seats from 160 seats). There was a wide spread accusation that the government was cheating on the election. Khuang Aphaiwong, leader of the Democratic Party demanded nullification of the election. Crowds of protestors began to mass on the streets. Shortly after the election, the government again reverted to its

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<sup>27</sup>Phibul allowed the press even to criticize him on his government. His sincerity was seen in an interview with the press; he said, "You have full freedom now. You can criticize me or the government. I will use no force." Cited in Darrell Berigan, "Thailand: Phibul tries Prachathipatai," The Reporter (June 14, 1956), p. 31.



old way of repression. A nationwide "state of emergency" was proclaimed and the government banned all political meetings of more than five people.<sup>28</sup>

On September 16, 1957, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat seized the power in a bloodless coup d'etat and drove Phibul into exile. Phibul's government was replaced by Pote Sarasin. A general election was held on December 15, 1957. The Saha Phoom Party led by Sarit won the majority seats in the national assembly.<sup>29</sup> Lt. General Thanom Kittikachorn (supported by Sarit) was appointed the Prime Minister because Pote Sarasin refused to accept the office of the Prime Minister.<sup>30</sup>

The Thanom government was faced with internal difficulties. Even though the government was labeled "military government," Thanom did not seem to favor "military dictate" ways. Public debate was allowed and the presses were able to give their views on public affairs. A few months later, the government was requested to consider a move toward neutralism. This proposal was supported by newspapers and

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<sup>28</sup> "Thailand: A Question of Technique," Time (March 11, 1957), p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> The Saha-Phoom Party won 44 seats and the Democrat Party won 39 seats from 160 seats. The remaining 77 seats were held by minor parties and independent candidates.

<sup>30</sup> Chai-Anan Smuthwanich and others, Sat Karn Muang, ("Political Animals"), (Bangkok, Thailand, 1971), p. 120.

some leftist-inclined members of the Assembly. Inside the government, there was a split among members of the government which made Thanom's position more unstable.<sup>31</sup> The situation became worse when it was rumored that the leftist group was quietly planning to have Pridi Phanomyong back from his exile in mainland China to head the neutralist and the leftist group. In the National Assembly, Khuang Aphaiwong petitioned for a general debate which would result in either the resignation of the government or the dissolving of the Assembly.

On October 20, 1958, Thanom resigned from the office of the Prime Minister. Sarit immediately seized the government. Sarit proclaimed a nationwide "state of emergency" and imposed martial law. Sarit abolished the 1952 Constitution, dissolved the Assembly, and banned all political parties.

Sarit's actions received support of the ousted government. Sarit took the position as Chairman of the Revolutionary Party. Thanom, the ex-Prime Minister was appointed the Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Party. Following the coup, the Revolutionary Party appointed a fifteen-member committee to draft an interim constitution.

On January 28, 1959, the Interim Constitution was promulgated. The Interim Constitution consisted of twenty

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 120, 126.

articles which established a legal basis for an unlimited power of the Prime Minister. The essence of the Interim Constitution was in Article 17:

During the enforcement of the present Constitution, whenever the Prime Minister deems it appropriate for the purpose of repressing or suppressing actions, whether of internal or external origin, which jeopardize the national security or the Throne or threaten the peace, the Prime Minister by resolution of the Council of Ministers, is empowered to issue orders or take steps accordingly. Such orders or steps shall be considered legal.

All orders issued and steps taken by the Prime Minister in accordance with the provisions of the foregoing paragraph shall be made known to the National Assembly.<sup>32</sup>

The Article 17 of the 1959 Interim Constitution had been used as a source of legitimation for heavy-handed repression throughout the Sarit regime. Sarit assumed the office of the Prime Minister until he was formally appointed on February 8, 1959.

During the Sarit regime (1958-1963), the governmental system was reorganized toward centralization. All the executive branches of the government were focused on the Office of the Prime Minister. Sarit died in 1963 and his deputy, Thanom Kittikachorn, succeeded him. Thanom followed Sarit's path and the country had been ruled by the Interim Constitution of 1959 until the promulgation of the new constitution on June 20, 1968.

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<sup>32</sup> The Interim Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2502 (1959).

The 1968 constitution was drafted by the government-appointed Constituent Assembly over a period of seven years. The reasons set forth by the government to explain the delay was due to "the instability of previous regimes, the need for a centralized government to promote development, and the threat from indigenous and external Communism."<sup>33</sup>

The 1968 Constitution provided for a bicameral national assembly. It assured executive dominance of the legislature. The executive branch was led by the prime minister; a chairman of the Council of Ministers who selected his own cabinet. The king appointed the Prime Minister and not less than fifteen nor more than thirty other Ministers of State to form a Council of Ministers with the duties of administration of state affairs. The legislative branch consisted of a bicameral National Assembly. The upper house, the Senate, was composed of three-fourths the number of the lower house and was appointed by the king on the recommendation of the government in power. The House of Representatives, the lower house, was an elected body. The separation of the executive power from the elected body was reinforced by the provision that neither the prime minister nor any other minister could be members of either house. A potential minister could be elected to the House of Representatives and then resign if appointed a minister.

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<sup>33</sup> Clark D. Neher, "Constitutionalism and Elections in Thailand," Pacific Affairs (Summer, 1970), 240.

In conducting the state affairs, the Prime Minister or a Minister of State who was appointed to be in charge of a Ministry was responsible to the National Assembly for the administration of his Ministry. Every Minister of State was collectively responsible to the National Assembly for the general policy of the Council of Ministers. The judicial power was vested exclusively in the Courts and was exercised in accordance with the law and in the name of the king.<sup>34</sup>

Following the promulgation of 1968 constitution, the King, on the recommendation of Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn, appointed 120 members of the Senate. The Senate which eventually numbered 164 members, had the powers and duties of both houses of the bicameral National Assembly during the interim between the enforcement of the constitution and the elections for the lower house.

According to this constitution, the national election was held on February 10, 1969. The pro-government United Thai People's party (Saha Pracha Thai) headed by Field Marshal Thanom was able to hold the majority in the National Assembly.<sup>35</sup> Thanom was re-appointed the Prime Minister on March 7, 1969.

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<sup>34</sup>The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2511 (1968), translated by Kamol Sandhikshetrin (Bangkok, 1968).

<sup>35</sup>The Saha Pracha Thai Party won 75 seats and the Democrat Party won 57 seats of the total 219 seats. The remaining 87 seats were held by minor parties and independent candidates.

On November 17, 1971, the Revolutionary Group headed by Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn abrogated the 1968 constitution, dissolved the National Assembly, and resumed direct rule over Thailand. The reasons for abrogating the 1968 constitution, as set forth in the Interim Constitution B.E. 2515 (1972), were: "to improve the perilous situation which might endanger the State, the King, and the Thai people, to hasten national peace and order, and to arrange for governmental mechanism which will be appropriate for the current situation of the country."<sup>36</sup>

Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, Chairman of the Revolutionary Group, explained to high-ranking civil servants that "the real motive behind the revolution is the survival and the independence of the country, and the upholding of the throne in the wake of the changing situation in the world, in neighboring countries, and in our own country, especially after the change in the international scene with the admission of the Government of the People's Republic of China into the United Nations, a fact which might invoke certain reactions from the three million Chinese people living in Thailand."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>The Interim Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2515 (1972).

<sup>37</sup>"Ngan Khan Toa Pai Khong Khana Patiwat," ("The Forthcoming Work of the Revolutionary Party,") Siam Rath Weekly Review (November 28, 1972), p. 3.

Following the coup, the Revolutionary Group established a National Executive Council of twenty-five members as the highest administrative body. The "Plad Grasoang," the top career civil servants were put in charge of their respective ministries and were asked to report directly to the National Executive Council.

On December 15, 1972, the interim Constitution B.E. 2515 was promulgated. The interim Constitution provides for the National Legislative Council of 299 members appointed by the King. The essence of the interim Constitution B.E. 2515 is contained in Article 17, which reads:

During the enforcement of the interim Constitution, whenever the Prime Minister deems appropriate for the purpose of repressing or suppressing actions which jeopardize the national security, the throne, national economy, or state affairs, or subvert or threaten law and order or public moral or actions which jeopardize national resources or harmful to public health whether such actions are committed, before or after the promulgation of this interim Constitution, and whether of internal or external origin, the Prime Minister, by resolution of the Council of Ministers, is empowered to issue orders or take steps accordingly. Such orders or steps or actions shall be considered legal.

The Prime Minister shall make known to the National Legislative Council all orders issued or actions taken in accordance with the provisions of the foregoing paragraph.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Translated from Article 17 of The Constitution (Interim) of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2515 (1972), promulgated on December 15, 1972, countersigned by Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, Chairman of the Revolutionary Party.

From this article of the interim Constitution, the Prime Minister is able to strengthen the executive power and to assume direct control over the administration of state affairs.

Considering the past, the dramatic change in the Thai government has been due largely to the personality and disposition of the political leaders in power. Under the constitutional government, the authority of the executive branch of the government rests in the hands of the Prime Minister, his cabinet, and civil and military bureaucracies. Under the revolutionary government, power resides primarily with the leading military figures. Before the war, Marshal Phibul dominated the scene. After the war, power shifted to the hands of Pridi Phanomyong, who had been an associate of Marshal Phibul in the 1932 coup. In 1947, after the mysterious death of King Rama VIII, Pridi's government collapsed and Marshal Phibul again became the dominant figure. In 1957, General Sarit Thanarat drove Marshal Phibul into exile with a coup d'etat, and Sarit again initiated another coup d'etat in 1958 and introduced a more direct military rule. The Thai government scene from 1958 to 1963 was dominated by Marshal Sarit and from Sarit's death in December 1963 was dominated by Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and General Praphas Charusathien.



From 1932 to 1972, Thailand has had 32 governments with eleven different prime ministers. Most of them had expressed their desire for a democratic form of government and for the development of the country.<sup>39</sup> However, when their attempts to introduce more representative institutions of government led to a diffusion of authority, the military asserted their influence in the form of coup d'etat.

It has been criticized that Thailand has not yet developed a truly stable and effective replacement for the absolute monarchy. Cady, in his writing, noted: "The succession of constitutions operative in Thailand from 1932 to 1951 and from 1955 to 1958 amounted to little more than a facade designed to impress Western observers."<sup>40</sup> And Daniel Wit also wrote:

It is . . . a self-proclaimed constitutional monarchy which, for the past ten years, has been functioning without a real constitution. Instead, it has been governed since 1958 under a seventh and 'interim' constitutional statement which abrogated the previous Constitution, authorized the government to appoint (not elect) all members of the National (Constituent) Assembly, and empowered the Prime Minister--the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces who had seized power in a coup to rule by decree whenever he felt it to be necessary in order to preserve law and order or the national security.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>"Ngan Khan Toa Pai Khong Khana Patiwat," op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>40</sup>Cady, Thailand, Burma, Laos, & Cambodia, 15.

<sup>41</sup>Daniel Wit, Thailand: Another Vietnam? (New York, 1968), pp. 84-85.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

For several years prior to World War II, American contact with Thailand under the old name Siam had occurred as a by-product of the expanding American trade and commerce in Asia. The Thai people had become acquainted with the Americans during the years of the Protestant missionaries who arrived in the 1830's. These missionaries activities in the fields of education and public health were respected. When Siam entered World War I in July 1917 on the side of the Allies and became one of the victorious powers, the United States was the first Western nation to take steps in promoting Siam's advancement toward international equality.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of the Americans in Thailand began to assume a significant role after World War II. The impact of World War II had brought about a significant change in the Thai internal politics. The military group under the leadership of Field Marshal Phibulsongkram was discredited due to Phibul's alliance with Japan. The liberal group led by Pridi Phanomyong

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<sup>1</sup>In 1920 America negotiated a treaty with Thailand that abolished most restrictions of extraterritoriality. The treaty was drafted in such a manner that it would come into effect only after other nations abolished their unequal treaty privileges in the kingdom. This treaty was instrumental in ending extraterritoriality with all Western nations by 1927.

was able to control power in the government. Shortly after the Japanese surrender, Seni Pramoj, the former Thai Ambassador in Washington and the leader of the Free Thai Movement, was appointed as Prime Minister. The government under Seni Pramoj was confronted with a difficult position. The British and the French tried to exert punitive action on Thailand. The British had extensive commercial interests that had suffered serious damage and they demanded sufficient compensation. The United States had shown a sympathetic attitude toward Thailand. Frank C. Darling wrote that this attitude was due largely to the opinion of the Americans that the actions of Phibul's government during the war did not represent the real sentiment of the people. The activities of the Free Thai Movement convinced most Americans that the Thai had never been a loyal ally of Japan.<sup>2</sup>

The Americans assisted Thailand in post-war negotiations, as well as in the reconstruction of the country. With the signing of the Anglo-Thai peace treaty on January 1, 1946, the United States promptly reestablished diplomatic relations with Thailand. The United States provided a loan of 10,000,000 dollars for the purchase of railroad equipment and the rehabilitation of the transportation system. In addition to financial and economic aid, the United States supported the

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<sup>2</sup>Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States (Washington, D.C., 1956), pp. 40-43.

Thai government's efforts to restore normal relations with other major powers and to gain admission to membership of the United Nations, the latter coming in December 1946.

The sympathetic American attitude and the economic assistance during the post-war period had been deeply felt among the Thai government and its people. The good intentions of the Americans and their traditional sympathy had promoted the sense of pro-American attitude in the Thai government. "To some extent," noted Frank C. Darling, "this attitude was also due to the experience of the Americans during the previous century. The Protestant missionaries were prone to think of Thailand as the only small independent nation in an area dominated by European colonialism."<sup>3</sup>

The victory of the Western democracies in World War II helped stimulate influence of liberal government ideas in Thailand. The government sought to establish a liberal constitutional system. Following the post-war negotiations, the liberal government held the first general election since the change of the regime in 1932.

By 1946, Pridi's political figure began to decline. Pridi resigned on August 21, 1946 and Luang Thamrong Navasawat was appointed as Prime Minister and later was replaced by Khuang Aphaiwongs. During this period of civilian government, the government was faced with deterioration of the internal political

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-46.

and economic conditions. The failure of the civilian government to cope with the economic situation gave rise to the return of the military faction. Khuang was forced to resign on April 6-7, 1948, and Phibul was able to resume his office in the government.<sup>4</sup>

When Phibul returned to the office of Prime Minister on April 8, 1948, Thailand had already come to rely on the United States for economic and financial assistance.<sup>5</sup> The appearance of a Communist threat and the need for economic development had become major factors stimulating close cooperation between the Thai government and the United States. When Peking began to broadcast sharp attacks against Phibul's policy of oppressing the Chinese living in Thailand, Phibul decided to join with the United States against the Communist bloc. Phibul felt the need for national security but at the time he was not sure of American support. This was shown in his response to the proposal made by the Philippines for a collaboration among countries in an anti-Communist Front. Phibul insisted that "Thailand would be interested only if other independent Asian countries joined also, and if the United States gave material support."<sup>6</sup> It was noted that Thailand's move toward the Western camp in 1950 was due to Phibul's belief in his pro-Western

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<sup>4</sup> David A. Wilson, Politics in Thailand (New York, 1962), p. 241, 284.

<sup>5</sup> Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Donald E. Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia (Ithaca, New York, 1956), p. 104.

policy. Phibul "desperately wanted American protection of Thailand, and he believed that he could expect large amounts of aid from the United States in return for his pro-Western policy."<sup>7</sup> In an attempt to gain the support of the United States, Phibul's government decided to give recognition of the Bao Dai government and of the newly established governments of Laos and Cambodia. This caused the displeasure of the Communist bloc and Phibul was charged as "an American puppet."<sup>8</sup> David A. Wilson noted that the recognition of Bao Dai government "was the persuasion of the American government, based on assurances of assistance."<sup>9</sup>

When the Korean War broke out in June 1950, President Harry S. Truman announced the acceleration of military assistance to the countries in Southeast Asia. Two American survey missions were sent to visit Thailand; one was headed by R. Allen Griffin, the second was the Melby-Erskine Joint State Defense MDAP Survey Mission.<sup>10</sup> In July 1950 Phibul made a most significant move, in his decision to send 4,000 troops to join the United Nations forces in South Korea.<sup>11</sup> This action caused the United States to take additional measures to increase

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>9</sup>David A. Wilson, The United States and the Future of Thailand (New York, 1970), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup>Russell H. Fifield, Southeast Asia in United States Policy (New York, 1963), p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>The New York Times, July 23, 1950.

support to Thailand. On September 19, 1950 Thailand signed the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement with the United States, and later the agreement on military assistance was signed on October 17, 1950. The Agreement of October 17, 1950 became the first military agreement between Thailand and the United States. The Agreement was signed at Bangkok by Field Marshal Phibulsongkram for the government of Thailand and by U.S. Ambassador Edwin F. Stanton for the government of the United States.<sup>12</sup>

However, the United States military assistance agreement of 1950 did not go beyond equipment and training "to strengthen the security forces required for the protection of her (Thailand's) freedom and independence."<sup>13</sup> It was clear by both parties at the time the agreement was signed that no military alliance or bases were sought by either side, and that all personnel involved would "operate as part of the Embassy under direction and control of the Chief of the Diplomatic Mission of the Government which they are serving."<sup>14</sup>

In January 1951, the first shipment of American military equipment arrived in Bangkok. The United States established a Military Advisory Assistance Group to provide training for

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<sup>12</sup>U.S. Treaties and Other International Agreements, Vol. 3, Part 2, (Washington, 1954), pp. 2675-2685.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

the Thai armed forces in the use of American arms and equipment. By 1952 Phibul's government received considerable assistance from the United States to strengthen his military power, his position within the internal power structure, and his prestige with the public. The military and economic assistance helped Phibul to eliminate all of his effective political rivals.<sup>15</sup>

A new phase of American involvement in Thailand began with the increasing of the threat of Communism and the expansion of military aid under the Eisenhower administration. The threat of Communist invasion during 1953-1954 aroused the move by the Eisenhower administration to strengthen the military forces in Thailand. Military assistance was increased as more tanks, artillery, small arms, and jet fighter planes were supplied to the Thai Armed Forces.<sup>16</sup>

In 1954 the United States committed itself to a more important role of protecting the security of Southeast Asia countries. The United States took an active role in the formulation of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. The SEATO treaty was formed at Manila among eight countries-- Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines,

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<sup>15</sup> Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States, p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 102.



Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries agreed "to strengthen the fabric of peace and freedom and to uphold the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and to promote the economic well-being and development of all peoples in the treaty area," and, "to coordinate their efforts for collective defense for the preservation of peace and security."<sup>17</sup>

In 1962 there were two elements which influenced the relations between these two countries. First was a joint statement made by the Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman and U. S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk after conferences in Washington.<sup>18</sup> The statement clarified the U. S. commitment to defend Thailand against Communist aggression without waiting for SEATO action. In the text of the Rusk-Thanat Memorandum, "The Secretary of State reaffirmed that the United States regards the preservation of independence and integrity of Thailand as vital to the national interest of the United States and world peace. He expressed the firm intention of the United States to aid Thailand, its ally and historic friend, in resisting Communist aggression and subversion."<sup>19</sup> Both agreed that the SEATO treaty "provides the basis for the signatories

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<sup>17</sup> Department of State Publication 6305, Far Eastern Series 72 (Washington, D.C., 1956), pp. 22-23.

<sup>18</sup> The New York Times, March 7, 1962.

<sup>19</sup> Department of State for the Press, The Rusk-Thanat Memorandum (Washington, 1962).

collectively to assist Thailand in case of Communist armed attack against that country."<sup>20</sup> It was also affirmed by the statement that this obligation of the United States to act to meet the common danger "does not depend upon the prior agreement of all other parties to the treaty."<sup>21</sup> This changed the status of the SEATO Treaty into a bilateral agreement between the United States and Thailand.

A second element was the event in Laos which brought the first American forces to Thailand. Early in May 1962, the Royal Laotian Army was forced to retreat by the Pathet Lao and Viet-Minh forces to the northern border of Thailand. The Thai government under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat asked the U. S. government to send troops to Thailand to prevent the Communists from advancing to the Thai border. A United States Marine Forces of 1,800 men landed in Bangkok in May and was moved up to the Laotian border to guard against infiltration by Communists.<sup>22</sup> These troops were in addition to the 1,000 troops that came to participate in SEATO maneuvers in April and had remained in the country because of the situation in Laos.<sup>23</sup> With the reinforcement made under President Kennedy's

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>22</sup>The New York Times, May 15, 1962.

<sup>23</sup>The New York Times, May 13, 1962.

order, the American military forces in Thailand soon numbered up to 5,000 men.<sup>24</sup> The Thai government claimed that the circumstances in Laos constituted a threat to the security of Thailand and cited the Rusk-Thanat statement and obligations under the SEATO agreement of 1954.<sup>25</sup>

According to a report on the American presence in Thailand made by Maynard Parker, former U.S. public information officer in Thailand in late 1964 there were only a few Americans in Thailand. Despite rising Communist activities, the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group under the command of Major General Ernst Easterbrook, seemed to feel that the situation was well in hand. The mission was already proceeding to the doctrine of build up an allied country's military force and thereafter sending the advisers home.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in August 1964, some U.S. Air Force personnel were sent to Korat joined by a squadron of F-105 fighter-bombers to assist in the bombing of the Laotian parts of the Ho Chi Minh trail.

The build-up of American troops in Thailand was reported to come mainly in the mid-sixties as a result of the military situation in Vietnam. Early in 1966 there were some 13,000

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<sup>24</sup>The New York Times, June 14, 1962.

<sup>25</sup>Donald E. Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, p. 241.

<sup>26</sup>Maynard Parker, "The Americans in Thailand," The Atlantic, (December, 1966), pp. 51-58.

U. S. troops stationed in Thailand.<sup>27</sup> The U. S. troops had increased ever since, but the exact number at the time was classified, although it was thought to be about 35,000 men. This information was later confirmed in November 1966.<sup>28</sup>

The establishment of U. S. military bases in Thailand began when the United States felt the need to increase air power activities in Vietnam. The U. S. planned to build a large complex of military installations at Sattahip as early as in December 1965.<sup>29</sup> U. S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited Bangkok in February. After conferences with Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn and Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, a communique was issued, announcing that both nations agreed on the need to strengthen Thai forces and the U. S. would step up military aid to Thailand.<sup>30</sup> Later in March, the bill which included 7.5 million dollars for Thailand was approved by the U. S. Congress.<sup>31</sup>

The construction of air bases had been kept secret for more than a year. There was some reluctance of both the Thai and the American officials to admit that these bases

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<sup>27</sup>The New York Times, January 23, 1966.

<sup>28</sup>The New York Times, November 18, 1966.

<sup>29</sup>The New York Times, December 12, 1965.

<sup>30</sup>The New York Times, February 15, 1966.

<sup>31</sup>The New York Times, March 27, 1966.

existed, although the bases were being built and becoming operational. The U. S.-built airbase at Sattahip was opened in August 1966 and this partly lifted the blackout on Thai-U. S. cooperation in the war in Vietnam.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the long period of secrecy, the construction of American air bases had continued. In the North and North-east of Thailand, the bases were built at Udorn, Ubon, Korat, Nakhon Phanom, and Takhli. In the East, the B-52 air base was built at Utapao, and the Deep Water Port at Sattahip was completed and turned over to the Thai government in the spring of 1968.<sup>33</sup>

The American bombers from bases in Takhli were reported to have attacked North Vietnamese oil storage depots in Hanoi and Haiphong in June 1966, during the beginning of a round-the-clock air offensive against North Vietnam.<sup>34</sup>

The U. S. military forces in Thailand increased during 1965-1966. This was probably best described in Parker's report:

There were F-4C Phantoms at Takhli, F-105 Thunderchiefs at Korat, reconnaissance FR-101's at Udorn, SAC tankers for mid-air refueling at Bangkok's International Airport. The American military personnel in Thailand

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<sup>32</sup>The New York Times, August 11, 1966.

<sup>33</sup>The New York Times, May 29, 1968.

<sup>34</sup>Marcus G. Raskin and Bernard B. Fall, The Viet-Nam Reader (New York, 1967), p. 506.

jumped from 4,000 in early 1964 to 6,500 by the end of that year, and 18,000 by the end of 1965.<sup>35</sup>

In Parker's view, the escalation of American forces in Thailand was not caused by conditions in this country, but by "the need for a safe haven for American aircraft outside Vietnam." <sup>36</sup>

In 1967, the alliance between Thailand and the United States became more intense. For two years, American air bases in Thailand had been one of the strongest U. S. weapons in the Vietnam war. As early as in February 1967, there existed a plan to send the Thai troops to help the South Vietnamese. Agreements for stepped-up use of the air bases were being discussed by the Thai and American officials. By this time, most observers in Southeast Asia believed that the U. S. commitment in Thailand was going to expand. There already were 35,000 U. S. servicemen in Thailand and most of them were Air Force personnel.<sup>37</sup> It was clear that the U. S. was taking on new commitments.

It was not until January 19, 1967 when the U. S. Ambassador Graham A. Martin made the first formal acknowledgement of the extent of the American military build-up, that this information was disclosed. Ambassador Martin confirmed that United States helicopters had been transporting Thai security

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<sup>35</sup> Maynard Parker, "The Americans in Thailand," p. 55.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> U. S. News and World Report, February 27, 1967.

units into the northeastern provinces since August 1966 when the Pro-Communist guerrillas had been active in the northeastern area.<sup>38</sup> Martin accepted that there were 35,300 troops in Thailand, of whom some eight thousand were "engaged in construction and maintenance of strategic roadways, communications networks, port facilities, military supply depots, and other installations,"<sup>39</sup> Of the bases, Martin said that at the time they were being used "in carrying out defensive measures."<sup>40</sup> According to the New York Times, 46,000 American troops were reported to be stationed in Thailand in spring 1968, and 5,000 more came in each week on a five-day rest and recuperation tour from Vietnam.<sup>41</sup>

Gaining information on the presence of American forces and U. S. military bases in Thailand; what they were doing and why they were there, has been a matter of complication. In Bangkok, neither formal treaty nor any verbal agreement has ever been released to the public except information on the meetings and state visits between leaders and persons in high key posts of both countries. In regard to the establishment

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<sup>38</sup>The New York Times, January 19, 1967.

<sup>39</sup>Robert Shaplen, Time Out of Hand (New York, 1970), p. 274.

<sup>40</sup>Robert Shaplen, "Letter From Bangkok," New Yorker, (March 18, 1967), p. 135.

<sup>41</sup>The New York Times, April 30, 1968.

of the bases, there was an agreement between the Thai and the U. S. government signed on March 19, 1963 by the Minister of Defense, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and U. S. Ambassador Kenneth T. Young. The ceremony of signing the Thai-U.S. agreement on military logistics base use was held at the Ministry of Defense in Bangkok, and a joint communique was issued to the following effect:

The Governments of Thailand and the United States have agreed to expand Thailand's military logistics base. The decision was made subsequent to the dispatching here of SEATO forces to resist the Communist threat in May 1962.<sup>42</sup>

The program concentrated on raising the capacity of transport and other local facilities. It was also mentioned that at the time the construction projects were being undertaken by U. S. military engineer construction units.

In Washington, U. S. Senator J. W. Fulbright alleged that the United States and Thailand had signed a top secret military contingency plan in 1965 and that the secret arrangement had broadened American commitments to Thailand. This information was acknowledged on July 10, 1969 by U. S. Department Spokesman, Robert J. McCloskey that the United States did sign a secret defense paper with Thailand in 1965. McCloskey indicated that the paper was "no more than a 'military contingency plan' within the framework of previous commitments to come to Thailand's defense," and that "it was customary to have such

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<sup>42</sup>Foreign Affairs Bulletin, II, No. 4, (Bangkok, February-March, 1963), p. 415.



agreements with countries with which the United States has security pacts."<sup>43</sup> However, when asked about the presence of American forces and the military bases in Thailand, American and Thai officials would say only that action of this sort was being taken in accordance with the Southeast Asia Collective Defense treaty of 1954, which established the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

By 1969 the American Military strength in the country had reached a number of 48,000 officers and servicemen. In July 1969 President Richard M. Nixon paid a three-day visit to Bangkok, where he and Thai leaders exchanged views on the future role of the United States forces in Thailand. The presidential visit was followed by bilateral talks on a gradual withdrawal of American troops from Thailand. Based on an agreement reached in September 1969, some 6,000 of the American troops had been withdrawn by the end of June 1970.<sup>44</sup>

Early in 1972 the United States planned to shift bases from South Vietnam to Thailand. The closed airbase at Takhli was reopened in May. Marine A-6 intruder planes were reported to have begun operations from Nam Phong, a newly prepared base in Thailand after being moved from Danang.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>The New York Times, July 11, 1969.

<sup>44</sup>John W. Henderson and others, Area Handbook for Thailand (Washington, 1971), p. 223.

<sup>45</sup>The New York Times, June 21, 1972.

The move was in accordance with President Nixon's goal of reducing American presence in Vietnam by the end of June.<sup>46</sup> This resulted in the expansion of U. S. bases in Thailand and the increasing of troop strength from 40,000 to nearly 50,000 men in June. Most observers believed that these troops were transferred from Vietnam.

In regard to U. S. military strength in Thailand, the U. S. and Thailand agreed to the maintenance of a substantial American military presence, mainly air power, in Thailand for an unspecified period after the Vietnam ceasefire. The provision of this agreement called for continuance of an American military presence able to respond "in an armed way" to violations of the peace accord in the area. The maintaining number of men involved in providing air power was to be at a level of roughly 40,000 and not to exceed 45,000 men in the country.<sup>47</sup>

By the end of 1972, the number of American troops and other servicemen stationed at seven Thai bases was 49,000.<sup>48</sup> Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn announced that in talks with Ambassador Leonard Unger, he had given approval to the U. S. to move its forces from Saigon to remote bases in Thailand and that some troops would be withdrawn from Thailand in case of a cease-fire, but that with a new arrival from Vietnam, the number of American

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<sup>46</sup> The New York Times, June 29, 1972.

<sup>47</sup> The New York Times, November 25, 1972.

<sup>48</sup> The New York Times, December 9, 1972.

Military personnel in Thailand would remain at about the current level of 45,000.<sup>49</sup>

With regard to U. S. military and economic assistance, the various inflows of military and economic aid from the United States over the period from 1946 to 1965 are shown in Table II.

Table II shows that in a five-year period from 1953 to 1957 while Phibul was in power, Phibul's government received 205.1 million dollars of military aid and 132.2 million dollars of economic assistance from the United States. While from 1958 to 1962, Sarit's government received 125.4 million dollars of military aid and 182.6 million dollars of economic assistance. Following Sarit's death in 1963, American economic aid decreased. In fact, it is probable that U. S. economic assistance would have been phased out in the mid-1960s, had it not been for Thailand's strategic location.<sup>50</sup>

More military aid began to pour into Thailand from 1963, but from 1964, information about this expenditure was marked "confidential." However, it was estimated that the amount of American assistance passed the one billion dollar mark in 1967. Military aid had consumed approximately 600 million dollars, while economic assistance totaled 440 million dollars.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The New York Times, December 17, 1972.

<sup>50</sup> George J. Viksnins, "United States Military Spending and the Economy of Thailand, 1967-1972," Asian Survey, (May, 73), p. 442.

<sup>51</sup> Frank C. Darling, "Thailand: Stability and Escalation," Asian Survey, (February, 1968), pp. 120-121.

TABLE II

INFLOWS OF U.S. ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND  
1946 - 1965

(U.S. Fiscal Years - in Millions of U.S. Dollars)

Program	1946- 1948	1949- 1952	1953- 1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	Total 1946- 1965
U.S. Economic Loans	6.2	1.0	23.0	1.8	34.7	2.0	-	22.0	4.9	19.0	20.9	135.5
U.S. Economic Grants	-	16.1	109.2	24.1	24.2	23.9	24.3	25.6	17.0	13.0	20.8	298.2
Total Economic Aid	6.2	17.1	132.2	25.9	58.9	25.9	24.3	47.6	21.9	32.0	41.7	433.7
Military Aid	-	16.5	205.1	19.7	18.0	24.7	23.9	39.1	68.5	←Data Classified→	←Data Classified→	
Grand Total	6.2	33.6	337.3	45.6	76.9	50.6	48.2	86.7	90.4	←Data Classified→	←Data Classified→	

Source: U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants and Assistance From International Organizations,  
Special Report Prepared by Agency for International Development for the House  
Foreign Affairs Committee, March 18, 1966, p. 69.

According to the figures revealed by the U. S. News and World Report, the United States had loaned or given Thailand 592 million dollars in economic aid from 1949 through mid-1969. Since 1949, Thai military forces have received 743 million dollars in material and budget support. U. S. procurement and other expenditures-not including direct support totaled 885 million dollars.<sup>52</sup>

During 1965-1972, the buildup in official U. S. military spending had been intensified by the war in Vietnam. Major U. S. government expenditure in Thailand from 1965 to 1972 is shown in Table III. The figures in Table III show that the United States military assistance to Thailand had increased sharply during this period and had reached its peak in 1968.

In sum, Thailand has received a substantial amount of U. S. aid during the 1950s and 1960s. Total U. S. grant economic assistance adds up to about 500 million dollars through the end of 1970. Direct military assistance accounts for 800 million dollars for the same period. The economic assistance in recent years has averaged 20-30 million dollars annually, and military aid has been 50-60 million dollars per year.

This attempt to bring to a focus the elements of American involvement in Thailand has been made. It was found that following World War II, the Thai-American alliance was continually

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<sup>52</sup>U. S. News and World Report, August 24, 1970, p. 52. These figures represent the sums up to August 1970.

TABLE III

## MAJOR U.S. GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE IN THAILAND, 1965-1972

(In Millions of Baht; 1 U.S. Dollar = 20.8 Baht)

Program	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	Total
War Expenditures	922.1	2584.1	4109.2	4917.8	4629.7	4192.1	3788.5	4000.0	29143.5
Military Assistance	731.0	1013.0	1355.0	1500.0	1392.0	1273.0	1150.0	N/A	8414.0*
Economic Assistance	357.4	438.8	799.6	117.2	864.3	613.0	519.0	470.0	5234.5
Total Military and Economic Assistance	1088.4	1451.8	2154.6	2672.4	2256.3	1886.0	1669.0	N/A	13648.5*

Source: George J. Viksnins, "United States Military Spending and the Economy of Thailand, 1967-1972," Asian Survey, Vol. XIII, No. 5, (May, 1973), p. 442.

\*The figure represents aids from 1965 to 1971 since the amount of military aid in 1972 is not available.

strengthened by a series of increasingly binding mutual commitments. Beginning with the Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement and the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement in 1950, the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty in 1954, the Rusk-Thanat Memorandum in 1962, and the secret Military Contingency Plan in 1965. Other important elements are: The expansion of military aid to Southeast Asia under the Eisenhower administration; the establishment of military forces in Thailand under the Kennedy administration; the escalation of American troops due to President Johnson's decision to intervene massively in Vietnam and his subsequent decision to station some 48,000 American forces in Thailand. Obviously, the presence of Americans in Thailand during the period of three significant military leaders, Phibul, Sarit, and Thanom, made their impact on the military and economic aspects of the country from 1945-1972.

American involvement has declined during the period of President Nixon, and the Thai government has turned toward a "self-help policy."

### CHAPTER III

#### FACTORS IN THAI SOCIETY THAT ARE PRESSURED BY THE U. S. INVOLVEMENT

Since 1950, Thailand has pursued an anti-Communist pro-United States policy and has been one of the most articulate and consistent opponents of Communism in Southeast Asia. A large amount of military and economic assistance has poured into Thailand to help Thailand during the 1950's and the 1960's. Thailand became the logistics and headquarter base for the majority of the American air war effort in Indochina in 1965. This development brought more American troops and more U. S. military expenditures.

American involvement posed complicated problems in the Thai society. In general, the Thai government and its people seem to show a favorable attitude toward the United States. However, the Thais have their own characteristics or habitual patterns of thought, "they had their own definite ideas about how, when and why they wanted to do things," and they look upon the Americans as "charming and annoying, positive and changeable, efficient and obtuse."<sup>1</sup> This reading of Americans has affected the Thais' feelings and

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Shaplen, Time Out of Hand: Revolution and Reaction in Southeast Asia (New York, 1970), p. 273.



actions. To a considerable degree, the presence of the United States forces in Thailand has posed multiple challenges to the ideals, political processes and governmental system of the Thai society. The most profound American impacts in Thailand are to be found in the realm of politics, economics, and social morality.

Politics in Thailand is concerned primarily with factional groupings. Political power is the privilege in the hands of a small elite group. Personality and factions have been the essential features of political dynamics in Thailand.<sup>2</sup> Changing of the government occurs by means of a coup d'etat -- all parts of a pattern of Thai politics.

The Thai military has played an important role in the political scene for a long time. The military leaders have dominated the institutions of government and have gained high political status in the Thai society. The military not only enjoys great administration autonomy but is judicially independent.<sup>3</sup> One factor that has made

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<sup>2</sup>Clark D. Neher, "Thailand: Toward Fundamental Change," Asian Survey (February, 1971), pp. 131-138. Most complete research study on Thai political factions is in Fred W. Riggs, Thailand: The Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity (East-West Center Press: Honolulu), 1966.

<sup>3</sup>According to the Thai military law, soldiers are to be tried in the Thai military courts. A study on the military in Thailand is in David A. Wilson, "The Military in Thai Politics," in John J. Johnson, ed., The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey), 1962.

the military a dominant sector in Thai politics is that the United States has placed greater emphasis on developing Thai military power and less emphasis on Thai economic and social development.<sup>4</sup>

A major criticism of the role of the American in less developed countries was reflected in Noam Chomsky, At War With Asia: "The imperial powers," claimed Chomsky, "have tried to develop native elites that would control the local population while enriching themselves through their relations with the imperial power."<sup>5</sup> The belief that the support of anti-Communist government in Asia would somehow defend the American way of life has led the American to support the regimes that appear to be on their side. Frank C. Darling also wrote about his observation on this matter. Darling indicated that from 1946 to 1955, there were three U. S. Ambassadors to Thailand; Mr. Edwin Stanton, Major General William J. Donovan, and Mr. John E. Peurifoy. These Ambassadors had favored the military because they felt that the rapid expansion of the armed forces would serve as a major bulwark against the spread of Communism.<sup>6</sup> The ideology

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<sup>4</sup>During most of the period from 1950 to 1972, a very heavy proportion of the disbursements went to the military. In turn these bolstered the political power of the military factions in Thailand.

<sup>5</sup>Noam Chomsky, At War with Asia (New York, 1969), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup>Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States (Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 105.

of anti-Communism has served as a highly effective technique. During the Phibul period, the policy of anti-Communism was used by the government not only to gain Western approval but also as a justification for anti-Chinese legislation and for the government's own large military expenditure.<sup>7</sup>

Even in regard to the SEATO alliance, criticism has been heard on the use of the SEATO as a channel to give stress to the Communist danger and to justify the American actions in the Southeast Asia region. The major impact of SEATO in Thailand has been to strengthen the emphasis on the use of more military power and police forces to protect the security of the country. The SEATO alliance has provided the military leaders with a justification to suppress internal opposition and at the same time to claim that the intimate relations between Thailand and the SEATO members make these actions "democratic."<sup>8</sup>

In regard to the pressure U. S. military aid makes on Thailand, most observers have seen that large-scale U. S. military aid to Thailand has pushed the political system

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<sup>7</sup>Wendel Blanchard and others, Thailand: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New Haven, 1957), p. 124.

<sup>8</sup>Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States, p. 111, 134. Citing the arrest of forty-nine persons in November 1952, charged of "plot" to establish a Communist regime and were sentenced to twenty years in prison, - the arrest of Thep Jotinuchit, Klaew Norapati in February 1956 when they returned from Communist China just a few days after SEATO military maneuver near Bangkok.

"backward," toward a more ruthless form of authoritarianism. The extensive military aid provided by the United States to the military, especially the army and the police, became a factor contributing to anti-American feeling among the Thai people. During the final phase of Phibul regime, in 1957 there was a growing hostility toward the United States. Many Thais wanted the Americans to withdraw their support from Phibul. They considered that the major impact of the assistance had been to strengthen the military government's position in suppressing internal opposition rather than in defending the country against a Communist threat as intended by the Americans.

When the military leaders staged the coups d'etat and introduced more direct military rule in 1957 and 1958, the United States continued to provide assistance to them. However, the military assistance that the United States had provided to Sarit's government (1958-1963) was less than the amount provided to Phibul's regime. This was, presumably, because the United States might have realized the effect of its military assistance, or possibly it follows from the fact that Sarit was not much favored by the United States even though he was one of the strong opponents of the Communism. Sarit's interests were devoted more to economic development and nationalism than to strengthen the military power.

The role of the United States on the economic field was more limited than in military strategy. Besides grants and loans, the United States provided economic assistance by constructing roads, communication systems, dams, irrigation projects, port facilities, etc. The United States assisted Thailand's economic and social development through the United Nations and the World Bank.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, American economic aid after 1957 was reduced to approximately 24 million dollars annually. American economic aid had decreased sharply to 17 million dollars in 1963, and to 13 million dollars in 1964 (see Table II). Frank C. Darling assessed that about 12 percent of American foreign aid to Thailand since the beginning of the Cold War had been devoted to economic and social advancement.<sup>10</sup> However, the portion of aid provided to the non-military programs did much to improve the economic and social standards of the people.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>see Ronald C. Nairn, International Aid to Thailand (Yale University Press: New Haven and London), 1966.

<sup>10</sup>The percentage is calculated from the sum of economic aid upto 1960 which totaled 216 million dollars. Of this amount, Darling estimated that about 55 million dollars had been devoted to genuine economic and technical development. see Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup>By 1961 Thailand had a gross national product of approximately 2,200 million dollars which had increased at an average rate of 5 percent each year since 1952, and the per capita income was approaching 100 dollars per year.

American aid became a major factor contributing to the continuation of political stability in Thailand. However, most criticism on American aid has been on the assumption that while American aid did much to bolster the peace and progress of the country, it has, to a considerable degree, damaged the very order of the Thai society.

One of the leading scholars who supported this assumption is Lucien M. Hanks.<sup>12</sup> Hanks contended that the U. S. military aid is upsetting the social balance in Thailand, or at least threatening it. Hanks suggested that the volume of American military aid in Thailand has threatened the very order that the Americans would preserve. Hanks explained that the economic aid from the United States to Thailand together with funds from other international agencies such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and the Colombo Plan, were assigned to variety of projects under several ministries and departments. Therefore, these resources of revenue did not strengthen any single link of society. On the contrary, the military aid, particularly during 1965-1970, had meant that large sums went to a very few people, e.g. the Generals. The very size of the military aid had caused the imbalance between the military and the civilian. Most of the time from 1950 to 1972, the armed forces, particularly the army,

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<sup>12</sup>Lucien M. Hanks, "American Aid Is Damaging Thai Society," in Robert Jay Lifton, ed., America and the Asian Revolutions, 1970, pp. 117-132.

had received large appropriations, and army officers had been installed in influential positions throughout the government and the economy.

When Frank C. Darling tried to conclude his observation on the Thai political scene of the Phibul regime, his statement seemed to be applicable to the regime of his successors too; Sarit, and later Thanom and Praphas, when he wrote:

For almost ten years the political system had been moving further away from, not closer toward, free institutions and genuine representative government. Assisted by American military aid the triumvirate regime (Phibul, Phao, and Sarit) in four brief years had obliterated the modest and painful progress made toward constitutional democracy since the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932. The rapid increase in military assistance sponsored by the Eisenhower administration had given the military leaders uncontested political power.<sup>13</sup>

When the United States started the systematic bombing of North Vietnam from the bases in Thailand in 1965, Thailand became the prime target of Communist propaganda. Marshal Chen-yi remarked at a New Year's Day party in Peking the same year, that there would be a guerrilla war in Thailand before the end of the year. The Thai Communist movement had claimed in its propaganda to villagers that the Thanom-Praphas government was "the lackey of American imperialists."<sup>14</sup> Many American observers spoke of Thailand as a

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<sup>13</sup>Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States, pp. 160-161

<sup>14</sup>Maynard Parker, "Untying Thailand," Foreign Affairs, (January, 1973), p. 338.

country to be "another Vietnam."<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Casella, a specialist in Asian affairs gave his view that the action of the Thai government in allowing the United States to use the bases in Thailand as the great rear area for its prosecution of the Indochina war created a de facto state of war between Thailand and North Vietnam. "Technically, Thailand had declared war on North Vietnam, and the latter would have been justified by law in retaliating."<sup>16</sup>

There was some anxiety about this matter among the Thais that the government was provoking trouble from Hanoi that could otherwise have been avoided. One Thai army officer gave this comment: "The longer we let the Americans stay here, the more deeply we become North Vietnam's enemy. If Americans go home, North Vietnam can concentrate on destroying us and creating a puppet government in Thailand."<sup>17</sup>

Within the cabinet, the intra-governmental tensions appeared to have developed over the building and manning of the air bases by American troops. Unlike the open welcome of the American troops in 1962 to prevent Communist insurgency from Laos, subsequent military operations were kept

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<sup>15</sup> e.g. see Donald E. Nuechterlein, "Thailand: Another Vietnam?" Asian Survey (February, 1967), pp. 126-127, and J. L. S. Girling, "Northeast Thailand: Tomorrow's Vietnam?" Foreign Affairs (January, 1968), pp. 388-397.

<sup>16</sup> Alessandro Casella, "U. S.-Thai relations," The World Today (March, 1970), p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Fox, "Thailand: Restless Ally," The Christian Century (November, 1968), pp. 1452-1454.



officially secret. The Thai internal pressures were also preoccupied with face-saving and the desire of the Thai government not to appear to be too much under the U. S. umbrella. The request for total secrecy was a condition imposed by the Thais and reluctantly accepted by Washington.<sup>18</sup> The reasons for this insistence on the discretion were essentially related to internal politics. Alessandro Casella explained that, Thai rulers have been extremely sensitive to allegations that they "sold out" to the Americans and compromised Thai "sovereignty" and "honour" by permitting the stationing of foreign troops in the country.

It is also a characteristic of the Thai personality to shun commitments and to avoid extensive responsibilities. The Thais have the capacity "to attach greater importance to form than to substance," and the Thai demands involved only "principles and face-saving."<sup>19</sup> Once the Americans learned this fact they were able to gain practically a free hand in the everyday conduct of operations under the assumption that, "what the Thais don't know, they cannot protest about," and the Thais would tend to say, "what we do not know does not exist."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Alessandro Casella, "U. S.-Thai Relations," p. 121.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

Besides the rising criticism of a foreign policy that has made Thailand a close supporter of the United States, other internal difficulties faced by the Thais were that they were disturbed by the effects of the American presence in Thailand on their traditional manners and morals. A dilemma faced by the Thais was that they want and need U. S. help in fighting off Communism in Southeast Asia, but they were irritated by the social effect and consequence of the military presence.

In the light of anxiety and resentment toward the American presence, the social problems which arose out of the large American military presence in Thailand had been the growing number of illegitimate children of American fathers and Thai mothers. These children were referred to as "red-haired babies," or, among the sociologists concerned with the problem, they were called the "Amerasians." The legal situation of the children was complicated by the fact that the mothers were embarrassed to register them, which made them ineligible for public education. According to a seven-month study conducted in 1968 by the Pearl S. Buck Foundation of Philadelphia, there were some 1,200 such children in Thailand at the time. The survey revealed that 76 percent of such children were half white and 23 percent half Negro.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>The New York Times, April 30, 1968.

Another factor that focused the increasing tensions between the Thais and the Americans was the fact that there was no Status-of-Forces agreement between Thailand and the United States. There was still the question of who should try misbehaving G.I.s. On the Thai government side, the effort had been to put these foreign servicemen under the jurisdiction of Thai courts of law, while on the American side, the effort had been made to bring the case to U. S. military authorities.<sup>22</sup> In most cases, the matters had been carried out with compromise and the American would seem willing to pay for compensations to get themselves out of trouble.

In conclusion, there is some significant pressure on the Thai society as a reflection of the American involvement in Thailand. Major factors that are pressured by this involvement are in the sphere of government and politics and, to a lesser degree, in the realm of economic, social order and morality. Despite the economic progress that was apparently a result of American assistance in the country, the heavy emphasis on the military has led to the introduction of a direct military rule and a change of the regime to a more authoritarian form of absolutist rule by the military government.

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<sup>22</sup>see "Thailand: Tensions between Partners," Time, (May 3, 1968), pp. 28-31.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE THAI REACTIONS TO PROBLEMS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

The people of Southeast Asia have long been faced with their internal and external problems. Getting caught among pressures from outside powers, the people of most countries in Southeast Asia have to fight with problems of political instability and security threat. The doctrine of "wars of liberation" enunciated by the Communist countries has resulted in an increasing problem of insurgency in which their governments have been threatened by determined efforts at terrorism and ruthless violence. This has been one aspect of the problem in political development of developing countries in Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup>

The major problems faced by the Thais are those from Communist China and North Vietnam. The Thais' concern with China and Vietnam has been aroused during recent years as a result of the Vietnam war and the changes in world situation brought about by the emerging relationships between major powers; the United States and China.

The Nixon Doctrine set forth by the U.S. President on July 25, 1969, at Guam, has special meaning for the political

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<sup>1</sup>See Lucian W. Pye, Aspects of Political Development (Boston, 1966), pp. 126-127.

dynamics of Asian countries. President Nixon announced that the new American policy for Asia would be "money and arms, not men, to help Asian nations become military "self-sufficient."<sup>2</sup>

The implementation of this policy paralleled the Nixon administration's efforts to improve relations with China. A positive approach on China was clarified by a report of the Secretary of State:

We have set out to improve our relationships with the People's Republic of China, in recognition that it will play a growing role in Asia. Although we have only a limited ability to influence Peking's attitudes, we are taking a number of steps toward a healthy relationship with the People's Republic of China and toward reducing the tensions and dangers latent in the current situation.<sup>3</sup>

As the prospects of changes became more apparent, the Thai government officials began to change their perceptions. The attempts to bring their policies more into line with these changes were reflected in their reactions to problems of Southeast Asia. In this Chapter, the Thai reactions to problems of Southeast Asia will focus upon three major aspects: First, the problems of Vietnam. Second, the problems of China, and last, the withdrawal of the United States to a "profile of low visibility."

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<sup>2</sup>China and U.S. Foreign Policy, Congressional Quarterly (Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>United States Foreign Policy, 1969-1970, A Report of the Secretary of State, Department of State Publication, No. 8575 (March, 1971), p. 36.

### To Problems of Vietnam

The problems of Vietnam have originated from a conflict between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese since the proclamation by Ho Chi Minh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945. When the French reoccupied Indochina in 1946, a group of some 46,700 Vietnamese refugees fled into Thailand. The Thai government allowed these refugees to settle on the Thai side of the Mekong River. By 1949 the Thais became concerned about the subversive potential of these refugees and the government began to try to control them.<sup>4</sup> The Thai government's efforts have been to send these refugees home by repatriation to either North Vietnam or South Vietnam. These efforts had been made through international Red Cross societies, through the United Nations, and through "third party" such as France, Burma, and Laos. Under an agreement reached at Rangoon between the Thai and the North Vietnamese Red Cross Societies in 1959, some forty thousand Vietnamese refugees were repatriated to North Vietnam between January 1960 and July 1964.<sup>5</sup> After the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, North Vietnam refused to accept further repatriation of these refugees from Thailand. The Thai government reached an agreement to repatriate

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<sup>4</sup>See Peter A. Poole, "Thailand's Vietnamese Minority," Asian Survey, VII (December, 1967), 886-895.

<sup>5</sup>The Bangkok Post, November 11, 1964.

the remaining refugees to South Vietnam in 1967, and the repatriations began following the Vietnamese presidential elections in September 1967.<sup>6</sup> In February 1973 a month after the "end" of Vietnam war, the Thai government announced that an agreement was reached between Thailand and North Vietnam to repatriate the remaining refugees to North Vietnam. The government revealed that negotiations with the North Vietnamese government were made through the Thai Ambassador in Laos. The Thai government also indicated its willingness to help the North Vietnamese government in the reconstruction of the country after the Vietnam war.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the time since 1949, the Thais have viewed the problem of Vietnamese refugees as constituting a serious danger to their national security. From mid-1964 on, the Communist subversive activities in the northeastern area of Thailand have increased steadily. Both Hanoi and Peking have begun to apply pressure against the Northeast region because of Thailand's military cooperation with the United States. When the war in Vietnam began to escalate in 1965, the problems of Vietnam became a matter of great concern to Thai security. The Thai government has taken the view that the North Vietnamese, as well as the Communist China, have

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<sup>6</sup>The Bangkok Post, July 10, 1967

<sup>7</sup>Siam Rath (Thai daily newspaper), February 19, 1973, p. 1.

influenced the communist insurgents in the Northeast and that both regimes have employed propaganda activities against the Thai government. The fact that Thailand has never had diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam combined with the fear of communist aggression from Hanoi makes the Thais consider North Vietnam as their primary enemy.

What the Thais are concerned about is their national security. The Thai government's view has been that its security threats lie closer at hand in Laos and Cambodia, specifically in the Mekong Valley of Laos.<sup>8</sup> The government fears that increased Vietnamese control over Laos and Cambodia would facilitate movement of men and supplies across the Mekong River into Thailand.<sup>9</sup> The principal aim of Thailand's security strategy is to prevent a Communist "presence" in these regions. To that end, the Thais have been willing to deploy troops in Laos, to allow their country to be used as the main base for the air war in Vietnam, and to send troops to South Vietnam during 1968-1971.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>"Thai Kab Karn Yud Ying Nai Vietnam," ("Thailand and the Vietnam Cease-fire,") Siam Rath Weekly Review (January 28, 1973), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>Astri Suhrki, "Smaller-Nation Diplomacy: Thailand's Current Dilemmas," Asian Survey, XI (May, 1971), 429-444.

<sup>10</sup>Maynard Parker, "Untying Thailand," Foreign Affairs, Vol. 51, No. 2 (January, 1973), 327-339.



According to the New York Times,<sup>11</sup> it was believed that the increasing of communist insurgency in the Northeastern area of Thailand was linked to the Vietnam war. The terrorist activities were aimed at forcing the Thai government to limit its support for U.S. efforts in Vietnam. Both Hanoi and Peking wanted to discourage Thailand from providing bases for any activities related to the Vietnam war.

The Thais' view toward the war in Vietnam has been that South Vietnam is the victim of communist aggression directly from North Vietnam, supported by other major communist powers, mainly China. This was reflected in statements made by the Thai Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman. Thanat took the view that "demands to halt the bombing of North Vietnam serve the Communist purpose," and that Thailand had no other choice but to fight back against the Communists "singly or with our friends and allies."<sup>12</sup> Again in October 1968, at the United Nations, Thanat gave his view that "peace will be restored in Vietnam and in the rest of Southeast Asia only if North Vietnam and its supporters renounce their designs of expansion and conquest."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The New York Times, June 26, 1966.

<sup>12</sup> Speech of March 15, 1967, in Collected Statements of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, 1966-67 (Bangkok: Ministry of Foreign Affairs), pp. 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> Collected Statements, 1967-68, p. 81.

### To Problems of China

The problems of China have, for a long time, been faced by the Thai government since the Chinese Communists proclaimed their victory on mainland China in October 1949. During the Phibul regime, the problem of Overseas Chinese was identified with the possibility that these Overseas Chinese would be attracted to Communist China and so would become a powerful subversive force. This was reflected in Phibul's policy of repression of the Chinese minority. Most of this Chinese minority has settled in Bangkok. Donald E. Nuechterlein estimated that nearly half the inhabitants of Bangkok are Chinese or of Chinese origin.<sup>14</sup>

Historically, the Thais dislike and fear the Communist Chinese. The Thai government believed that Communist Peking has planned to split the northeast provinces and that Communist activities in Thailand received support from China, though part of them were operated through North Vietnamese organizations working out of Hanoi.<sup>15</sup>

The Thai government does not recognize the government of the People's Republic of China. Besides this fact, the

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<sup>14</sup> Donald E. Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia (Ithaca, New York, 1965), p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> John Scott, Crisis in Communist China, a Report on Red China and Her Neighbors to the Publisher of Time, the Weekly Newsmagazine, 1962, p. 41.

Thai national security policy has been based on the assumption that Communist China is pursuing an aggressive and expansionist policy with attempts to overthrow the government and change the regime to Communism.<sup>16</sup> From the administrations of Phibul Songkram and his successors--Sarit, and Thanom, Thai governments have followed the same route in suppressing any opposition organization to which the revolutionary tone of the Chinese statements might have given encouragement. The government had no intention of establishing diplomatic relations with Peking and discouraged or repressed unofficial contacts with Communist China.

A rare occasion of diplomatic contact with the People's Republic of China was presented at least once at the Afro-Asian Conference held at Bandung in April 1955 in which the Thai Foreign Minister, Prince Wan Waithayakon had met with Premier Chou En-Lai.<sup>17</sup> Prince Wan expressed the Thai attitude toward China that "Thailand fears both invasion and subversion by the Communist world, affirming that Thailand's adherence to SEATO was purely defensive and that war for self-defense was just."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Astri Suhrki, "Smaller-Nation Diplomacy: Thailand's Current Dilemmas," p. 433.

<sup>17</sup>See David A. Wilson, "China, Thailand and the Spirit of Bandung (Part II)" The China Quarterly (July-Sept., 1967), 97.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

After the Bandung conference in 1955, the Thai government had eased political restrictions toward China. Restrictions on press freedom were lifted and political parties, which had been suppressed for some years, were legalized. A number of trips by unofficial delegations were made to mainland China. The Thai government reaction after the Bandung conference was ambivalent, and this coincided with Phibul's attempts to impose democratic procedures on his administration after his return from a world tour, which included a trip to the United States.<sup>19</sup>

The policy of "trips and trade" toward China had been maintained until October 1958 when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat staged his second coup d'etat. The arrest of political "leftists" was made. The left newspapers in both Thai and Chinese languages were closed, and later the import of all products of mainland China was banned, thus, was closed off public relations with China.

In 1969, Thailand was faced with a change in U.S. policy toward both the East and Southeast Asia. The implementation of the Nixon Doctrine has been the evidence of a change in U.S. policy relating to the isolation of China. In 1971, the Chinese invited the American table tennis team

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<sup>19</sup>See Darrell Berrigan, "Thailand: Pibul Tries Prachathipatai," The Reporter (June 14, 1956), 30-33.

to tour China. This "Ping-Pong diplomacy" was followed by presidential advisor Henry Kissinger's secret trip to Peking, and by the invitation of the Chinese to President Nixon to visit China. The new policy from Washington has caused policy readjustments in Thailand. The Thais, frustrated by the U.S. de-escalation in Southeast Asia, have begun to change their perceptions toward China. The Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman announced that he would be willing to have "serious talks" with Chinese and other Asian Communist leaders on matters affecting the peace and security of the area.<sup>20</sup> However, the military members of the Thai government were known to disagree strongly with this perception. The opposition was quite reluctant to take steps which they felt might weaken the Thai-U.S. alliance and, therefore, they preferred to adhere to a "wait and see" policy.

Later in May, 1971, Foreign Minister Thanat disclosed that prospects for a "real dialogue" between the two countries had developed. Thanat stated that differences of interest between the two countries had narrowed and Peking had responded favorably to Thailand's feelers through "third parties" for a dialogue. In connection with Thanat's

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<sup>20</sup> Melvin Gurtov, China and Southeast Asia-The Politics of Survival (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1971), p. 44.

disclosure on May 14, 1971, the Thai government gave instructions to all government radio stations to cease propaganda attacks against China. General Kris Sivara, the Thai Deputy Defense Minister, gave an explanation as follows: "Bangkok wanted to ease tensions with China and would like to see an end to Peking's hostile attitude toward Thailand."<sup>21</sup>

By August 1971, the evidence of changes in the world situation became more apparent. On August 2, 1971, the United States ended twenty years of opposition to Communist China's presence in the United Nations by announcing it would "support action . . . calling for seating the People's Republic of China."<sup>22</sup> On October 25, 1971, the U.N. General Assembly voted to seat Communist China and expel Taiwan.

In Bangkok, the Thai reactions to this change have been identified with internal difficulties. The possibilities of improving relations with the People's Republic of China have been widely discussed.<sup>23</sup> The future relationship with China was openly debated, and the debate seemed to go beyond the

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<sup>21</sup>The New York Times, May 15, 1971

<sup>22</sup>China and U.S. Foreign Policy, Congressional Quarterly (Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>See "Kuan Cha Plien Rathabarn Mai Ruh Mei?" ("Should We Change the Government?"), Siam Rath Weekly Review (November 14, 1971), pp. 14, 31.

government's wish or control. Members of the opposition parties in the House of Representatives sent a telegram of congratulations to Peking and others petitioned to visit China. Some members of the House of Representatives made a request for the Thai government to reassess its policy toward China. Some also requested a change of the government.

The change in external environments was followed by the change in Thai internal politics. On November 17, 1971, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn abrogated the 1968 Constitution, disbanded the National Assembly, banned political parties, and resumed direct rule as the Revolutionary Group. Foreign Minister Thanat, the main government advocate of a reassessment in Thailand's China policy was no longer head of the Foreign Ministry, although he was retained in the government. The coup and the event which precipitated it illuminate important aspects of Thai politics and of interaction of foreign and domestic affairs. One week following the coup, Field Marshal Thanom, Chairman of the Revolution Party gave his view on the coup in relation with the problem of China. Thanom stated that "The slow and devious ways of democracy had to yield, because of repression from the changing world situation--that is the seating of China in the United Nations--and the ensuing dangers to Thailand," and that he needed "new power in particular, to head off the 'leftists' rush to make peace with Peking even when Peking

continues to support terrorism and subversion in Thailand."<sup>24</sup> Thanom's statement reflected his contention that the government could be more confident in dealing with Peking under conditions of tight domestic controls, accompanied by martial law. Two weeks after the coup, newspapers were forbidden to comment on the China-Thai relationship, thus closing public debate on the issue.

On August 8, 1972, the Thai government announced at the news conference in Bangkok that Thailand would follow the United States' example and would send a table tennis team to Peking. This was seen as "a clear sign that Thailand does not want to remain in an open anti-Peking position at a time when both the United States and Japan are taking steps to enlarge their ties with China."<sup>25</sup> The table tennis team accompanied by a "special advisor," arrived in Peking in August 1972. This was seen as evidence of change in the Thai policy toward Communist China.<sup>26</sup>

So far, the Thais' effort to improve relations with China has been concentrated more on trade relations than on

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<sup>24</sup>The New York Times, November 24, 1971.

<sup>25</sup>The New York Times, August 9, 1972.

<sup>26</sup>"Nayobai Tang Prathet Khong Thai Nai Anakot," ("Thai Foreign Policy in the Future,") Siam Rath Weekly Review (August 20, 1972), p. 3.



diplomatic relations. As most of the Thais see it, the chief obstacle to improving Thai-Chinese relations lies in Peking's encouragement to insurgents in the country.<sup>27</sup> One of the Thai leading scholars gave this comment: "If we ever get a Peking embassy in Bangkok, it will be like a Communist government inside a non-Communist state."<sup>28</sup>

#### The Withdrawal of the U.S. to a Profile of Low Visibility

The Thais concern with the withdrawal of the American profile began when President Johnson announced on March 31, 1968 that he was reducing the level of American military involvement in Vietnam and taking steps toward a negotiated peace settlement with the North Vietnamese government. This announcement aroused a growing sense of doubt and uncertainty among officials of the Thai government. As the Thais were alarmed by the prospect of negotiated peace on Vietnam conflict, they became increasingly fearful that it might have critical effects on their national security. They were also afraid that the U.S. cutback might affect the possible phase-out of technical assistance for counterinsurgency programs.

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<sup>27</sup>"Jeen Dang Kab Pan Ha Phu Kow Karn Rai Nai Thai," ("Red China and the Problem of Terrorism in Thailand,") Siam Rath Weekly Review (November 9, 1973), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>A remark by M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, reported in The New York Times, November 24, 1971.

The Thais anxiety was intensified by criticism in Washington. In June, 1968 Senator Eugene J. McCarthy made a statement that he thought the United States could afford to withdraw its troops from Thailand.<sup>29</sup>

The Thai response to Mr. McCarthy's statement was dramatic. The Thai officials circulated a statement made by Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman on May 10, 1968 in which Thanat stated that Thailand never asked U.S. for troops nor have they participated in combat operations against Communists in Thailand:

We have never asked our friends the United States or other countries to send soldiers or to send men to help us fight Communist danger. And I want to emphasize and to stress very strongly that the 46,000 or 47,000 American soldiers who are stationed in Thailand have not been asked nor have they taken part in any combat operation against Communist agents in Thailand.

American soldiers in Thailand are, therefore, the sole purpose of carrying out the war, the Vietnam war, not for assisting in any way in combat operations against the Communist guerrillas in Thailand.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that U.S. troops are in Thailand to support war operations in Vietnam has been a crucial point for the Thai government officials to stress this fact whenever they were confronted with American criticism of U.S. presence in

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<sup>29</sup>The New York Times, June 15, 1968, reported interviews with Senator McCarthy in which he said, "I think the time has come when we must say we should take our steel out of the land of thatched huts."

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

the country. However, the Thai government feared that the end of Vietnam war and the withdrawal of U.S. troops stationed in Thailand would hurt the nation's economy. The government was also threatened by the labor problems arising from the layoffs of thousands of Thai workers employed in the U.S. construction projects during 1967-1968.<sup>31</sup>

In the light of the Thais' displeasure and anxiety toward the American withdrawal, the Thai Foreign Minister took an initiative toward showing a desire for adjustments in Thailand's foreign policy. The cautious moves were made first toward the Soviet Union and later toward China. Thanat's direction toward the Soviet Union was demonstrated by his statement when he said: "Bangkok is allied to Washington not because it is obedient to American dictates, but because American interests in the area happen to be the same as the Thais'. If Moscow's interests were to coincide with the Thais', Thailand would be ready to work with the Russians."<sup>32</sup>

In January 1969 the United States began to implement its reduction plan in Vietnam. When the Thais faced this

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<sup>31</sup>Part of these layoffs included workers and personnel of Zachery-Kaiser-Dillingham, a contractor firm in charge of building the airbase at Sattahip. The Thai Labor Department, after consultations with the U.S. officials, had set up a temporary employment officer to assist in finding jobs for the 5,000 Thai workers who were laid-off.

<sup>32</sup>A remark by Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, cited in "Thailand: Restless Ally," The Christian Century (November 13, 1968), p. 1452.

prospect of U.S. disengagement, the Thai government made a remarkable reaction. The Thai Foreign Minister denied that Thailand was "anti-Communist," and claimed that the Thai foreign policy should be "flexible, vital and progressive."<sup>33</sup>

On July 25, 1969 President Nixon set out a new U.S. approach to Asia which became known as the Nixon Doctrine. The President declared his intention to reduce official presence and visibility abroad. This was clarified by a report of the U.S. Secretary of State: "We intend that our presence will be more in keeping with the changing situation in the area and that our diplomacy consequently will be more flexible."<sup>34</sup> However, when President Nixon was in Bangkok on July 30, 1969, he pledged that "the United States will stand proudly with Thailand against those who might threaten it from abroad, or from within."<sup>35</sup> This was seen by the Thais as a contradiction to the Guam Doctrine.

During 1968-1969, there was a growing United States Congressional criticism of American involvement in Thailand.

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<sup>33</sup>J. L. S. Girling, "Thailand's New Course," Pacific Affairs, XLII, No. 3 (Fall, 1969), 346-359.

<sup>34</sup>United States Foreign Policy, 1969-1970, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>35</sup>Clark D. Neher, "Thailand: The Politics of Continuity," Asian Survey, X, No. 2 (February, 1970), p. 165.

The criticism was focused on American commitment in accordance with the 1965 military contingency plan. Fearing that criticism in the U.S. might impair essential requirements of military equipment aid, and offended over speculation that Thailand might become a second Vietnam, the Thai government took the initiative in asking for a gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops. This action was made by Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman. On August 20, 1969 Thanat proposed to the American Embassy that the process of "immediate evacuation" of the 49,000 troops be made<sup>36</sup> Following this proposal, a series of formal meetings in Bangkok was arranged to discuss the gradual reduction of American troops.

In the mean time, there was a sharp difference in emphasis of the Thai military leaders. Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn indicated that there was no Thai initiative for the withdrawal. Thanom indicated that Thailand wanted neither total withdrawal nor, at the time, any withdrawal at all.<sup>37</sup>

By this time it was already widely believed that the Thai government did not really want U.S. troops to leave the country. This was clearly denoted in Thanat's remark to an informal meeting with visiting members of the United States Senate

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<sup>36</sup>Alessandro Casella, "U.S.-Thai relations," The World Today, XXVI, No. 3 (March, 1970), p. 122.

<sup>37</sup>The New York Times, August 26, 1969.

and the House of Representatives in Bangkok, on November 7, 1969:

We have no intention of driving American forces out of Thailand, . . . but to confirm our policy of relying on our national forces, especially in terms of manpower . . . and to show the sincerity of self-reliance, we have suggested . . . discussions to redeploy and to withdraw those forces in conformity with the requirements of the war in Vietnam . . . But, we have no desire of hastening the withdrawal of those forces.<sup>38</sup>

Despite a series of talks on gradual withdrawal, from 1969-1972 there was a considerable number of American troops in the country. In May 1972 the United States had increased its armed forces in Thailand to forty thousand men. The closed airbase at Takhli was reopened and the seventh airbase was being built at Nam Phong.<sup>39</sup> This was contrary to what had been expected by most observers. The Thai military leaders were delighted with this reversal of the previous trend of U.S. troop withdrawal. It was not until September 1, 1973 that the last American forces were reported to have left the country after the peace settlement of the Vietnam war.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>A remark made by Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman, cited in Astri Suhrke, "Smaller-Nation Diplomacy: Thailand's Current Dilemmas," Asian Survey, XI (May, 1971), pp. 429-444.

<sup>39</sup>The New York Times, June 8, 1972.

<sup>40</sup>Siam Rath Weekly Review, September 16, 1973, pp. 24-26, illustrated last twelve U.S. Fighter Bomber planes took off from Nam Phong Air Base.

As most observers see, the withdrawal of American military personnel in Thailand has little direct impact on the security of Thailand. The U.S. troops in Thailand have never participated in counterinsurgency operations in the country. The Thai government often emphasized that the troops were not called upon to aid Thailand in its internal problems and that Thailand needs only economic and military equipment assistance. The demand for the withdrawal of American troops seemed to stem from the Thai irritation over criticism of U.S. officials and the press on the contingency plan. It was also seen as a desire to demonstrate its independence.

It is fair to say that among the Thais there is more regret than rejoicing about the U.S. withdrawal, even though that is not true of everyone. This is quite contrary to what most of the Vietnamese feel when they see the Americans leave their country.<sup>41</sup> The Thai reactions to the withdrawal of U.S. troops were remarkable. In particular, they were so because of their "capacity" to adjust to the changing situation. The Thai reactions also denoted the "flexibility" of their policy-making process. A sharp difference between the civilian view and the military view is, in part, one aspect of the Thai politics.

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<sup>41</sup>See "Was Vietnam Worth It? A Size-Up From the Scene," U.S. News and World Report (April 2, 1973), p. 23.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS: THE NOTIONS THAT SUPPORT THE PLAID FABRIC OF THAI REACTIONS TO U.S. ACTIONS

The threads of the dynamics of politics in Thailand are the tangled ones. The preceding chapters have sought to untangle the elements of these threads to allow for both analysis and conclusion. This chapter presents the conclusion in the context of the Thai political life.

Politics in Thailand from 1945 to 1973 were in a process of transition. The accelerated process of change began in the post-war period, gathered impetus gradually in the decade of 1950s, and increased in speed during the 1960s. Many factors helped to stimulate this process of change. First, the feeling of insecurity from the rise of communism on mainland China and from North Vietnam which posed a threat to the security of the Kingdom. Second, a growing popular awareness of the problems of the outside world, accompanied by new aspirations and new discontents from American involvement in the region. Third, the inherent demand of mass political distress for increasing democratic reforms since the change of the regime from absolute monarchy in 1932.



A series of coups took place after the adoption of the first constitution on December 10, 1932. The basic constitutional form remained unchanged, although during some periods the constitution was not fully implemented. During all of the period following the 1932 coup d'etat, the government and politics was dominated by a small elite group, the make up and control of which shifted from time to time, but which mostly centered within the military.

The monarchy remains the symbolic representation of national unity. The king is a figure head of the state and is placed in a high esteem. The real significance of the monarchy in national politics has been the need of the ruling group in any given period for the king to legitimize its rule through royal appointment to the governmental offices and executive posts. Although the constitution provided that all power is exercised in the name of the king, he has very little power in his own right. The monarch has generally been restricted to exerting limited influence behind the scenes since the change of the regime to constitutional monarchy.

The present king, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, is the ninth king in the Chakri Dynasty. King Bhumibol is the focus of the Thai love and respect. The people respect their king much more than any other leader of the country.

In the Thai political system, the prime minister plays a dominant role in national politics. The prime minister has been more than first among equals. He also is the leader of the ruling group, the head of the cabinets, and the chief of the executive. He holds the ultimate powers of the administration of state affairs, and he controls all his ministers and civil servants. The power of the prime minister was enhanced during the enforcement of the interim constitution (The Interim Constitution of 1959, from 1959 to 1968, and the Interim Constitution of 1972, from 1972 and on). By virtue of the principle of emergency powers, the prime minister may take all steps necessary to maintain security, the peace, and social orders of the country whenever he deems necessary. Vested with responsibilities of policy formulation, coordination and supervision, the Office of the Prime Minister has become a major instrument through which the prime minister controls and supervises the national administrative system.

Reactions of the Thai people toward governmental actions have been very limited. The Thai people, historically accustomed to strong central and paternalistic rule, retain their traditional reverence for their king. The people did not feel that affairs of state were the concern of anyone other than public officials. They unquestioningly accepted official decrees that were imposed on them. If any law

or obligation was excessively abusive or demanding, it was simply ignored or evaded.

From the past, the government has been functioning with a low degree of participation from the people. Any access to political means is likely made through an influential individual with whom one can establish a personal relationship of obligation. The government has maintained that the people were not yet fully prepared for participation in the representative form of democratic political processes. In addition, the elitist nature of Thai politics has tended to confine political activities to a limited circle of personalities. During the two decades preceding 1973, the government tended to link dissent with Communism and to emphasize stability and national security above free political associations.

The Thais' concern about the Communist threat to its security was heightened sharply in the late 1960s. The Thai leadership expressed concern that Communist China would fill a possible vacuum once the United States completed the gradual process of lowering its military profile in Asia. As a result, the country up to 1973 was closely allied with the United States. The government was at the same time reportedly reassessing the premises and direction of its foreign policy in the context of Thai expectation that Communist China would play a more influential role in Asia than in the past.

In October, 1973, there was a political uprising that resulted in the fall of the Thai military dictatorship headed by Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn. The uprising stemmed from a widespread public discontent with the Thanom regime. There was a wide discontent because of the rising cost of rice and Thanom's police-state methods.<sup>1</sup>

The revolt that brought down the Thanom regime started when university students in Bangkok issued a list of demands calling for the promulgation of a permanent constitution and free elections. Twelve demonstrators, mostly university students, were arrested for being "involved in a plot to overthrow the Government" by seeking the promulgation of the constitution.<sup>2</sup> Few days later, students took to the streets demanding their colleagues release and a certain date for the promulgation of a new constitution. The demonstrations turned out to be a riot when the police shot some students to death. The result was the end of decades of military rule. Prime Minister Thanom, his Deputy Prime Minister Praphas, and Thanom's son, Colonel Narong, fled the country into exile on October 15, 1973.

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<sup>1</sup>"Thailand: A One-Day Revolution Topples a Dictator," Time (October 29, 1973), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>Bangkok Post (A special supplement) October 19, 1973, p. 8.

The uprising of October, 1973 brought an end to the absolutist rule of the military government. Following the radio announcement of Thanom's resignation from the office of Prime Minister on October 14, 1973, the King immediately appointed Sanya Thammasak, Rector of Thammasat University and his former Privy Counciller, as the new Prime Minister to head the civilian government.

This political upheaval had shed a light upon democratic political reforms in Thailand. The overthrow of the Thanom government was also seen as a political participation of the public and a partial return of the monarch's power. The King has supported the reform and exercised his new authority in the crisis.<sup>3</sup> This was seen as a sign of significant political actions which marked a new role for the King.

This review of politics in Thailand brings to light the essence of American impact on Thai politics. The Thai alignment with the United States, after the emergence of Communist China up to the implementation of the Nixon Doctrine to reduce a military presence to a profile of low visibility, was in tune with the Thai's "capabilities" to adjust to their internal and external situations. The

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<sup>3</sup>"Thailand Upheaval: Its Meaning for U.S.," U.S. News and World Report (October 29, 1973), p. 101.

adoption of an anti-Communist policy since 1950, the emphasis of the government on national security, and the Thai reactions to problems of Southeast Asia, all parts of the attempts of the Thai government to adapt to American involvement in the region.

Overall, the Americans made their impact mostly on the political aspect of the Thai society. They did much to bolster the military power but did not, or made less of an attempt to, encourage the military leaders to provide a channel for the Thai people to exercise some influence on the policies of their government. The United States gave assistance even to the regime which had overthrown constitutional government. The monarchy became less powerful as the military leaders have gained muscle from their "American connections." In practice, the American tends to support the political elites who are able to control power in the country. Less emphasis has been made by the American on the Thai actions and procedures relating to democracy. When these features of American involvement are combined with patterns of Thai politics, the total process has retarded democracy. As a consequence, it has placed unlimited political power in the hands of the military leaders and therefore, did not pave the way for democratic political development in the Thai society. Had it not been

for the student uprising in October, 1973, the country would still have been ruled by a military dictatorship of the Thanom-Praphas regime.

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