



## THAILAND'S NATIONAL STRATEGY IN THE DETENTE ERA

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to study the detente situations of Thailand in the world context, the detente situations of Thailand in Indochina context, and the Thailand's national strategy in the detente era from the cold war. This research used qualitative research method by studying documents and the use of a structured questionnaire to interview experts and information were analyzed using descriptive. The results indicated that confusion and uncertainty of the international structure in the world and Indochina affected to the anarchy to the Thai's nation. Termination of support by USA to Indochina and Southeast Asia, and competition and expand its influence in Indochina, of the Soviet Union and China, including issues of border fighting in Vietnam-Cambodia and issues of border fighting in Cambodia-Thailand, affected to confusing towards the implementation of Thai's strategy extremely. Thailand was careful to support any one super power openly. Thai's strategy continues to live with the situation that occurred both in world situation and Indochina situation. Therefore, the Thai's national strategies in detente era are two main strategies - Thai's national strategies toward China and Thai's national strategies toward domestic issue. The purposes of Thai's national strategies were to national security, balance of power that world powers, threat from the communism in Indochina, relations between Thailand and China in the past breakup, increasing relationship between Thailand and China, reducing the sponsorship and event of communist party of China toward communist party of Thailand, and a cut of revolution situation of the communism in Thailand. The implementations of the Thai's national strategies in detente era leads to the increase in the national power including national security, military power, economic power, social power, and technology power.

**Keyword:** Thailand national strategy, Thailand security, The detente era

## Introduction

The decade of 1970s saw changes in international situation in the world, resulting in uncertainty in the international relation of the world great powers: the United States and Soviet Union were suspicious about each other. In addition, in 1975, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam were completely communist. In late 1970s, Soviet Union invaded in many regions in the world. The United States tried very hard to prohibit such an act using the strategy of “horizontal war expansion” in 1972 in order to link Europe and Asia Pacific. In 1975, the United States reduced its role in Indochina while communism expanded into the region. Vietnam also relied on Soviet Union to expand its influence in Indochina, making China grow cautious about the expansion of Vietnamese influence. Another key factor was the conflicting political ideology between the United States and Soviet Union. Besides, China and Soviet Union also had territorial issues. They both used the strategy of sieging each other. To clarify, Soviet Union sieged China by building and expanding the barriers in as many ways as possible, for example, on the east and south side of China. On the contrary, China responded by creating the global allies such as the United States, Japan, Western European countries, and some Third World countries.

Before 1980s, Soviet Union stabilized communism both in the country itself and overseas such as ally countries under its command while the United States tried every way it could to stop the expansion of

communism. From late 1980s to early 1990s, the United States became less serious about its effort to restrain the expansion of communism. One of the observations was that the United States began to build relationship with China. The western giant agreed to negotiate the reduction of nuclear weapon. At the same time, Soviet Union also became less serious about expanding its communist influence. However, when the United States lost the Vietnam War, it announced to play fewer roles in Southeast Asia. In the meantime, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia changed their regime to socialism communist in 1975. When Vietnam marched its armies to take control in Cambodian territory in 1978, the Vietnamese action was a big concern to Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries.

When Vietnam invaded and took Cambodia from 1978 to 1979, Soviet Union encroached on Afghanistan in 1979, and the United States competed with Soviet Union in strategic defense initiative (SDI), Thailand needed to adjust national strategy to suit the international situation, an external environment. Thailand had to adapt itself, from only developing a relationship with powerful country like the United States to having one with China and Soviet Union for its security. During 1980-1988, Thailand applied such strategies that maintained national security from external threats as the invasions of Vietnam and powerful countries. The strategies could also alleviate internal threats such as the uprising of people disagreeing with the regime led by

the Community Party of Thailand. Some of the strategies Thailand used were national strategy of Thai state toward China and national strategy of Thai state on the solution of internal problems.

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate the detente situation of Thailand in the global context
2. To investigate the detente situation of Thailand in the context of Indochina
3. To investigate Thai national strategies in the detente era

## **Limitations in the Study**

This study employs the concept of strategies and other related sciences in the present to study the implementations in the past. However, the body of knowledge in the past had not been applied. Therefore, there are limitations in that it is difficult to make a conclusion for all bodies of knowledge in strategies and related science at this time.

## **Benefit of the Study**

1. Knowledge in the detente situation
2. Knowledge in the Thailand implementations and national strategies in the detente era that have impact on Thailand national security
3. Data in the study is useful for educational institutes that have courses about strategy and national security, or other related sciences. Interested persons can also apply the knowledge to learn about strategies and

security.

## **Literature Review**

### **The balance of power theory / by Waltz**

The balance of power theory concerns the structure and anarchy (a state of a country without government) when powerful countries take control of international relation management. If the powerful countries change the balance of power, the structure system will change accordingly. The structure system will be stable only in the state or anarchy with the system to control the balance of power. Anarchic state in the international society has the characteristics of “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” or it could be a state of war. In time of anarchy, it is not possible to trust any single state but its own. The state, thus, has to be self-dependent and as little dependent on other states as possible. The priority goal of the state is to survive. The international structural system is what controls the state and it is something that the state cannot avoid. In order to maintain its national security, the balance of power is a must. Such can be done by becoming in alliance with other states to prevent one state from becoming more powerful than the state, or joining stronger states to maintain its own security (Waltz, 1979).

### **The agenda setting theory**

Agenda setting can be caused by different streams such as problem stream, political stream, and policy stream. These three

streams are free from each other, yet they had to meet at the same time. First of all, the problem stream focuses on public interest and that of the policymaker. It is often a specific social problem. Secondly, the political stream concerns the stream that political group or government defines and the issues of which deserve solution. The issues of the problem will be formed or defined as a result of the reaction of key factors in the society. Thirdly, the policy stream involves agenda setting, decision making, or assigning alternatives. Most of the people doing agenda or alternative setting for policymakers are usually hidden cluster.

### **The national strategy setting theory**

The national strategy involves the exercise of the entire power of the nation in order to achieve the goal and to define the overall strategy or mega-strategy that leads to national policy, using the process that primarily consists of 3 elements: ends, ways and means. All these are to be done considering possibility, acceptance, appropriateness, as well as performing risk assessment in order to obtain the most complete national strategy (Yarger, 2006). The complete strategy consists of national goal, setting mega-strategy or strategic vision, and defining national strategy in the form of rough guidelines about the overall role in pursuit of and monitoring national benefits (Yarger, 2006). To set the national strategy that has to relate with tricks for applying the strategy elements in order to achieve the

objectives of the strategy before defining the national strategy requires that one consider the ends clearly (possibility to achieve the objectives). When the success is clearly seen, it is now the time to define the ends of the strategy, ways to do it, the means required for doing so (Bartholomees, 2006), as well as the tricks.

### **Research methodology**

This research presents Thailand national strategies in the detente era during 1978-1988 and other period of time that affected Thailand national security under the conflicting political ideologies between capitalist and communist countries. Qualitative research approach was used by studying from documents such as textbooks, research articles, analysis from Thai and foreign languages, as well as seminar handouts compiled by international affair experts. The study also applied structured review from experts having important roles in using Thailand strategies in the detente era having impact on national security. Research results were presented using qualitative data analysis approach.

### **Results**

#### **Thailand detente situation in the global context**

Research found that Thailand used a method of political siding to maintain its stability by joining with a strong capitalist nation, the United States, in 1960-1970, and saw this as a counterpoise to the influential power

of socio-communism, as it seeks for the balance between the two competing powers. During that time, the world had become politically bipolar and had been divided into two by two different political ideologies: socio-communism and capitalism. Such division had caused anarchy in South-East Asian region including Thailand and other states. While some states decided to be under the dominance of socio-communism, other states that were afraid of such influence as well as the domino theory had decided to side with the capitalist world, the United States, not just to ensure their national stabilities, but also to receive financial supports from the United States and incomes in exchange with their military supports. In the following decade, during 1970-1980, the confusion and instability in the international political structures on the global level as well as the anarchic situation still remained, yet Thailand's strategic response to the situation has been deemed successful in balancing the two competing powers.

#### **Thailand detente situation in the Indochina context**

By siding with a strong capitalist nation, the United States, in 1960-1970, Thailand was able to maintain its national stability and balance the two powers in Indochina region. Due to the political fragmentation into two major ideologies: communism and liberalism, a state of disorder and anarchy was to be seen in Indochina region and throughout South-East Asia. While some states decided to be under

the dominance of communism, other states that were afraid of such influence as well as the domino theory had decided to side with the liberal world, the United States, not just to ensure their national stabilities, but also to receive financial supports from the United States and incomes in exchange with their military supports. In 1970-1980, the confusion and instability in the international political structures on the Indochinese level as well as the anarchic situation still remained. On the other hand, the withdrawal of the United States army from the region, the competitive attempt to dominate the region by Soviet and China, and the threat of Malayan communist bandits had posed a challenge to Thailand's strategic planning as they limited Thailand's move to openly support one of the political powers.

#### **Thailand's national strategy in detente period**

This included Thailand's national strategy regarding the Republic of China in detente period and Thailand's national strategy regarding domestic problems. The details are as follow:

##### **Thailand's national strategy regarding the Republic of China in detente period**

Thailand's national strategy regarding the Republic of China in detente period included 3 sub-strategies which were the establishment of diplomatic relationship, political and militaristic cooperation, and royal visits to China by Thai royal family. These 3 sub-strategies may sprung from the shift in the national agenda to national policy after the

national agenda had been realized in 3 categories: problem stream, political stream, and policy stream. The problem stream of the 1st sub-strategy was that Thailand was afraid of the communist influence in Indochina region and the oil crisis within the country while the political stream was about the Thai government's worry in the discontinuation of supports from the United States, changes in the relationship between China and the United States, and the fact that Thai government was shifting from militaristic government to civil government. The policy stream, on the other hand, covered the impact done to Thailand as a result of the changing international political structures on both global and Indochinese level as well as the acceptance of China into the United Nations that required Thailand to change its attitude towards China.

Talking about the political and militaristic cooperation between Thailand and China, the problem stream of such agenda was the oil crisis and the fact that Communist Party of Thailand was seen as a threat to the national stability. The political stream, on the other hand, looked at the sluggish diplomatic relationship between China and Thailand from the political crises within both countries while the policy stream focused on the long-term stability of Thai government.

The problem stream of the strategy involved royal visits to China by Thai royal family was the citizens' lack of understanding in the reason behind the establishment of diplomatic relationship with China by the Thai

government. As it takes two to tango, the political stream reflected on the fact that Chinese government also sought for diplomatic relationship with Thailand to show a sign of "being a good friend" by sending an invitation to the royal court for the royal family to pay China a visit. This had led the policy stream that encouraged the establishment and development in international diplomacy between Thailand and China.

### **Thailand's strategy in the establishment of diplomatic relationship**

The strategy can be divided into 2 stages: unofficial and official. During 1971-1973, the objectives or the "ends" of Thailand being engaged in diplomatic relationship with China may be that it sought to preserve its stability and sovereignty. Siding with China that possessed a great economic and military strength ensured Thailand could counterpose the influence of the United States and Soviet over the country while also shielding itself from the threats posed by communist parties inside Indochina region such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Thailand, therefore, used diplomatic solutions as the ways and means to achieve its desired results. These included press conference, personal meeting between the first Premier of the People's Republic of China Zhou Enlai and Waiwai Phathanothai, a Thai politician brought up under the auspices of Zhou Enlai, table tennis and badminton competition.

Thailand's strategy in the establishment of diplomatic relationship with China became official in the later stage (1974-1975). This stage included diplomatic mission led by Thai leaders Maj.Gen. Chatichai Choonhavan (his rank at that time) and M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, international negotiation between the leaders of both countries: M.R. KukritPramoj, Deng Xiaoping (Vice Premier), and Mao Zedong (China's Leader), and the signing of joint declaration of recognition in 1975 by Kukrit and Chinese premier Zhou Enlai which marked an important step in Thailand's diplomatic affairs by becoming a good friend with the world's superpower and ending any misconception about China since 1949. China, too, saw this as its diplomatic success.

### **Political Collaboration and Military Partnership Strategies**

The political collaboration and military partnership strategies can be divided into 2 parts. The first part took place from 1977 to 1978, with the goal (ends) of reconnecting the relationship between Thailand and China that had been disconnected from 1976 to 1977. The strategy was also meant to balance the power between the United States and Soviet Union as well as prohibiting the invasion of Vietnam forces in Indochina. The second part of political collaboration and military partnership during 1978-1998 had the goal (ends) of having China reduce its party-to-party support between the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Thailand. Developing

the relationship with China was the way that Thailand used to comply with the political collaboration and military partnership strategies during 1977-1978 to reconnect the disconnected relationship during 1976-1977 and to bar the influence of Vietnamese power. The collaboration also helped in balancing the power with the United States and Soviet Union. Military partnership was the way during 1978-1988 in order to balance the power between the United States and Soviet Union, so that China reduced its party-to-party support between the Communist Party of China and the Communist Party of Thailand and maintained long-term relationship by using ambassadors as means for negotiating with ASEAN countries, as well as the United States and China. Using diplomatic negotiation could also be regarded as a way to place pressure on Vietnam and join alliance with the world in solving problems in Cambodia in a peaceful manner. The way to do this was to develop a long-term security partnership with China. Thailand used military forces and military diplomats as the means by sending military diplomats to work at the Embassy in Beijing and communicating through military diplomat at the level of military leader during 1984-1988. In an effort to reduce the support of the Communist Party of China to the Communist Party of Thailand, Thailand used military diplomacy as the means for communicating between ChaiZemin (China's military leader) and General KriangsakChamnan (Thailand's Supreme Commander) in 1976. After that,

China announced to stop its role in the internal affairs of Thailand and would not support the war between Thai government and the Communist Party of Thailand.

### **Paying a royal visit to China by the royal family**

The strategy included the royal visit on May 12-20, 1981 by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn during detente period (1980-1988). The visit happened after China had sent an invitation to the royal family, aiming to build an international relationship through the supreme leaders of each country. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn accepted the invitation and met with Deng Xiaoping. This reflects the meeting between 2 “highest” leaders as Deng Xiaoping was the supreme leader of the Communist Party of China while Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn came from the royal family which is considered the highest circle in Thailand. By having a member from the royal family as a diplomat also means that Thailand sincerely respects China and its leader and that China would not hesitate to trust and believe that Thailand is one good friend. The visit focused more on arts, culture and society rather than politics and could not be successfully achieved without royal diplomacy.

### **Thailand's strategy in response to the domestic problems**

Thailand's strategy in response to the domestic problems in detente period

included the strategic action to end the attempt to start a communist revolution by those communist parties. Such strategic action may spring from the shift in the national agenda to national policy after the national agenda had been realized in 3 categories: problem stream, political stream, and policy stream. The problem stream that led to the action was the division among Thai citizens into 2 groups which were those that supported Thai government and those that supported the Communist Party of Thailand. The political stream, in the same vein, was the instability in the democratic regime as a result from the expansion of influential communism. The policy stream of the action, therefore, focused on the elimination of those who were declared “terrorists” by the government of Gen. Kriangsak Chamanan, which was part of the 4 government policies dealing with corruption, deforestation, drugs, and the aforementioned terrorists that the government saw as the most urgent issue.

The objective of the strategic action to end the attempt to start the communist revolution was to eliminate the people that may or may not be the member of the Communist Party of Thailand, who seek to overthrow the democratic form of government with the King as Head of State and, adopt a socialist communist regime instead. The government saw these people and their objective as threats to the nation and therefore came up with a response or way to deal with them. The response can be divided into 2 stages – before

and after the implementation of Order 66/23.

### **Implementation before Order 66/23**

The anti-communist implementation in this part was before the Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 was issued on "Policy Overcoming Communism". The implementation took place during 1977-1980, primarily aiming to tackle 4 internal problems under the leadership of General Kriangsak Chamanan, General Prem Tinsulanonda (Deputy Minister of Interior and Deputy Commander-in-Chief) played a part in addressing terrorism problem. In this case, oppressing the communist activities was considered the top priority that deserved to be addressed. Politics before military was the way to achieve that, with diplomatic negotiation and military as the means to support the strategic executions. The four steps of implementation included psychological mission, peacemaking project, encouraging the social community to fight against communism, promoting each village by launching volunteer doctors and Saea Pa Phu Phan Project. After implementing with such way, it was found that the tricks used were to develop a close relationship with people, encouraging them to stop supporting communist terrorists, educating pros and cons of communism, helping them solve the sufferings in the critical areas, educating them to be able to protect themselves, providing medical aids, and addressing unemployment of the new graduates. All these were the tricks to prevent those who had not joined the communist party from

being lured by and joining them, and so that the communist activists stop supporting and leave the party, as well as limiting the number of communist joiners and even reducing the number of communist activists.

### **Implementation of Order 66/23**

The implementation of Order 66/23 was the way to end the communist revolution. It was the national strategy implemented during the government led by General Prem Tinsulanonda, the former prime minister. It was the continual works from the solution to terrorism unfinished while General Kriangsak Chamanan was the prime minister. The order was executed in the form of the Prime Minister's Command numbered 66 of 1980 or commonly known as 66/23. The command was given on April 23, 1980. The content of this command was to finally put an end to the communist revolution in Thailand in a peaceful manner. The means to do so included diplomatic negotiation, military, and information tactics. The ways to achieve that goal were the use of intelligence and destruction of the Communist Party of Thailand. Intelligence mission enabled the government to know how the Communist Party of Thailand would do the revolution as well as its goal. The destruction of the Communist Party of Thailand applied 4 steps of strategy including using the forest as the strategic base, the operation in the city, the destruction of armed forces of the Communist Party of Thailand, and the destruction of the communist movement. The

ways to achieve those included the following tricks.

1. Using intelligence units enabled the government to know how the Communist Party of Thailand would do the revolution and to counterstrike the execution of the Party.

2. Changing the forest into the strategic base to make the Communist Party of Thailand worry and anxious. It was how the government discouraged the armed forces of Communist Party of Thailand without the actual fight.

3. Military mission was also implemented. However, the mission was not conducted by the full force. The armed forces of the Communist Party of Thailand lost and surrendered. The captives were prisoners of war, but they were called "Thailand Co-developer" instead of war hostage. They were made democratic mission executors in order to avoid liability. Proceeding and suppression were not used. Instead, the government chose to use the moral and political measure to deal with the communist party. In the past, the Communist Party of Thailand employed the political measure against the government while each of the former governments employed legal and military measures against the Party. This explained why the previous governments were unable to destroy the movement of the communist party. Therefore, this strategy brought an end to the war very quickly, brought back democracy in a peaceful manner instead of legal and physical suppression by military

forces.

4. In the destruction of the activists joining the communist party, the government made a promise to the party that Thailand would work on politics in a more concrete manner. The government proclaimed the Prime Minister's Order numbered 65 of 1982 on political pro-active plan or commonly known as "Order 65/25", the Political Pro-active Plan. Despite the probable long operation time, it guaranteed to the communist activists that Thailand would develop true democracy in the future.

### **National Security and Benefits after the Strategic Implementation**

The strategic implementations of Thailand toward China during the detente era including diplomatic relationship development, political and military strategies, and the royal visits to China of Thai royal family were the actions that could maintain the national security and benefits in many ways. The increase in Thailand national military and security resulted in strategic and weaponry collaboration that Thailand received from the military empowerment in 3 aspects. First of all, the Communist Party of China ceased its military support by not giving for free or selling at "friendly" prices to the Communist Party of Thailand. Secondly, after the diplomatic reconnection on June 1, 1975, economic relationships between Thailand and China expanded in all dimensions. For example, there had been bilateral investments between both

countries and the investments of Chinese government in Thailand, as well as other cooperation, especially signing the trade agreement, setting the target of trading each year, and the review of inter-trade problems and solutions. Signing of trade agreement was truly the force that drove the expansion of trading between the two countries. Thirdly, Thailand and China did increase their social and technology powers. The governments of both nations joined hands in many ways, including signing many agreements as the cooperation frameworks. For example, they had signed the science and technology agreement on marine logistics in 1979, the agreement on civil aviation, the agreement on cultural, religion, and athletic exchange, as well as the visits between the people of both countries which brought about social exchange between Thailand and China.

The implementation of anti-communist strategies was how Thailand could preserve its national security and benefits. After implementing the strategies, the country became secure by enhancing social power that discouraged and put an end to the effort of communist activists trying to change Thailand from a democratic state to a communist one. The strategies allowed the communist party activists, allies, and armed forces to leave the forest and came home. It also reduced the power of high activists of the communist party until it lost the power to ever again bring back communism, and left the Communist Party with just the name, but no people to

support it.

## Discussion

Thailand took side with strong states with the purpose to maintain its national security by joining with the United States during 1960-1970 to balance the power in Indochina because of the two extreme systems: communism and the liberal world. The war of different ideologies resulted in anarchy in Indochina, as well as Southeast Asia. Some states joined the communist side while others were scared of communist influences according to the domino theory, and thus joined the liberal world. During 1970-1980, it was the time of confusion and uncertainty between the structures in the global scale and in Indochina, resulting in anarchy almost all the time. The retreat of the United States from Indochina and Southeast Asia, the competition between China and Soviet Union to expand their influences to Indochina, the territory fights between Vietnam and Cambodia, and border shootings between Cambodia and Thailand were clouding the strategies of Thailand. Thailand could not openly support any specific state. The implementation of strategies of Thailand depended on the situation going on globally and regionally. The strategy of developing the relationship with China in the same time as Vietnam taking place under the leadership of General Kriangsak Chamanan was successful at the beginning. However, when Vietnam invaded and took control of Cambodia (Khmers Rouges) in 1979 forced Thailand to

take side with China in order to negotiate with Vietnam and keep balance between the United States and Soviet Union. This action can be said to go along with the balance of power theory (Kennet N. Waltz, 1979). The international structure certainly affected the structure in Thailand, as well as those states with anarchic situation. In order to solve the problem, the balance of power is the answer. Something that a state should do is joining the alliance with other states in order to prevent one state from becoming too powerful. Taking side with a stronger state could be a good choice. In this case, Thailand chose to take side with powerful state for the main goal of preserving national security. In addition, setting the policy agenda agrees with the concept and theory of public policy setting theory (John W. Kingdon, 2003). In this case, Thailand had taken into consideration triggering mechanism received from external factors and domestic factors that lead to the policy. The streams that lead to national policy and strategies were problem stream, political stream, and policy streams. These streams are free from each other, but they finally meet at the end. Thailand national strategies during the detente era agree with the strategic concept of ends, ways, means, and tricks to implement the strategies.

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