THAILAND'S FOREIGN RELATIONS IN PERSPECTIVE

THESIS

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By

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The purpose of this thesis is to study Thailand's foreign relations. The specific argument will be that, to a large extent, Thailand was able to keep her independence because of her rulers' ability to adapt the country's policy to the changing circumstances in foreign affairs. Therefore, it was imperative for policymakers to look at the threats to the country's security from the local point of view and to develop appropriate policies for dealing with them accordingly.

The thesis is organized into six chapters. After the introductory chapter, the second and third chapters examine the historical development and the general features of the foreign relations of Thailand, respectively. Chapter Four deals with the change in the direction of foreign policy after the Second World War. In contrast to the traditional foreign policy, the government under military dictatorship gradually moved in the direction of the Western, especially American, position. The positive and negative consequences of the pro-American policy are treated in Chapter Five. It is pointed out that this policy contributed to the sharp increase in activity of Communist insurgents in various parts of the country. By comparing the post-war foreign policy with the
traditional policy prior to that time, a conclusion can be drawn that Thailand is better off with her traditional method in dealing with foreign powers. That is, under normal circumstances she should maintain friendly relations with other countries but should not become too closely involved and identified with any foreign power in particular.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On March 20, 1976, the government of Thailand asked the United States to withdraw 4,000 remaining American servicemen and to close down its military installations within the next four months. The Thai Government's decision to ask Americans to leave was taken after a breakdown in negotiations between the U.S. Ambassador and the civilian Prime Minister of Thailand.\(^1\) To many people, this event could be viewed as the formal termination of the close relationships between the United States and Thailand.

This decision should not be interpreted, however, as a desire to cease having friendly relations with America. Nor should it be seen as Thailand's attempt to placate the Communist states of Indochina. As the Thai Premier at the time, Mr. Kukrit Pramoj, has pointed out, "The reason behind our action was not to curry favor with the various countries in Indochina. We have done what was right and fair for us."\(^2\) Rather, what happened was an indication of Thailand's desire to maintain peaceful and friendly relations with all other countries without favoring any one in particular. This approach is in line with her traditional foreign policy.

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\(^2\)Ibid., p. 15.
In general, the purpose of this thesis is to study Thailand's foreign relations. The specific argument will be that Thailand was able to keep her independence in the past because of her rulers' ability to adapt the country's policy to the changing circumstances in foreign affairs. In the process, it was imperative for Thai policy-makers to look at the threats to the country's security from the Thai point of view and to develop appropriate policies for dealing with them accordingly. This tradition in foreign affairs had been consistently maintained prior to the end of the Second World War.

After the war many Southeast Asian countries tried to gain independence from the Western colonialists. By contemporary standards, this was a justifiable enterprise, since it was an anachronism to have a country ruled by foreigners in the middle of the twentieth century. When a country wants to shake off its colonial shackles, it does not really matter where assistance to that worthwhile aim comes from. Hence, the so-called Communist threat to the Free World notion should not have caused much concern for Thailand because these former colonial people wanted to liberate their countries from foreign domination. In this sense, it was a mistake for Thailand to accept and act on the Western notion of the nature of the threat to her national security.
This study will proceed in the following way. In order to have a better understanding of a country's present, it is necessary to look at its past. Chapter Two describes the historical development of Thailand and its people from the thirteenth century to October, 1973. Through the years three things stood out as the most important elements that contributed to the maintenance of Thailand's independence and the unity of its people. These were the ability of most Thai Kings, the use of the same language, and the prevalence of Buddhism as the national religion. However, there was a change in the nature of one of these elements in 1932 when the system of absolute monarchy was overthrown by a group of Western-educated military and civilian officials. Officially, from that time on, Thailand was supposed to be governed under the system of constitutional monarchy in which public policy is made by popularly-elected representatives. But in reality the country was under a system of military dictatorship for most of the time.

Chapter Three examines Thailand's foreign relations from the thirteenth century to the end of the Second World War. Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, Thailand and Burma were the predominant powers of the region. Contacts with Westerners were sporadic, and Thailand was preoccupied most of the time with warfare against her neighbors. By the middle of the nineteenth century she had to adopt a new
foreign policy, due to the increased pressure from France and England. King Rama IV laid down the new approach for dealing with the aggressive Western powers. By not becoming too closely involved with any foreign power, he was able to preserve Thailand's independence while all of her neighbors became colonies.

In Chapter Four, emphasis is given to the change in the direction of Thai foreign policy. After the outbreak of the Korean War, Thailand began moving closer to the Western camp. A series of military and economic agreements were concluded with the United States. Thailand also emerged as a strong supporter of SEATO in the 1950's. But she did not reject contacts with Communist countries in Asia and elsewhere. In substance, this approach was not different from the traditional policy of not becoming too closely involved with any particular foreign power. The military coup in 1957 changed all this, and Thailand was on its way to becoming one of the most staunchly anti-Communist countries in Asia.

During the period from 1963 to 1973 Thailand became an active partner of the United States. The last part of Chapter Four deals with Thailand's relations with other nations, especially with the United States. From 1963 on, the military government supported American policy in Indochina. This was done despite the lack of danger from either without or within. In the process, Thailand allowed the
United States to build six new air bases to be used for the bombing of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. She also sent troops to help the right-wing factions in Laos and Vietnam. In essence, Thailand's support of the United States' Indochina policy was steady throughout the ten year period under consideration.

Chapter Five deals with the positive and negative consequences of Thailand's anti-Communist policy. There were several benefits as a consequence of her association with the American policy in Indochina. The most visible were political, military, and economic. On the other hand, Thailand had to pay a price for cooperating with the United States. That is, prior to the government's decision to give active and unequivocal support to American undertakings in Indochina there was practically no activity by Communist insurgents. Nevertheless, the Thai government adopted an explicit pro-American policy with little regard to repeated warnings from Peking and Hanoi as to the serious consequences of such policy. Subsequently, Communist insurgents began appearing in various parts of the country and there was a proliferation of armed clashes with the police and army forces. It was clear that the problem of insurgency, which has remained one of the most serious internal problems up to the present time, occurred as a result of the military government's pro-American policy. Included in the last part of this chapter is a brief examination of the Thai Communists.
The last chapter of this thesis is a brief assessment of Thailand's foreign relations. Historically, Thailand was able to cope with threat of invasion and subjugation by her neighbors because there was not much difference in terms of the level of technology and the number and capability of troops among various Southeast Asian countries. The coming of Westerners in the nineteenth century drastically altered the character of relations among the countries in the area. Equipped with advanced technology and weaponry, the Europeans were able to defeat, militarily and politically, almost all of the Asian countries. The threat to Thailand's independence in the last century was very real indeed. In contrast, the Communist menace of the middle of the twentieth century was not as serious. It was unfortunate that the Thai military government followed the Western policy of anti-Communism with little regard to the more practical policy of not becoming too closely involved with any foreign power.
CHAPTER II

AN EXAMINATION OF THAI HISTORY

This chapter's main concern is with Thailand's historical development from the thirteenth century to 1973. In particular, emphasis will be given to Thai politics from 1932 on.

Thailand Before the Twentieth Century

The Sukothai Kingdom, which lasted from 1238 to 1378 A.D. is generally regarded as the beginning of the unification of Thai people as a group.¹ In that time span of approximately 140 years Sukothai "has been called the cradle of Siamese civilization."² Of all the rulers of the Kingdom the most famous was Ramkamhaeng, who "brought under control nearly the whole of present day Thailand after the Thais had been in Indochina for barely three centuries."³ In addition to being a renowned warrior, Ramkamhaeng was superb in other respects as well. Perhaps the second most significant contribution he made to the Thai nation, after the unification


³Chula, Lords of Life, p. 25.
of the country and the people, was his creation of the "first complete T'ai alphabet, in A.D. 1283, which, with some changes, is in use to the present day." Indeed, the Thai people owed an incalculable debt to him for these two great accomplishments because without land and language there would be no Thailand as she is known today.

An important element that helped the Thais to stick together through the years was religion. Already before Ramkamhaeng's times, Buddhism was the predominant religion among the people. During his reign, Ramkamhaeng made a treaty with Ceylon, which was the center of Hinayana Buddhism in Asia, and consequently, "many priests came from that island to reside in Siam and preached the pure doctrine which resulted in the revival of the religion to a still greater degree." Thus, it can be seen by this time that the Thai people as a group had already possessed three elements which were essential for the existence of national unity; namely, the place to live, the language to communicate with one another, and a definite belief system.

Ramkamhaeng's successors were men of lower caliber and thus were unable to hold the Sukothai Kingdom together the way it had been done up until 1317. However, according to Nuechterlein, "by the middle of the fourteenth century a

4Ibid., p. 25.
5Ibid., p. 25.
new and powerful Thai kingdom had grown up to the south, at
Ayutia, which was located in the middle of the Chao Pya
Valley, some fifty miles from the Gulf of Siam."

The new Thai kingdom at Ayudhya proved itself to be a
strong one soon after it was found by extending control over
the central portion of present-day Thailand and over much of
the Malay peninsula. A number of rulers of Ayudhya further
contributed to the growth of the country. There were also
others who failed in their jobs and one of these men was to
be responsible for the ultimate downfall of the Thai capital
at Ayudhya in 1767. In that year the war between Thailand
and Burma came to an end when the latter sacked the Thai
capital. The extent of damage inflicted on the city by the
Burmese was so extensive that Ayudhya was, for all practical
purposes, useless after it "had been the capital of Siam for
417 years under 33 monarchs." But the resiliency of the Thais soon proved itself after
the loss at Ayudhya. Obviously the ruler along with language
and religion were the three major elements which were essen-
tial for the preservation of the nation. The fall of Ayudhya
was due in large measure to the ineptness of one element,
the monarch, while the other two had remained pretty much as

6 Donald E. Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for
Southeast Asia (New York, 1965), p. 3.
7 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 165.
8 Chula, Lords of Life, p. 69.
before. The monarch, however, was a crucial catalyst without which the other two would be rather meaningless. And the monarch alone was less effective than when he was able to utilize the positive effects of language and religion. But with a combination of these three elements Thailand was a complete whole in which the people could live, work, and find happiness together. In this respect, the country and the people were fortunate to find in Praya Taksin, a soldier in the old capital, the qualities of a strong leader.

After the fall of Ayudhya, Praya Taksin established himself as head of one of the many independent groups with the ultimate purpose of reunifying the country. Taksin was so successful in his mission that by 1777, only a decade after the fall of the old capital, he was able to eliminate all other rival factions and even the Burmese were driven back into their own territory. Unfortunately for Taksin, long years of constant battles had caused him to become somewhat less than stable by 1782. One of Taksin's deputies, Chakri, was then chosen by other deputies as the country's new ruler and he became the first king of the Chakri dynasty in April, 1782.

Along with the new king a new capital was set up at Bangkok which had previously been just a major port city. The first king of the House of Chakri, Rama I, was faced with two basic tasks at the outset of his reign. According
to Chula, "one was to make the country safe from future
invasions, and the other was to revive the T'ai heritage
of Sukot'ai and Ayudhya." By all indications, these two
aims had been achieved by the end of Rama I's reign. But,
as Chula has noted, although Rama I "was the Founder of
the Dynasty for his family, for the T'ai people at large
he was the Restorer of what they should have inherited from
their ancestors."10

The first ruler of the House of Chakri died in 1809.
His successor, Rama II, inherited a relatively secure nation
except for occasional minor conflicts with Burma. Rama II's
interests lay chiefly in the realm of the arts. As a result,
artistic and cultural activities flourished through to the
end of Rama II's reign in 1824.

Domestically, the reign of Rama III (1824-1851) was
very similar to the previous one. In governing the country,
Rama III's administrative patterns followed the line set
out by his two predecessors by separating the country into
two main parts, the north and the south, both having head-
quarters in Bangkok. Within these two, the territory was
divided into major and minor provinces, but governors of
major provinces were allowed to have relative autonomy over
people in their jurisdictions.11 The government had three

9 Ibid., p. 85.
10 Ibid., p. 85.
11 Ibid., p. 149.
sources of revenue; namely, corvée work, tax farming, and the royal monopoly of foreign trade. It was the area of foreign trade that turned out to be of great concern to Rama IV when he took the throne after the death of Rama III in 1851.

Over the years foreigners had gradually become impatient with the Thai monarch's traditional monopoly over the country's foreign trade, and by 1851 it was clear to Rama IV that to insist on maintaining the same foreign trade policy was both dangerous and unrealistic. Therefore, he abandoned the royal prerogative on foreign trade and invited foreign merchants to come in and share in the country's commercial activities. The king was also conscious of the fact that there was no way Thailand could deal successfully with Western countries through her antiquated governmental machinery. With her neighbors fast becoming colonies, Rama IV was well aware that if Thailand wanted to maintain her independence she must modernize. Accordingly, Rama IV, who was more commonly known as King Mongkut, started the policy of employing European experts for the purposes of reorganizing the government services, the education system, and the economy. Moreover, according to Hall,

He had promoted the digging of canals, the construction of roads, shipbuilding, and especially the teaching of foreign languages. He had established a mint in the palace, and from 1861 minted

12 Ibid., pp. 149-150.
flat coins in substitution for the rounded lumps of gold or silver previously in circulation... He had patronized the printing press introduced by Christian missions, constructed buildings in a European style, and began reorganization of the army.\textsuperscript{13}

The significance of Rama IV's efforts to modernize the country lay in the fact that it was he who set the direction toward which his successors would follow with considerable success. By and large, however, King Mongkut's achievements could be found more easily in the field of foreign affairs. This aspect is dealt with in the next chapter.

The long reign of Rama V, or King Chulalongkorn, from 1868 to 1910, was a period in which a great deal of Thai territory was taken away by France and England. But domestically a great many improvements were made in various spheres of society. Some of the most important measures undertaken in Rama V's reign could be briefly outlined here. First of all, there was the abolition of slavery in 1874 which, according to Hall, "though not as harsh as the plantation system of America... its abolition was an obvious essential of the modernizing process."\textsuperscript{14}

The second area of modernization was in the field of education. Prior to Rama V's times, education for those who had the opportunity, which in fact was just a tiny fraction

\begin{itemize}
\item Hall, \textit{A History of South-East Asia}, p. 635.
\item \textit{Tbid.}, p. 636.
\end{itemize}
of the whole population, could be obtained from the monasteries. With foreign specialists' assistance, the Department of Education was set up for the first time in Thailand in the last decade of the nineteenth century and also by this time the first three government schools were established.

The development of a communications system was another important element in the overall development scheme. When King Chulalongkorn came to the throne, the best way to travel in and around Bangkok was through canals. There was no railway to facilitate traveling between Bangkok and other parts of the country. Conflicts with France forced the king and his ministers to speed up the program of building a railway network to link those militarily significant provincial capitals with Bangkok. Thus, a Royal Railway Department was established in the 1890's and by the first decade of the twentieth century there were trains running from Bangkok to more than six major provincial capitals.15

The fourth area of concern was the reform of Thailand's financial system. Beginning with the establishment of the Ministry of Finance in 1892, various steps were taken to make the auditing and accounting systems of the treasury work more efficiently. However, there was one serious problem in this area which would hamper development efforts in

15Ibid., pp. 639-640.
other areas as well because modernization needed money. Money could only come from the royal treasury, which in turn obtained the revenue from domestic taxation and the collection of import-export duties. According to Chula, "because of increased trade and prosperity, imports simply pouring in, Siam was not able to raise legitimate revenue by increasing import duties as she was bound by her treaty obligations with Western powers to keep them at three percent."\textsuperscript{16}

There were also reforms in the legal and administrative systems. Taken together, the modernization efforts of Rama V were not successful in every respect, of course. But Thailand at the end of his reign, in 1910, was substantially different from what she had been in 1868. By selective consideration it might be argued that some other Asian countries under foreign rule were being developed and modernized to a greater degree than Thailand. In other words, as Cady has pointed out, "in 1902, a retiring British education officer argued . . . that British rule could transform Siam in half a generation, multiplying its wealth."\textsuperscript{17} But what good did it do if the multiplied wealth of a nation belonged not to the natives but to foreign rulers? In this sense, Hall was basically correct in his observation that

\textsuperscript{16}Chula, Lords of Life, p. 241.

\textsuperscript{17}John F. Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development (New York, 1964), p. 495.
in the light of later developments, and against the background of deeply ingrained traditionalism, one may assess the achievements of Chulalongkorn's reign as truly remarkable. And if one refuses to attribute to him personally the zeal for reform that his admirers have parised in somewhat exaggerated terms, the fact remains that the real progress that was made was possible only through the exercise of his absolute power.\textsuperscript{18}

Thai Politics in the Twentieth Century

1900-1932

Among the many modernization programs initiated by King Chulalongkorn, political reform, in the sense that national policies were made by the people's representatives, was not one of them. Nor did his two successors move substantially in that direction. Therefore, it has been easy to blame Rama VI and Rama VII for their failures to begin the process of political reform. This failure, of course, was used by the European-educated Thais as a primary justification for their abolition of absolute monarchy through a revolution in June, 1932. To be fair to these two kings, it may be useful to consider briefly the nature of their reigns.

When he came to the throne in 1910, Rama VI was the first king in Thailand's history who had been educated in Europe. The use of foreign specialists as advisors to the king in various ministries was continued up until the end of the First World War when returning students from Europe and

\textsuperscript{18}Hall, \textit{A History of South-East Asia}, p. 642.
America began replacing Western specialists in increasing number. One consequence of this replacement of key personnel in the Thai bureaucracies was that more and more Western-educated Thais found themselves in powerful positions. Thus, little by little, many of them became dissatisfied and frustrated with Rama IV's policies. The King himself did much to alienate these dissatisfied officials. According to Cady, Rama VI "depleted the privy purse of the palace by extravagant expenditures on tours and state functions and imposed no curbs on official corruption and inefficiency."19

Discontent among officials grew into attempts to assassinate the King in 1912. This plan did not materialize. The second attempt to unseat Rama VI occurred in 1917 because the pro-German elements in the army were opposed to the King's pro-allied policy.20 Again, the attempt failed. Probably as a reaction to these attempts, Rama VI tried to tighten the system of royal absolutism and this reactionary policy, according to Hall, was "a contributing factor in bringing about the constitutional crisis of 1932."21

Rama VI's achievements in domestic matters were relatively modest in comparison to foreign affairs. Nevertheless, his domestic policy helped bring about many kinds of modern

19 Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 496.
20 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 759.
21 Ibid., p. 759.
institutions and practices and fostered more up-to-date ideas on a number of matters among the general population.

The irony of the reigns of Rama VI and Rama VII was that while the threats from the aggressive Western powers were almost completely absent, the danger to the system of royal absolutism from within began building up with increasing speed. The source of internal danger came principally from those Thais who were sent abroad, mostly on the government's scholarships, to study. It was inevitable that, in addition to the subjects they were studying, these students would become familiar with the system of government of European countries in which they lived. Paris, France, in particular, was a place where plans to replace Thailand's absolute monarchy with Western-style democracy were laid by a group of ambitious young men who wanted to become Thailand's new rulers.

Perhaps the plan to overthrow royal absolutism in Thailand would not have succeeded had it not been for a number of contributing factors. The first factor was economic in nature while the other had to do with the personalities of the main characters involved. Already mentioned was Rama VI's extravagant use of money which left the royal treasury in a terrible shape by the time Rama VII assumed the throne in 1925. The net result of this overspending was the general weakening of the country's monetary resources at the time when discontented government officials were looking for the shortcomings of the system of royal absolutism.
Another important economic factor which had been partly responsible for the success of the 1932 revolution was the Great Depression. Thailand, like other countries, was not prepared for that sudden economic catastrophe. Even before the great economic depression struck Thailand, a substantial number of bureaucrats had to be removed as a part of the overall plan to improve the treasury. Many more officials, both civilian and military, were eased out when things had gotten worse in 1929. Consequently, these recently laid-off officials were harboring resentment against those whom they thought to have been responsible for their economic plight. Naturally, the system of absolute monarchy and the King stood out conspicuously as the culprits in the eyes of these frustrated officials.

In addition, there were non-economic elements which could be deemed as contributing factors to the success of the revolutionaries. In comparison to the previous kings of the Chakri dynasty before him, Rama VII had a weak personality. He was thirty-four when he ascended the throne in 1925. But upon taking the royal power Rama VII announced that, according to Chula, "... he lacked knowledge and experience in the art of government, and felt himself too young for his heavy task."22 To help him in this process, Rama VII created a Supreme Council which was composed of his half-brothers

22Chula, Lords of Life, p. 302.
and uncles. This Council had weekly meetings and its principal function was to advise the King "on all matters of public and family affairs."23

Although Rama VII was a weak ruler when it came to the question of making some alterations in Thailand's system of government, argued Nuechterlein, "there is reason to believe that if King Prachatipok had been permitted to follow his own political instincts, he would have granted a constitution before the conspirators could take matters into their own hands."24 But it was unfortunate for Rama VII to put too much faith in the Supreme Council's advice. That is, "his uncles and brothers, who could not bring themselves to believe that there was anything untoward in the air, dissuaded him from granting a constitution."25

Rama VII's health had also played a part in the gradual weakening of his grip on the control of government. After having been on the throne for six years, he "was suffering from cataract in both eyes. . . ."26 As a result, Rama VII had to go abroad to receive an eye operation at a time when the country was in need of a decisive leader in the face of the worsening economic situation.

23Ibid., p. 303.

24Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, p. 30.


26Chula, Lords of Life, p. 305.
Another significant non-economic factor which helped bring down Thailand's royal absolutism was the determination of those foreign-educated plotters who felt that the time had come for a major change in the country's political system. In this connection, Nuechterlein has observed that

In a real sense the key men in the June conspiracy were political idealists who believed the time had come for Siam to rid itself of outmoded ideas of kingship. Whether these young liberals were republicans at heart is not entirely clear, for they were willing to retain the monarchy so long as the King agreed to accept a much reduced role; but it is certain that the group of some fifty Siamese students who had returned from France by 1932 was determined to remake Siam politically and was fully prepared to abolish the monarchy if it proved to be a stumbling block to their program. 27

Thus, a combination of these economic and non-economic factors were the main causes for the success of the revolution on June 24, 1932, whereby the King was forced by a group of civil and military officials to grant a provisional constitution to them.

This event was significantly different from the country's traditional way of transferring political power. That is, when the struggle for control of the country occurred, the victor usually became the new king and the losing side was put out of existence. This pattern had occurred regularly throughout Thailand's history from the Sukothai period down to the beginning of the Chakri dynasty.

27Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, p. 30.
Moreover, the revolution of June, 1932, was unprecedented in the sense that the King was forced to give up his power but he still remained King in the eyes of the vast majority of the people. Even the People's Party, as the group of plotters became known, had to take the King's pervasive influence and symbolic value into consideration when it presented to him Thailand's first provisional constitution. Rama VII himself, after having been asked to grant the provisional constitution, had also reminded the People's Party of his significance in terms of relations with other countries when he said that "if I decline to continue in my office as King, the foreign powers will not recognize the new government. This might entail considerable difficulty for the government."  

Political Development Since 1932

Shortly after the 1932 revolution was carried out, some disagreements developed within the leadership circle of the People's Party. Certain members of the group, especially the military faction, were not prepared to go along with the more radical elements on everything the latter proposed. This growing internal disagreement plus the King's warning with regard to foreign powers apparently had some effect on the People's Party's plan. One obvious example was the selection

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28Kenneth P. Landon, Siam in Transition (Shanghai, 1939), p. 10.
of a more conservative member of the group, Praya Manopakorn, as Thailand's first Prime Minister.

The provisional constitution which was reluctantly granted by the King in June, 1932, went into effect for six months. In general, it provided that

... the country was governed by the king, an assembly with a special executive committee which later became the cabinet, and law courts; but the king was reduced to acting only as a figurehead. The provisional assembly consisted of seventy members, appointed by the People's Party.29

Not only did this temporary document serve to legalize the People's Party, it also provided the victor with a basic justification for its hold on newly acquired political power. Six months later the first permanent constitution of Thailand went into effect on December 10, 1932. This constitution was more elaborate than the provisional one in many respects but there was one feature which clearly showed the desire of the People's Party to keep the power to itself. That is, among other things, the first permanent constitution provided that there would be an assembly consisting of two kinds of members. Half of the assembly members were chosen by the electors, who were in turn elected by the people and the general elections were to be held every four years. In theory, the other half of the assembly members was appointed by the King but in fact

29Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, p. 32.
they were chosen by the People's Party on the basis of loyalty and then formally appointed by the King. This practice would continue "until half the eligible voters had completed four years of schooling, or for a maximum of ten years."30 But the fact of the matter was that, as Nuechterlein has pointed out, although "this may have been a sound decision in view of the inexperience of the nation in representative government; but it meant that the ruling political group, the People's Party, could maintain itself in power for at least ten years and perhaps longer."31

Thus, there was no question that the People's Party used democracy as a main justification for taking political power from the monarchy. It may even be granted that some members of that group were sincere in their belief that Thailand would be more rapidly modernized if the people had a voice in the policy-making process. But under normal circumstances, the democratic form of government would flourish in a place where it was sought by the majority of the people. This, however, was simply not the case with Thailand in the 1930's. As soon as political power became more firmly secured in their hands the squabbles between competing factions within the People's Party soon came into the open. And it did not take long before the squabbles grew into major conflicts.

30 Ibid., p. 34.
31 Ibid., p. 34.
For a year after the 1932 revolution, the post of Premier belonged to a conservative member of the group. During that time span the radical members were gradually squeezed out of power. But in June, 1933, a group of army officers who were sympathetic to the radicals staged a successful and bloodless coup d'etat. Fearing that the resurgence of the radical faction might endanger the stability and continuity of the country, one of the King's cousins, who was the commander of the armed forces for all the Northeastern provinces, ordered his troops to march on Bangkok in October, 1933. Fighting broke out between soldiers in Bangkok, who were under the control of officers who just staged a coup, and those from the Northeastern provinces. Blood was spilled on both sides but the Bangkok troops managed to win in the end. Despite a later charge that the King might have had something to do with this incident due to the fact that the rebel leader was one of his cousins, the fact of the matter was that, according to Hall, "throughout the crisis the King had maintained a neutral attitude."\(^{32}\)

After the rebels were eliminated, "in November, 1933, a general election was held in order that the government might seek to counteract the influence of the rebel sympathizers by intensive propaganda."\(^{33}\) It was not really a promising

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\(^{32}\) Hall, \textit{A History of South-East Asia}, p. 765.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 765.
occasion, however, since "less than a tenth of the electorate voted and comparatively few candidates offered themselves for election." Predictably, members of the People's Party secured a majority in the assembly and the group's grip on political power was thus perpetuated.

In January, 1934, Rama VII went abroad to have his eyes operated on. After that he stayed on in England until March, 1935, when he announced his intention to abdicate from the throne. It was the first time since the founding of Bangkok that a king had voluntarily abdicated. Different historians have given different reasons why the King stepped down. Perhaps the best reason for this unprecedented act could be found in the King's letter of abdication itself.

The gist of Rama VII's abdication letter is that the People's Party had not really kept its revolutionary pledge that it wanted to create a truly democratic system of government in Thailand. He decided to accept the People's Party invitation to continue as king under the constitution because he thought the party would reform Thailand's political system in a way similar to democratic practices in Europe. He indicated that he himself was contemplating a reform but he could not carry out his plan soon enough. After the revolution, it became clear to him that the People's Party wanted to keep political power to itself and this, in his opinion, was not

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34 Ibid., pp. 765-766.
what democracy was all about. Further, there were a number of abuses carried out by the government under his name which he tried to correct. When his attempts failed, the King felt he could no longer let the government do to the people things which he himself would not have done when absolute power was solely his. He cooperated with the government with the hope that a true democracy was the People's Party's aim and when this hope did not materialize, he felt he could no longer let his name be used by people who, under the guise of democracy, really wanted to monopolize political power.

After Rama VII's abdication, his nephew, Prince Ananda Mahidol, who was only ten years old, was proclaimed King. Due to his age, a Regency Council was appointed to act in his name until he was older.

From 1935 to 1973, Thailand's form of government had been for most of the time a military dictatorship. To be sure, there were sporadic outbursts of democratic enthusiasm on the rare occasions when elections were allowed to be held. As far as political freedom was concerned, then, the country was not really better off than it had been prior to 1932. For clarity purposes, Thai politics from the 1932 revolution to the student revolution in 1973 may be roughly divided into two periods, one for 1932 to 1957 and the other from 1957 to 1973. Since the three years from 1932 to 1935 have already been described, attention can now be given to political developments after 1935.
The most significant political development from 1935 to 1938 was an increase in the army's influence in the government. Although the planners of the 1932 revolution were predominantly civilian, that crucial undertaking would not have been possible without the army's support. Again, it was the Bangkok troops that saved the government from the advancing rebel army of the Northeast in October, 1933. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the army would become more and more influential as its officers came to the realization that it was they to whom the government must ultimately turn in time of trouble.

In 1938 Praya Pahol, an officer who staged the coup in 1933, bowed out and his place was taken by an ambitious army officer, Phibunsongkram, another member of the People's Party. Being an army officer was a clear advantage to Phibunsongkram when it came to dealing with his civilian counterparts in the government, since his words could be backed up with force.

As Prime Minister, Phibunsongkram initiated various policies which were paradoxical in nature. For example, he began a number of programs which were aimed at revitalizing the feeling of nationalism among the people. First was the change of the country's name from Siam to Thailand which means "the land of the free" in the Thai language. Another measure in the same vein was the government's discriminating actions against the Chinese and other foreigners. These actions
included the tightening of immigration regulation, the limitation of certain occupations to Thais only, the closing down of Chinese schools and newspaper, and the arrest of a number of leading members of the Chinese community. These were two of the most publicized measures designed to increase the people's nationalist consciousness.

In the meantime, the government was also trying to modernize the country by passing certain regulations which were really not in harmony, to say the least, with its plan to revitalize the spirit of nationalism. It must be remembered that Thailand in the late 1930's and 1940's was anything but a Westernized nation and only a very small minority of the people could be said to have known or heard about anything Western. Thus, it came as a big surprise to practically everyone when the government, according to Hall, started a campaign to inculcate Western manners and social practices. Both sexes were required to wear European shoes and hats in public, and a Westernized version of dress was prescribed. Efforts were also made to stop the practice of chewing betel.

Phibunsongkram remained Premier for more than six years before he was forced out by his civilian rivals who had support from the Allies in 1944. After that the dominating political figure was Pridi Panomyong who, in addition to

35 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, pp. 766-767.
36 Ibid., p. 767.
being the principal civilian planner of the 1932 revolution, was the leader of the Free Thai movement operating within the country after December, 1941. In general, the post-war domestic politics could be best characterized as being civilian-dominated, thanks to the fact that the army under Phibunsongkram was, at least formally, on the side of Japan.

In the general election of January, 1946, candidates supporting Pridi won a large majority and, as a result, Pridi himself became Prime Minister. However, the Premiership of Pridi turned out to be short-lived when King Ananda Mahidol died mysteriously from gunshot wounds on June 9, 1946. This incident was a great blow to Pridi's reputation and career because his opponents took advantage of the situation and used it as a weapon to bring him down. It was done because there were widespread rumors that Pridi might know something about the King's death even though the exact circumstances surrounding this incident have never been revealed. Moreover, the Pridi's government was charged with widespread and unbridled corruption. These charges had put tremendous pressure on the Prime Minister and he eventually had to resign in August, 1944.

Another civilian Premier was then chosen but he too came under heavy attack. Most of the charges were the same, minus alleged complicity in the King's death. The civilian government lasted until November 8, 1947, when it was forcibly
overthrown by the army under the leadership of Phibunsongkram. The justification of the coup group's action was the civilian government's failures to improve economic conditions and to stop corruption. It is interesting to note that of the thirty-six leading members of the coup group there were thirty-three army officers, two air force officers, and one from the national police.37

Phibunsongkram then proceeded to legitimize his hold on political power by announcing that new elections would be held and a new constitution was to be drawn up. The military party, however, made a poor showing at the polls in the general elections of January, 1948. The result of this election was that a civilian, Kuang Apaiwong, became Prime Minister. Unfortunately, Mr. Kuang's tenure in office lasted only about two months when he was forced to resign by officers of the coup of 1947. It may have been a puzzle to many observers why Phibunsongkram and his colleagues had to take all those troubles in persuading a civilian to head the government and then dismiss him shortly afterwards when power was clearly in their hands? Nuechterlein has offered the most plausible answer:

It appears that a primary consideration influencing the senior officers who plotted the coup was the negative reaction of foreign powers. First

reports from Washington and London showed that these nations disapproved strongly of the coup and especially the re-emergence of Pibun, who was still in bad repute for his wartime actions. Even the nomination of Kuang as Prime Minister failed to satisfy the British and American governments. Only after the January 1948 elections gave the new government a popular mandate and after the assembly had given Kuang a vote of confidence, did these powers finally extend recognition. Once this was achieved, the military group concluded that the time was ripe for a second coup. At first the U.S. reacted coolly to Pibun's assumption of power, even suspending consideration of Thailand's request for financial assistance; but in May 1948, after Phibun received a vote of confidence in the assembly (when Pibun presented his government to the assembly for a vote of confidence, he received only 70 affirmative votes out of a possible 200; of the remainder, 26 were opposed, 67 abstained, and 37 were absent), the State Department announced U.S. recognition of his government. 38

Although political parties were banned as a consequence of the coup, the position of Phibunsongkram and his colleagues was not entirely secure at this point. There were two attempts to unseat the ruling group by naval officers in 1949 and 1951 respectively. Both turned out to be complete failures. With the outside threat gone, the coup group became increasingly split between the two powerful figures. On one side there was General Phao Sriyanon who was Director of the National Police, and on the other side, there was General Sarit Thanarat who was Commander-in-Chief of the army. Phibunsongkram found himself more and more in the role of a mediator trying to balance the two equally powerful forces.

38Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for South-east Asia, p. 56.
Of course, no one outside this exclusive group was allowed to compete for political power. Thus, this was the political situation in Thailand from 1951 to 1955.

In 1955 Phibunsongkram visited the U.S. and Europe and subsequently returned home with certain ideas on his mind regarding the theory and practice of democracy. It was not clear, however, whether he had been influenced by Western democracy or merely sought a way to escape from the increasing pressure from the other two powerful members of his group, when he announced the legalization of political parties shortly after his return from the West. Consequently, opposition elements were allowed to freely criticize the government and its policy, and a public park was specially designated for those who wanted to express political dissatisfaction and other grievances. Political activities increased tremendously in 1956 and it was announced that general elections were to be held in February, 1957. Thirty-two political parties were already formed and many more were in the stage of coming into existence by January, 1957.

Officially, the party under Phibunsongkram's leadership won a majority in the February, 1957, election. But even before the final result had been made public, charges of fraud and electoral irregularities were widespread in Bangkok and, to a lesser extent, in other provinces. Accordingly, student demonstration and public protest against the election began and after a few days the situation had become so serious
that the government declared a state of national emergency in March. The government justified its action by pointing out that "it was necessary because there were organized groups with foreign support which were attempting to incite unrest in order to overthrow the government." Although there has been no evidence to substantiate this assertion, the event was significant in the history of Thai politics in the twentieth century for three reasons.

It was the first time the people in general and the students in particular staged massive public protests against the ruling group. Secondly, it marked the beginning of the end of the competition for power among major contenders within the coup group of 1947. Thirdly, the incident in 1957 also signaled the ending of the lingering influence of the people, the most notable being Phibunsongkram himself, who had initiated political change in 1932.

It was relatively clear by this time that Phibunsongkram's role as a mediator between the chiefs of the police and the army had become untenable. Nevertheless, "it was in the midst of this confusion that Phibun's last cabinet was formed, with Marshal Sarit (he was recently promoted) as Defense Minister and General Phao as Minister of the Interior." In spite of

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the appointments, it was evident that the fragile coalition was breaking up when, as Brimmell has argued, "in August, Marshal Sarit resigned . . . on the grounds that he believed the government to have lost popular support. General Phao was soon forced to give up his post as Chief of Police, but refused to resign the Ministry of the Interior, and in this was apparently backed by Phibun." Phibunsongkram's tilt toward Phao may have been the fatal cause which brought the end to their political careers when Marshal Sarit staged a successful and bloodless coup d'etat in September, 1957.

Now all alone and in full control, Sarit sought to legitimize his government by announcing that another general election would be held in December, 1957. As expected, Sarit and his followers were able to form a new government. But due to his illness, according to Darling, "Sarit selected one of his army aides, Lt. General Thanom Kittikachorn, to take over as Prime Minister in January, 1958, while Sarit went abroad for medical treatment and convalescence in the U.S. and Great Britain. With the exception of the previous government's prominent figures, opposition groups were allowed to criticize the government. And criticize they did, because "the Thanom government was confronted from the outset with increasing economic problems created by a decline

41 Ibid., p. 354.
in foreign trade and a large deficit inherited from the former regime."

The opposition elements were tolerated while Sarit's health was in bad shape but once this personal problem was alleviated, the Marshal made his move. According to Darling, in October, 1958, Sarit "seized the government, abolished the constitution, dissolved the Assembly, and banned all political parties. Martial law was declared and a new Revolutionary Party was established to rule the country temporarily . . . Sweeping arrests were made of former Assembly representatives" and other suspicious groups. Thus, Thailand temporarily ended the democratic experiments which had been on-again-off-again affairs since 1932, and all the residue of democracy was systematically put out of existence. In this connection, Darling has offered an interesting observation about the shift in the nature of Thai politics by pointing out that "until the seizure of power by Sarit, no government after 1932 claimed to be absolute. Modest opposition to the government was usually permitted, and some limits were maintained on executive rule." The military dictatorship continued in this fashion until Sarit's death in October, 1963, but this event did

43 Ibid., p. 349.
44 Ibid., p. 351.
not alter domestic political conditions to any significant degree. That is to say, the military was still in firm control even after the death of Sarit, who had been widely regarded as a much stronger personality than his successor, Thanom.

General Thanom was Prime Minister for ten years before the students drove him out to Boston to live in exile. It was the Thanom government that began the policy of open collaboration with the United States' efforts to contain the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. Domestically, the Thanom government, like most governments after 1932, tried to rule the country through the dictatorial form of government. To be sure, there were problems with which the predecessors of Thanom had not had to deal. Obviously the growing activities of communist insurgents was one of the most serious problems.

Initially, the Thanom government did not encounter any serious opposition to its dictatorial rule, which in fact was a continuation of the policy of the previous government under Sarit. There were two major reasons which could be used to explain the relative calm in Thailand's domestic politics. The first was the fact that in most sectors the economic picture was bright, which meant that there was little to complain about as far as the people's welfare was concerned. Secondly, the Thanom government appeared to be forward-looking in the eyes of the people, thanks to
its three much-publicized policy goals. They were: a) the government's avowed attempt to eliminate corruption; b) the beginning of a policy of thrift which subsequently cut down several government spending programs; and c) the government's announced intentions to lift martial law and return the country to the democratic form of government.46

From 1964 to 1968, however, political corruption and graft seemed to go on, more or less, unabated. But this fact had been hidden from the public view for the most part by the impact of the country's economic boom. In 1965, for example, "the expansion of the economy has been impressive, the annual growth rate for the national income averaging 5.3% during 1950-1960, and 6% to 7% at present."47 With regard to the plan to end military rule, it took the Thanom government over four years to complete the task.

In 1968 another constitution was promulgated, the eighth since the revolution in 1932. True to the ruling group's tradition, the 1968 constitution was written in such a way so as to insure that the Thanom government would remain in power even after the system of military dictatorship had formally ended. That is, the general election in February, 1969, resulted in the government party receiving the largest


number of seats, 75 out of 219, in the lower house. Subsequently, through promises of financial and other forms of compensation, the government party was able to persuade a number of independent assembly members who did not belong to any party to join itself to form a majority in the lower house. Thus, by the end of 1969, the general expectation on the part of Thanom and his supporters seemed to be that from then on they would be able to rule the country in a more legitimate fashion than had been the case from the end of 1963 to the beginning of 1969.

But in 1970 the political situation began to deteriorate from the Thanom government's point of view. There were several attempts by younger members of the government party to amend some features of the constitution in order to make that document more liberal-oriented. The government had to make concessions to dissidents within its own party just to have enough votes for the passage of the budget and tax bill for 1970. In addition to developing political problems, there were some disturbing economic developments as well. Already there was an overall trade deficit in 1969 totaling $528 million. And the situation was no better the following year. Thus, as Neher has noted, the one factor which might precipitate "a serious political crisis is Thailand's troubled economy. In 1969 and 1970 for the first time in over a decade there was a deficit in Thailand's overall
balance of payments, and her foreign exchange reserves were being depleted. 48

These, however, were not all the problems with which the Thanom government had to cope. Activities of communist insurgents were increasing in many parts of the country. According to Neher, "slightly more than one-half of the provinces in Thailand experienced various levels of insurrectionary activity in 1970. 49 Even though the communist strength in Thailand was relatively weak in comparison to the similar situations in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the Thanom government was naturally to blame for its inability to solve this security problem.

A combination of growing discontent within the government party, rising voices from opposition groups, deteriorating economic conditions, and increased levels of insurgency activities seemed to convince Thanom and his friends that these problems might best be solved if their power were strengthened. Accordingly, Thailand's experiment with democracy was once again interrupted when Thanom and his followers seized power on November 17, 1971. In the process, the 1968 constitution was abolished, the parliament dissolved, and the National Executive Council was set up to govern the country.

49 Ibid., p. 135.
On the surface, then, it looked like Thailand was reverting back to the old familiar system of military dictatorship after the ruling group's patience had run out.

But the ultimate paradox of the Thanom government, which would eventually be partly responsible for its downfall, was the fact that while it wanted to maintain a dictatorship, it was also willing to permit the opposition groups to politely express their grievances. At first the opposition circles were small and ineffective. But gradually the opposition movement gained momentum and, more importantly, it gained large followers among college students. By late 1972 these students had taken an unprecedented step in the country's political history by organizing themselves for the first time into the National Student Center of Thailand.50

In the beginning the NSCT concentrated its efforts on attacking peripheral issues which did not directly concern the government. From there the focus was shifted more and more toward the Thanom government itself. First of all, the government had to back down from its attempt to bring the Judiciary completely under the control of the National Executive Council. In May, the students joined the press in the latter's attempt to uncover those who were involved and responsible in a scandal involving the use of government

50Ruth-Inge Heinze, "Ten Days in October -- Students vs. the Military," Asian Survey, XIV, No. 6 (June, 1974), pp. 491-492.
vehicles and helicopters for private hunting purposes in a national game reserve. This undertaking was successful in the sense that finally all the people involved were brought to trial in an open court.

In June, 1973, nine students were expelled from a state university because they had collaborated on the writing of a satire on the military government. The NSCT reacted by organizing a huge student demonstration against the expulsion. The government reluctantly gave in and the nine students were reinstated.

It should be pointed out here that all through the first six months of 1973 the people in Bangkok and, to a lesser extent, in other provinces, were beginning to side with the students in opposing the government. The major cause of this general dissatisfaction and frustration of the populace was the rice shortage in Bangkok and other provinces. The rice shortage was not caused by a drought or a flood or any natural disaster. Instead, it was caused by influential companies' extensive rice exporting in which Premier Thanom's son, his wife, the Deputy Premier, and other powerful members of the ruling group had substantial interests. The rice shortage situation was intolerable in the people's opinion simply because of the fact that Thailand has always been a major rice exporting country in Southeast Asia, and it was really unthinkable for the people to be unable to buy rice to feed their families. And the greed of Thanom and his followers
was so great that they unscrupulously prevented a large portion of that year's rice supply from being sold in the country in order to obtain higher prices in the foreign market. Thus, it was inevitable that the people's confidence in the Thanom government was very low by the summer of 1973.

Beginning in October, 1973, several members of the NSCT and former National Assembly men began passing out political leaflets to the public. The main import of the leaflets was a call for the abolition of military rule and the creation of political freedom. At first these political activists were given notice by the government that such actions were forbidden. When the warning was not obeyed, the police arrested eleven of those political activists on October 6, 1973. The NSCT reacted to the arrest by organizing mass demonstrations of students from all state universities in Bangkok and other provinces. At first the NSCT asked for the immediate release of the arrested. Later on, the students demanded that the government set up a limited time frame within which the constitution must be written. Negotiations between representatives of the government and the NSCT from October 6 on turned out to be slow in terms of the two sides being able to reach a final agreement. Meanwhile the number of protesting students was swelling following October 6. Protests gradually turned into confrontations as the students were becoming more and more militant. By October 13, 1973, the
number of protesting students had risen to about 400,000 but the negotiations were still going on.51

The general public's sympathy was clearly with the students' cause. Money and food were donated to the gathering students in plentiful quantity. By the night of October 13, the Thanom government had actually agreed in principle to practically all of the students' demands. But the breakdown in communication and the lack of coordination among various groups of demonstrators eventually led to violence and bloodshed in the night of October 13 and the following two days. Specifically, the thing which caused the shooting was the rumor that student leaders had been killed and that there was really no agreement reached between the two sides. Heavy fighting between students and government forces broke out in the night of October 13, the following day, and continued well into the evening of October 15, when announcements were made on radio and television that Premier Thanom and other leading members of his government had left the country.52 The King then appointed the rector of one of Thailand's major universities to head the provisional government pending the drafting of the new constitution.

CHAPTER III

THAILAND'S FOREIGN RELATIONS FROM THE
13TH CENTURY TO WORLD WAR II

In this chapter, an attempt is made to examine the ways Thailand carried out relations with other countries from the thirteenth century to the Second World War. Special emphasis will be placed upon the period from the second half of the nineteenth century on, because this was the first time that contacts with the Western countries were to have continuing and far-reaching effects on Thailand.

1200-1851

Fear of China was still evident even after the Thai people had moved to present-day Thailand from Nanchao or southern China. Thus, even during the reign of the most famous ruler of the Kingdom of Sukothai "the linch-pin of Rama Khamheng's policy was the maintenance of the most cordial relations with China."¹ In carrying out this policy, Rama Khamheng "sent many diplomatic missions to China with suitable presents which were interpreted by the Chinese Court as tributes from a vassal."² But it is interesting

to note that, according to Prince Chula Chakrabongse, "although China from then on claimed suzerainty over Siam for hundreds of years, she never attempted to exercise any external or internal control."³

After the fall of the Sukothai Kingdom, Thailand's relations with other Asian countries during the Ayudhaya period were similar to the Sukothai period in the sense that war was the predominant method for the resolution of conflicts. Burma, for example, was the threat to the security of Thailand most of the time and it was the Burmese who eventually brought an end to the Thai Kingdom at Ayudhaya in 1767 when that city was sacked and completely destroyed.

The first group of Europeans, the Portugese, came to Ayudhaya initially in 1518. The Portugese were "met with a friendly reception . . . ,"⁴ given complete commercial freedom, and "permitted to open their Christian mission."⁵ Subsequently, the Dutch, English, French, and Japanese came to Ayudhaya and they were all given favorable treatment by the kings of Thailand.

Despite the lack of hostility on the part of Thailand, troubles developed in the second half of the seventeenth century when commercial competition intensified among

³Ibid., pp. 24-25.
⁴Ibid., p. 36.
⁵Ibid.
European traders. First it was the Dutch who became jealous of the French and the British over a number of minor trade privileges. Accordingly, the Dutch demanded more commercial privileges by applying pressure on Thailand in the form of a blockade. Increased trade concessions were granted to the Dutch and this had made the King aware of the need to find ways to curb Dutch influence in the country. The Thai Monarch, King Narai, then turned to France, sending two representatives to Paris "with the request that a French ambassador should be sent to Ayudhaya with powers to conclude a treaty." Because of favorable treatment given to the missionaries, King Louis XIV of France was misled into believing that there was a good chance of converting the Thai King to Christianity. If this were accomplished, argued the French priests, it would be only a matter of time before all the population of Thailand would follow the lead of their Monarch. Accordingly, Louis XIV sent an accredited French Ambassador and a large number of priests to Ayudhaya "with the avowed object of converting King Narai into Christianity." As a result of the negotiations between the French delegates and the King, France obtained additional trade

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6 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 341.
7 Ibid., p. 343.
8 Ibid., p. 344.
concessions. But on the religious issue the French got nowhere. For Thailand, "a French alliance was implied but not explicitly indicated . . . " and "the dispatch of a French military force was to constitute the earnest of their firm alliance."\(^9\) After the negotiations were over in 1685, Thai envoys went back to France with the French mission for more talks on the issue of alliance. By this time, however, it became clear to Louis XIV and his advisors that their original plan of converting the Thai Monarch to Christianity had no chance of success. Therefore, France deliberately misled King Narai's representatives by agreeing officially to send a number of troops to Thailand to balance the Dutch influence. Another purpose which was known only among the French for sending troops to Thailand "was for the occupation of Bangkok."\(^10\) Thus, "in 1687 six French warships carrying 635 soldiers arrived and took up positions in Siam's trading port of Bangkok."\(^11\)

However, it was fortunate for Thailand when "slowly the King came to realize that France was not interested in helping him to oust the Dutch, and he began to look for ways to curb

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\(^10\)Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 345.

French influence. Many ministers and influential members of the court were also alarmed at the sudden increase in French power in Thailand. Before the King could act, he became seriously ill to the point that he was unable to continue ruling the country in 1688. Anti-French feeling then ran high and shortly afterwards a Regent, who was appointed to act in the name of the King, demanded the withdrawal of French troops. Negotiations were soon started which subsequently led to the pulling out of French soldiers from Bangkok by the end of 1688. What followed, as far as relations with European countries were concerned, was that the Thai people "were so outraged over the foreign intrigue that the Government shut out Europeans, for all practical purposes, for the next one hundred and thirty years." 

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, one of the most important problems facing Thailand was war. The perennial struggle between Burma and Thailand did not end with the destruction of the old capital at Ayudhaya in 1767. In the year 1785-1786 the Burmese started invading Thailand on a massive scale by using four attack forces simultaneously. When this attempt failed, the Burmese tried again in 1794, 1798, and 1802. All of these attacks turned out to be futile.

12Ibid., p. 8.
13Ibid.
and eventually "these attacks degenerated in time into mere border raids."\(^{14}\)

With regard to Cambodia, Thailand usually had some influence over that country's political situation. For example, the King of Cambodia was crowned at Bangkok by Rama I in 1794 and, according to Hall, "for some years Siam was undisputed master of Cambodia."\(^{15}\) Thailand's influence over the internal affairs of Cambodia was curtailed somewhat after Emperor Gia-Long consolidated his control of all of Vietnam in 1802. Cambodia, being weaker militarily than Thailand and Vietnam, "therefore sedulously sent homage and tribute to both Bangkok and Hue. . . ."\(^{16}\) In terms of territories five Cambodian provinces, including Battambang and Siemrap, were under Thailand's control.

In addition to Burma and Cambodia, Thailand in the reign of Rama I "held all the Laotian principalities, most of the Malay states, together with Tavoy, Mergui, and Tenasserim."\(^{17}\) It should be noted that these last three provinces were frequently contested areas between Thailand and Burma and after Rama I's reign, they went back under the control of the Burmese who subsequently ceded them to British India in 1826. Hence, under the leadership of the first king of the

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\(^{14}\) Cady, *Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development*, p. 293.

\(^{15}\) Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, p. 435.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Chula, *Lords of Life*, p. 107.
Chakri dynasty, "Siam was more powerful than ever before by the beginning of the nineteenth century."\(^{18}\)

The reign of the second and third Kings of the Chakri dynasty lasted from 1809 to 1851. It was a period in which relations among the states of Southeast Asia were changing due to the intrusions of two powerful European countries, England and France. Further away to the north, the Middle Kingdom was trying unsuccessfully to withstand the growing influence and domination of people from the West. For Thailand, the threat from her powerful Western neighbor was finally gone when the first Anglo-Burmese War broke out in 1824, leading to the gradual absorption of Burma by the British forces.

Thailand's relations with Cambodia were carried out in much the same way as before. That is, Thailand was behind one candidate to the Cambodian throne while Vietnam was behind another. And for a time in 1812 it looked like Thailand's influence was ending when a Vietnam-backed candidate was installed as the Cambodian King with the support of Vietnamese troops and the Thai-backed candidate had to flee to Bangkok. But two years later, in 1814, Thailand sent an army across the Mekong River into Cambodian territory. As a result, Thailand "gained possession of a thick

\(^{18}\)Hall, _A History of South-East Asia_, p. 434.
slice of territory in the north of Cambodia and drove a wedge between that kingdom and the kingdom of Vientian, which a few years later it was to absorb (1828).”

In the south, there were some complications that would soon bring the first British mission of the nineteenth century to Bangkok. The Malay state of Kedah was acknowledged a vassal state of Thailand before the fall of Ayudhaya in 1767. But the Thai control had been relaxed during the early years of the Chakri dynasty because of the wars with Burma. In 1786 the ruler of Kedah ceded a piece of its territory, the Penang Island, to Great Britain. A few years later, another piece of territory under the control of the Sultan of Kedah known as the Province of Wellesley, which was located on the mainland opposite from Penang, had been rented to the British. After the death of this Sultan, the new ruler of Kedah refused to send tribute to Bangkok according to the usual custom. As a consequence, in 1821, Thai forces were sent down to Kedah and the new Sultan escaped to Penang Island. For a time this matter was settled but it was soon to come up again as the power and influence of England increased.

In 1821 the Governor-General of India sent John Crawfurd as head of a British mission to Bangkok with "instructions

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19 Ibid., pp. 435-436.
20 Chula, Lords of Life, p. 130.
not only to negotiate but also to collect as much information as possible about the country." According to Cady, "the Crawfurd mission's negotiations dealt with two substantive questions, one having to do with trade and the other with the status of the Sultan of Kedah." No concrete agreement was reached on either one of these questions from Thailand's point of view. From the other side's view, although Crawfurd's attempts "to obtain the restoration of the Sultan of Kedah and the removal of restrictions upon British trade completely failed, but indirectly he secured some sort of recognition of the British possession of Penang."  

The ascension to the throne of Rama III coincided with the beginning of the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824. The date could be regarded as the beginning of a new phase of relations among Southeast Asian states. Thereafter, two of the most powerful states in the area, Burma and Vietnam, were to be gradually weakened and finally colonized by England and France. For Thailand in the first half of the nineteenth century, the growing power of England was being increasingly felt in the west and in the south.

21 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 484.
22 Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 333.
23 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 484.
To the west, according to Hall, "Britain at first hoped that Siam would join her in the war with Burma..." 24 For a time, Rama III was contemplating helping the British but he "was also concerned with repeated efforts on the part of agents of British Penang to negotiate secretly with the Ligor Raja, whose territory was an integral part of Siam." 25 Moreover, the Thai government was alarmed over the British Governor of Penang's proposal "to restore the rebellious Kedah Sultan despite Siamese opposition and to extend British protection to other Malay states..." 26 It was against this background that England sent another mission to Bangkok at the end of 1825. The head of this mission was Captain Burney, who had been an officer in Penang prior to this assignment, and the chief object of the mission "was to reassure the Siamese government that the British success in the war with Burma... was in no way a threat to Siam, and that the East India Company had no intention of extending its sway over the Malay Peninsula." 27 In comparison to the Crawfurd mission, the Burney mission achieved some success. The terms of the agreement reached in 1826, according to

24 Ibid., p. 437.
26 Ibid.
27 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 486.
to Cady,

... were decidedly vague ... the "independence" of the Malay states was defined in such a way as to permit all the sultans to continue sending to Bangkok the traditional tokens of vassalage status. ... Siam promised not to obstruct the rights previously enjoyed by the British to trade with Tregganu and Kelantan, and Britain on her part promised not to disturb the states in question on any pretext whatsoever.

In addition to this,

... the British could trade only in accordance with local custom. They could rent land and build factories if express permission were obtained and resident Britons would be subject to Siamese courts. The exportation of rice was forbidden, as was the importation of opium. ...  

According to Hall, although Rama III "represented the old-fashioned traditionalist attitude which was becoming dangerously out of date," he nevertheless "dared not invite trouble by rebuffing Burney as Bangkok had rebuffed Crawfurd five years before." Moreover, "the need to avoid a break with the rising Anglo-Indian Empire was especially urgent in view of developing Siamese problems on the Laotian and Cambodian frontiers."

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28 Two vassal states, along with Kedah, Perak, Pahang, Salangor, and Negri Sembilan that Thailand eventually lost to Great Britain in the period from 1874-1909.


30 Ibid.

31 Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, p. 437.

32 Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 335.

33 Ibid.
The origin of the Laotian problem came from the Burney mission to Bangkok. In the course of Burney's mission, "an entirely baseless rumor reached Vientiane that negotiations had broken down and a British fleet was about to threaten Bangkok."\textsuperscript{34} The ruler of Laos, Prince Anou, therefore "decided that now was the time to wring his independence from Siam at the point of the sword."\textsuperscript{35} To carry out his plan, the Laotian Prince sent three armies across the Mekong deep into Thailand for an attack. After having some initial success, the Laotian forces met with a strong counterattack from the Thai army and they subsequently had to retreat. The end of the matter occurred when the Thai army went across the Mekong River and captured Vientiane in 1828.

After the Laotian campaign, the Thai army went on to invade Cambodia in 1831 and this venture "was completely successful at the outset."\textsuperscript{36} To protect his life, the Cambodian King fled to Vietnam. What followed was again a traditional competition between Thailand and Vietnam for mastery over Cambodia. Cambodia was thus caught in the middle. In their continuing competition Thailand and Vietnam were unable to install their candidates on the Cambodian throne with impunity. This see-saw contest went on for over

\textsuperscript{34}Hall, \textit{A History of Southeast Asia}, p. 420.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 438.
a decade, when both sides finally came to realize that neither one could win. Therefore, in 1845, both countries had to agree on a compromise which provided that "Cambodia was to be under joint protection of both Siam and Vietnam."37 For Thailand the Cambodian problem was to become a serious one in later years when the hands of French imperialists were extended into that country and the conflict could no longer be characterized as local. But for the time, this question was settled.

In addition to the British treaty of 1826, there were other Western missions that came to Bangkok in the reign of Rama III. For example, the United States, in 1833, sent Edmund Roberts to negotiate the first treaty with Thailand. According to Fifield, Thailand "was the first Asian nation with which Washington had a treaty relationship."38 In this connection, Cady has pointed out that "there is no evidence that American ships ever took extensive advantage of the Siamese invitation to trade, but the treaty did provide a basis for a culturally significant Protestant missionary impact."39 In the last three years of Rama III's reign, both England and the United States sent representatives to

37 Ibid., pp. 438-439.
Thailand to try to negotiate new commercial treaties. Unfortunately, both missions failed to get what they went for, namely, "a resident consulate, extraterritorial privileges such as China had recently granted foreigners, freedom to trade, purchase land . . . and a moderation of taxes." 40

All through the first half of the nineteenth century, attempts of England and other Western nations to open up Thailand for their merchants had met with little success because, among other things, the kings wanted to maintain a royal monopoly on foreign trade. This policy of preventing the foreigners from entering into Thailand's commercial activities was successful as long as the Western powers were not extremely dissatisfied. But after several failures through the use of persuasion and negotiation, it was inevitable that Westerners were bound to think of other methods. Thus, as Hall has noted, after their failure to negotiate a new treaty with Thailand, the British and American representatives who came near the end of Rama III's reign "advised their governments that in their opinion only a warlike demonstration would move the Siamese." 41 In this connection, Cady summed up the reign of Rama III accurately when he said that it

... was effective and vigorous in the traditional sense of reestablishing royal and national prestige and strengthening vassal control. The kingdom was

40 Ibid., pp. 338-339.
41 Hall, A History of Southeast Asia, p. 440.
certainly stronger in this sense in 1851 than at Rama III's accession in 1824. But . . . it was questionable how long the traditionalist policy of opposition to the rising tide of pressure from the outside world could be successfully maintained.42

Thailand's Foreign Relations from 1851 to 1945

The most prominent feature of Thailand's foreign relations from the middle of the nineteenth century to 1945 was the King's ability to maintain national independence. And from 1932 to 1945 the Premiers were trying to do likewise after the system of absolute monarchy was gone. The methods used by these men were varied but, to a large extent, they were alike in trying to avoid identifying Thailand too closely with any one of the powerful Western countries. It is true that there were other factors which helped prevent Thailand from falling into the hands of the two leading European imperialists, England and France. Two important factors were the geographical position of Thailand and the need of France and England to have a buffer state separating their respective empires. But the weighty fact remains that, in the days of absolute monarchy, the king was the person who could make the difference between life and death of a nation.

It is entirely possible that Thailand could have been divided between France and England had her rulers not been competent and farsighted enough to formulate and carry out

the appropriate policies to safeguard the security of the country.

In 1851, many Asian nations such as China, India, Burma, Vietnam and Cambodia were already occupied, or about to be occupied by one or another European power. It was fortunate for Thailand that Rama III died in 1851 and the new King, Rama IV, set Thailand on a new course in her dealings with foreign powers. Rama IV adopted the policy of appeasing Westerners' appetites by opening up the country to those nations that wanted to trade with Thailand. This policy was constantly followed by subsequent rulers. More importantly, Rama IV tried to preserve the country's independence by agreeing to grant a number of concessions to France and Great Britain.

It is true that Thailand had closer trade and cultural relations with England than with France. This is evident from the fact that Rama V had a missionary's wife as one of his English language instructors; Rama VI was educated at Cambridge University; and Rama VII was educated at Eton and the Royal Military Academy, Woolrich, England. But this does not mean that Thailand had more trust in England than in France. When it came to seizing Thai territories England and France were very much alike in their desires.

At this point, however, it is necessary to consider briefly Rama IV's ideas of Thailand's national security and
how he carried these ideas into practice. Rama IV was the only King of the Chakri dynasty who articulated the needs of the country in the face of growing European threats and how to deal with them. The soundness of his arguments was demonstrated when they were followed by his successors and Thailand was able to keep her independence.

Rama IV or, as he was commonly known in the West, King Mongkut, had spent twenty-seven years as a monk in the monasteries before assuming the royal power in 1851. While in the monastery, Rama IV was initially involved in the study of the Pali scriptures and the reform of religion which resulted in the formation of a second sect of Buddhism, the D'ammayutika, in Thailand. Later on, King Mongkut "began to widen the scope of his study, learning Latin, mathematics and astronomy from the scholarly French missionary Bishop Pallegoix, and English from the American missionaries Caswell, Bradley and House." Moreover, from these Western priests and books Rama IV, who was a voracious reader, "gained information about foreign countries and international relations which was to prove of utmost value to him and his country."44

Authorities on Southeast Asia are in agreement on their estimates of King Mongkut's ability as a ruler of an ancient kingdom who was able to keep his country from becoming another

43Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 630.
44Ibid.
European overseas possession like all of Thailand's neighbors. For instance, Cady has observed that Mongkut "was a self-reliant man, outspoken and fearless, who acted under conviction rather than from expediency. . . . Partly from a genuine desire for modernization and partly out of caution, he undertook to reach an accommodation with Western ways and expectations."45 Furthermore, Thailand under the direction of Rama IV was "the first Southeast Asian state to recognize the fact of British hegemony in the region of the Bay of Bengal and to come to terms with it voluntarily. . . ."46 Another authority has said of Mongkut as follows:

It is perhaps not too much to say that Siam owed to Mongkut more than anyone else the fact that she preserved her independence when by the end of the nineteenth century all the other states of Southeast Asia had come under European control. For he almost alone among his people could see clearly that if China had failed to maintain her isolation against European pressure, Siam must come to terms with the external forces threatening her and begin to accommodate herself to the new world, in which Asian traditionalism appeared outworn and inefficient.47

However, it was King Mongkut himself who provided an interesting observation on the problems facing Thailand in the middle of the nineteenth century. In a letter to the Thai Ambassador in Paris, he wrote,

Being, as we are now, surrounded on two or three sides by powerful nations, what can a small nation

45 Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, pp. 341-342.
46 Ibid.
47 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, pp. 630-631.
like us do? Supposing we were to discover a gold mine in our country, from which we could obtain many million catties weight of gold, enough to pay for the cost of a hundred warships; even with this we would still be unable to fight against them, because we would have to buy those very same warships and all the armaments from their countries. We are as yet unable to manufacture these things, and even if we have enough money to buy them, they can always stop the sale of them whenever they feel that we are arming ourselves beyond our station. The only weapons that will be of real use to us in the future will be our mouths and our hearts, constituted so as to be full of sense and wisdom for the better protection of ourselves. 48

These words, then, represent the guiding principle for Thailand's relations with Western nations for almost one hundred years. In practice, Rama IV and his successors were faced with numerous difficult problems in their attempts to maintain Thailand's independence. As Cady has pointed out,

From the outset of his accession, King Mongkut recognized both the necessity and the desirability of revising standing commercial treaties. The crux of the problem was to reach agreement with the powerful British. . . . Bangkok's desire to come to terms peaceably was undoubtedly increased by the events of 1852, which saw a British-Indian force, acting on little provocation, occupy the central valley of lower Burma. Bangkok's moves to liberalize trade restrictions voluntarily preceded formal treaty conversations. 49

Subsequently, the first major step taken by Rama IV to appease Westerners' hunger for trade and other commercial

48Abbot Low Moffat, Mongkut, the King of Siam (New York, 1962), pp. 24-25.

49Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 344.
activities in Thailand was his decision to invite Sir John Bowring, a senior British diplomat stationed in Singapore, to come to Bangkok for the negotiation of a new commercial treaty. The talks resulted in a treaty of 1855 between Thailand and England. In essence, the treaty provided, according to Cady,

. . . extraterritorial privileges for resident Britons, the right to establish a consulate at Bangkok as soon as British trade reached ten ships a year, access to all ports of Siam, and the right to rent land, to construct residences, and to travel a day's journey inland from the capital. The treaty also provided for a single export duty and for a maximum 3 percent duty on imports.50

In this connection, it is instructive to note that the negotiations between the British and Thai representatives were not conducted in a pressure-free atmosphere. As Cady has pointed out, while the negotiations were going on, "the British gunboat, anchored off Bangkok, delivered repeated twenty-one-gun salutes for psychological effect, and when the negotiations ran aground on one occasion, Bowring threatened to delay the gunboat's scheduled departure."51

Accordingly, the treaty was successfully concluded between the two countries. Once the door to Thailand had been opened, according to Sayre,

. . . it was only natural that other Western nations should demand like privileges; and during the


51Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 345.
succeeding years, therefore, Siam became bound by a series of treaties similar to the British treaty of 1855. ... In 1856 treaties were signed with the United States and with France, in 1858 with Denmark, in 1859 with Portugal, in 1868 with Sweden and Norway, with Belgium, and with Italy, in 1869 with Austria-Hungary, and in 1870 with Spain. 52

These treaties were very similar but in one important respect they were identical with one feature of the British treaty of 1855. This one ominous feature "was that the treaty contained no time limit; by its terms it could not be modified without the consent of both parties, and was therefore irre-vocable and unending." 53 Thus, Thailand had taken the first big step in unilaterally reducing her rights in exchange for the maintenance of the country's independence. However, even this measure was not enough for the two leading imperialists of the nineteenth century. In the more than half a century that followed the treaties of 1855 and 1856, Thailand was forced to cede a great deal of her territories to Great Britain and France in order to prevent herself from falling into the same lot with her neighbors.

Between England and France, the latter's tactics generally were coarser than the former's in their dealings with Thailand. This can be seen in the method the French utilized in her conflicts with Thailand over Cambodia. After Vietnam was

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53 Ibid.
forced to cede the three provinces of Cochinchina (South Vietnam) to France by the treaty of June 5, 1862, the logical next step was the assertion of France's claim over Cambodia. In August, 1863, French authorities carried out their plan by inviting the King of Cambodia to a French warship. While on board the vessel, the Cambodian ruler was forced to sign a treaty accepting a French protectorate over his country. Rama IV and his ministers were naturally furious over this incident because Cambodia was a vassal state of Thailand at the time. Sensing Thailand's displeasure, the King of Cambodia, in December, 1863, decided "to sign a treaty with Siam explicitly restating the vassal status of the Kingdom of Cambodia." When the French learned of this treaty in 1865, they sent a gunboat to Bangkok and "forced the Siamese government to renounce its treaty with Cambodia on April 14." Faced with this kind of threat, Thailand had no choice but to enter into negotiations with French representatives. The result was the Treaty of 1867,

... whereby France secured Thailand's formal recognition of the French protectorate over Cambodia (an area of about 47,120 square miles), and France


55Moffat, Mongkut, the King of Siam, p. 114.

recognized the sovereignty of Thailand over two Cambodian provinces of Battambang and Siemreap. 57

Relations with England during the reign of Rama IV from 1851 to 1868 were a bit more cordial than with France. Prior to 1851, England had already established herself on peninsular Southeast Asia at Penang and Province Wellesley. And by the time Mongkut became King "the island of Singapore had been ceded by Jahore, and . . . the British had interfered considerably in the Malay States, over which Siam claimed suzerainty." 58

The problem between the two countries arose when, in 1862, "Thailand was determined to remove the Sultan of Trengganu who was too independent and too intimate with the British even though he sent 'Golden Flowers' regularly." 59 When Thailand put a new Sultan, who was more agreeable to her, in Trengganu, England objected by pointing out that such action was a disturbance to British trade contrary to the terms of the Burney treaty of 1826. To underscore the point, British warships began bombarding Trengganu when it was learned that Thailand refused to withdraw the Sultan of her choice. The bombardment got the expected result, because shortly afterwards Thailand withdrew her Sultan. From that time on, the


58Moffat, Mongkut, the King of Siam, p. 102.

British authorities "corresponded directly with Trengganu and ignored Thailand's claim to suzerainty." 60

Thus, it could be seen that the threats from England and France were growing in the 1860's but it is simply not accurate to say that from that time on Thailand had played England off against France in order to safeguard her independence. It is true that in 1867 Sir John Bowring, who negotiated the British treaty of 1855 with Thailand, wrote letters to King Mongkut indicating that he would be glad to act as Thailand's representative in the upcoming negotiations with France over Cambodian dispute. In addition, the British counsel in Bangkok had repeatedly urged Rama IV to accept British help in her dealings with France. On the surface there seemed to be nothing unusual about this British offer but Rama IV realized the implications of this sort of assistance. This is evident from a letter he wrote to his ambassador in Paris,

All these only go to show that the British want us to solicit help from Britain as soon as possible . . . but if we really send Sir John Bowring to France on this occasion, and even if he could accomplish what we desire, it will give the French another cause for resentment against us because we have employed another power to brow-beat them. . . . With France's increasing animosity against Siam, where could she turn? Siam would be driven by the fear of France to seek protection from Great Britain, thereby to continue to be forever under that protection, in the like manner as many states in Hindustan have done and as Burma is doing at the present moment. . . . 61

60 Ibid., p. 13.

61 Moffat, Mongkut, the King of Siam, pp. 121-122.
In another part of the same letter, Rama IV turned his attention to the problem with France and to the method that Thailand should use for the preservation of her independence in the face of rapidly rising French and British power in the Southeast Asian peninsula. King Mongkut wrote,

When Montingy [French diplomat who negotiated the Siamese-French treaty of 1856] came here he tried to turn Siam into a French protectorate by seduction, using as his argument the dangers of British domination. The Siamese were not to be easily seduced however, and he spent some time here employing various methods of allurement. . . .

Now that they know that they are unable to win over the Siamese by peaceful persuasions, the French have finally resorted to violence and aggression. . . .

Since we are now being constantly abused by the French because we will not allow ourselves to be placed under their domination like the Cambodians, it is for us to decide what we are going to do, whether to swim up-river to make friends with the crocodile or to swim out to sea and hang on to the whale . . . .

It is sufficient for us to keep ourselves within our house and home; it may be necessary for us to forego some of our former power and influence.62

Therefore, it is clear that, in King Mongkut's opinion, neither the crocodile (France) nor the whale (England) could be trusted and that the future of the country must ultimately lay in the hands of the Thai people themselves. And to meet the challenges from outside King Mongkut came to the conclusion that it was imperative for Thailand to modernize herself. Accordingly, foreign technicians and experts in various fields were employed for modernizing the country. The result of this modernizing effort is that, according to Cady, "in general

the improvements were probably introduced about as fast as the people could appreciate them."

Unfortunately, Rama IV died unexpectedly in 1868. In the years that followed, modernization programs were continued and, in many cases, intensified by his successors. But the most dangerous threats on the country's independence from outside powers were also at their peak in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century. It is perhaps not too much to say that a combination of the guiding principal for Thailand's foreign policy established by Rama IV and the ability of his successors to apply it to day-to-day affairs helped guide Thailand safely through one of the most stormy periods in her relations with other nations.

The most dangerous years were during the reign of King Mongkut's immediate successor, Rama V or King Chulalongkorn, who ruled Thailand from 1868 to 1910. In 1874 England was the first to move against Thailand in order to gain control over Thailand's vassal states in the south, namely, Perak, Selangor, and Negri Sembilan. The reason for England's move originated from the British merchants in Singapore who felt that these states were "in a chronic state of disorderliness. . . . [which] it would be a service to civilization to step in and suppress." Therefore, England quietly and deliberately

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63 Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 349.

increased her influence over these three states. In the meantime, in a neighboring state of Pahang, British officials "were trying to get the ruler to swallow a treaty with Britain." By 1885, the basic outline of British policy in the area had become clear. According to Kiernan, the British Foreign Office adopted the view that "it was desirable . . . to keep Siam independent and friendly, but Britain in view of her 'special interests' in the peninsula could not allow the connection between Siam and any Malay state to strengthen itself." The result of England's policy of gradual expansion into the Malay states was that by 1876 Perak, Selangor, Negri Sambilan and Pahang came under her control. Thailand naturally protested Britain's action but actually there was little she could do given her primitive military forces as against the powerful war machines of England and the trouble with France. Before the reign of Rama V was over, Thailand in 1909 had to transfer to England "all rights of suzerainty, protection, administration, and control over Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis in return for a modification of British

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65 Ibid., p. 7.
66 Ibid., p. 11.
extraterritorial jurisdiction in Thailand.\textsuperscript{68} This was a one-sided treaty because Thailand, in her earnest effort to induce Great Britain to modify some unfair features of the British-Thai treaty of 1855, gave up four states under her control in exchange for "the shadow rather than the substance of actual judicial autonomy."\textsuperscript{69} On the other hand, Thailand was very much preoccupied with French aggression between the accession of Rama V and the beginning of the present century. The problem concerned Laos which was another vassal state of Thailand at the time. Because Laotian boundaries in the modern sense did not exist, French authorities "began to advance the theory that the Thai-Lao provinces east of the Mekong River, having occasionally been vassals of Annam should be restored to that Kingdom."\textsuperscript{70} The first step in that direction came in 1886 when "France secured permission from Siam to locate a consulate at Luang Prabang, the principal city of Laos, and installed August Pavie, an ardent colonialist, as vice-consul."\textsuperscript{71} The next step came with seasonal invasion of Laos by the bands of roving Chinese bandits, the Haws. Thailand, after having

\textsuperscript{68}K. P. Landon, "Thailand's Struggles for National Security," p. 11.

\textsuperscript{69}Frances B. Sayre, "The Passing of Extraterritoriality in Siam," p. 80.

\textsuperscript{70}K. P. Landon, "Thailand's Quarrel with France in Perspective," p. 32.

\textsuperscript{71}\textsuperscript{Ibid}.
received frantic appeals for help from the King of Laos, sent troops into that country to help in the suppression of the Haws. The result was that, in 1887, according to Landon, "the occasion was pretext enough for some French troops to move in from Hanoi to 'assist' the Siamese authorities in maintaining order." Consequently, "in 1888 these troops occupied the territory known as Sipsong Chuthai, an area of about 54,000 square miles, which they refused to evacuate." 

It must be noted here that as of the 1880's, according to Hall, the capital of Laos, Luang Prabang, "had been under Siamese suzerainty for a century at least and . . . the Convention of 7 May, 1886, providing for the appointment of a vice-counsul there, had implicitly acknowledged the sovereignty of Siam." In spite of this fact, the French nevertheless pressed ahead with their plan by creating several minor incidents in the hope of finding excuses to move their troops in for the occupation of more Laotian territories. Hall has pointed out that almost all the conflicts between French and Thai officials in Laos between 1888 and 1893 were prefabricated because "the French were looking for trouble in order to turn it to their own ends." 

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72 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 648.
73 K. P. Landon, "Thailand's Quarrel with France in Perspective," p. 32.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., p. 657.
The French finally succeeded in turning one small incident into a major conflict in 1893. After a French officer was killed in Laos, the French government sent two gunboats to Bangkok to back up its demand on all territories on the left bank of the Mekong River or all of Laos. The French also demanded that Thailand pay for the alleged damages inflicted on French subjects in Laos. And to make certain that their demands would be accepted in their entirety by Thailand, France occupied the city of Chantabun which was the second most important port of Thailand, after Bangkok, on the Gulf of Siam.

Thailand appealed in vain for British help to counter the French demands. According to Hall, Rama V "had hoped for much more positive support and was bitterly disappointed at what he regarded as British neutrality." 77 Thus, the conflict with France had proved that Rama IV's advice regarding the foreign policy of Thailand in the face of growing European aggression was basically correct. This was because when a great power such as Great Britain "found that, so long as questions in dispute were confined to the 'lower Mekong', far from British interests, the British Foreign Office confined itself to giving advice." 78 The result, therefore, was that Thailand had to accept all the French demands unconditionally.

77 Ibid., p. 660.

Although England did nothing of importance to help Thailand in the latter's conflict with France in 1893, she gradually became alarmed over the rapid spread of French influence in Laos. This is understandable since the north-west portion of Laotian territories was adjacent to British Burma. Accordingly, England persuaded France to enter into negotiations in 1895 which resulted in the Anglo-French agreement of January, 1896. Part of the agreement was that England and France "promised to seek no exclusive advantages in Siam." 

In essence, this section of the agreement can be interpreted that, as long as England and France did not encroach upon Thailand's territories that were already ceded to both sides, there would be no major conflict. But it was another story for territories that were in possession of Thailand. Hence, "although Siam had complied with all French demands promptly the French continued to occupy Chantabun." French design had become crystal clear just a few years later when, according to Landon,

... the French decided that further "rectification" of the border was desirable and in 1902 and 1904 secured by threat of force an additional 38,000 square miles of territory. In return the French agreed to

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79 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 662.

80 K. P. Landon, "Thailand's Quarrel with France in Perspective," p. 36.
withdraw their troops from Chantabun. . . . In spite of French promises to evacuate the area their troops did not actually leave until the middle of 1906. And then they did not leave Siam but merely withdrew to the nearby town of Trat, where their nuisance value was as high as ever. 81

All through these years Thailand had tried unsuccessfully persuade France to withdraw her troops from Thai territory. In 1907 France finally agreed to conclude a treaty with Thailand on the questions of the rights of French Asiatic subjects living in Thailand. The price Thailand had to pay for gaining the right to have jurisdiction over French Asiatic subjects and the withdrawal of French troops from Thai soil was the cession to France of the provinces of Battambang, Siemrap and Sisopon. It should be remembered that these three provinces were formerly recognized by France as belonging to Thailand in the Treaty of 1867. All told, "the physical scar tissues willfully created by France on the body of Siam covered some 290,490 square miles." 82

Because France and Great Britain often used such phrases as "in the names of Civilization and Christianity" to justify their actions when they colonized the countries and people of Asia it is interesting to find a study that compared Thailand with other colonized countries of Asia in various aspects of life. By the first quarter of the twentieth century,

81 Ibid., p. 36.
82 Ibid.
according to Parker Thomas Moon,

In Siam 60 children per thousand of population were attending school; in French Cambodia . . . the rate was 5 per thousand; in French Cochin-China, 23; in Annam 7, and this despite "la mission civilisatrice"! On the other hand, in Bengal and Burma, under British rule, the ratios were 43 and 38 . . .

On the material side . . . Siam exports and imports more, per capita, than either French Indochina or British India. She has more railway per capita than either (but less per square mile than India) . . . The point . . . is that even according to the conventional measure of material and educational development, independent Siam with its foreign advisors and shrewd royal family, has a marked superiority over French Indochina and, in some respects, over British India.83

The tide of European imperialist aggression in Thailand was clearly receding after Rama VI came to the throne in 1910. Educated at Cambridge, the King naturally leaned toward the Allies when the First World War broke out. But the physical and psychological wounds created by France and England were still fresh in the minds of many Thais, including the King himself. It was not until July, 1917, that Thailand decided to join the war on the Allied side. This decision turned out to be a wise one because, subsequently, "at the end of the war Siam at Versailles appealed to her Allies on the strength of their oft-repeated assertions that the war was really fought to protect the rights of small nations and to remove international injustices that make for war."84 The appeal for


justice of Thailand strongly impressed President Wilson who "promised that America would be prepared to give Siam a new treaty and would as a matter of justice renounce without compensation her rights of extraterritoriality." 85

Unlike England and France, the United States kept its word and, accordingly, the Thai-American treaty of 1920 came into being. In essence, the terms of the treaty could be summed up as follows: a) it abolished the American right of extraterritoriality which was set up by the Treaty of 1856; b) it gave Thailand complete fiscal autonomy as far as dealings with the United States were concerned; and c) it provided for the complete abrogation of the old Treaty of 1856 and for termination clauses of the new one.

As a result, "so far as America was concerned, therefore, Siam was at last freed from the old extraterritorial restrictions." 86 In addition to being the first Western country to terminate the unfair treaty she had made with Thailand in 1856, the United States had also made an indirect contribution to Thailand's efforts to eliminate the unequal and unfair treaties made with other European countries during the same period. This American help came in the person of President Wilson's son-in-law, Francis Bowes Sayre, who worked as Thailand's Foreign Office advisor from 1920 to 1927.

85Ibid., p. 80.
86Ibid., p. 82.
Initially, the problems facing Thailand in her attempts to induce European countries to agree to terminate the unequal treaties seemed to be insurmountable. This is because, as Sayre had pointed out,

Siam could not afford to cede any additional territory; and until she could succeed in separately persuading Great Britain, France, Italy, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Portugal each to surrender its fiscal rights voluntarily, and without compensatory benefit, Siam must remain hopelessly and permanently bound by the old three percent tariff restriction in addition to the existing rights of extraterritoriality.\(^87\)

From his office in Bangkok, advisor Sayre had been trying unsuccessfully to persuade European nations to revise their treaties with Thailand. It became apparent by 1924 that a new approach was needed if concrete results were to be obtained. Therefore, by the fall of 1924 Rama VI "decided to send the Advisor in Foreign Affairs as Siam's representative on a roving commission to Europe to visit, one after another, the European Foreign Offices, seeking to persuade them to renounce their existing rights and, if he succeeded in this, to negotiate in conjunction with the Siamese Ministers in Europe new treaties."\(^88\)

Rama VI's decision to send Sayre to Europe and the latter's exceptional ability turned out to be the two major factors which helped put an end to the unequal treaties that Thailand had

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\(^{87}\text{Ibid.}, p. 82.\)

\(^{88}\text{Ibid.}, p. 83.\)
had to endure for more than half a century. Sayre was able
to persuade each European country that had made a treaty with
Thailand to follow the American example and by July, 1926,
Thailand had, in Sayre's words, "at last won her long struggle
for judicial and fiscal autonomy."89

In the reign of Rama VII who came to the throne in 1925,
there was no serious problem in the field of foreign affairs.
But domestically, there were many problems which would even-
tually lead to the abolition of Thailand's absolute monarchy
in 1932. This change meant that from 1932 on, the monarch
would no longer be responsible for the making of the country's
foreign policy.

From 1932 to 1938 was a period in which domestic political
struggles were going on. One significant decision taken by the
constitutional government of Thailand during that time span
occurred in February, 1933, "when the Thai delegate to the
League of Nations refrained from voting on the Lytton Report
and so failed to condemn Japanese aggression in Manchuria."90
And after Phibunsongkram became the clear leader of the
government in 1938, "deliberate efforts were made by Thai and
Japanese officials to foster closer social, cultural, and
economic relations."91 This outwardly pro-Japanese posture

89 Ibid., p. 87.
90 K. P. Landon, "Thailand's Struggle for National
Security," p. 16.
91 Ibid.
of the Thai government under the leadership of Phibunsongkram was not without benefits to the country. According to Hall,
"after the Japanese landing in Indo-China a Thai-Japanese pact was signed in December 1940, and in the following March the French ceded the Cambodian provinces of Battambang and Siemrap, together with the Laotian territory to the west of the River Mekong."92 Thailand also obtained from Burma the provinces of Kengtung and Mongpan. In addition, Thailand was able to regain control of the four Malay States ceded to England earlier in the century, namely, Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu.93 These states, however, were returned to England and France after World War II.

Phibunsongkram's leaning towards Japan did not mean that he put all his eggs in one basket. Already before the signing of the Thai-Japanese pact of December, 1940, according to Fifield, "Thailand secretly sought a guarantee for its neutrality from the United States and Great Britain without the knowledge of Japan."94 Even though this hope of Thailand did not materialize, she did not give up trying and by July of 1941:

... Prime Minister Pibul Songgram told the U.S. Minister that he wanted American aid in the cause of Thai independence, indicating he would look to his "friends," Washington and London, in this difficult period. Despite this appeal and subsequent ones and despite American desire to encourage

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92 Hall, A History of South-East Asia, p. 768.
93 Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 580.
94 Fifield, Americans in Southeast Asia: The Roots of Commitment, p. 10.
Thai resistance to Japan the United States only assured Thailand that it would be placed in the same category as China for American aid if Japanese aggression occurred.95

The Japanese aggression duly took place on December 7, 1941. Fighting broke out briefly but on the next day Japanese forces were permitted to pass through Thai territories. Subsequently, Thailand joined in Japan's "Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" and declared war on the United States and England on January 25, 1942. The Western powers thus had the right to blame Premier Phibunsongkram for his decision to join the war on Japan's side. Given the existing circumstances, however, it was a good decision as far as Thailand's national interests were concerned. As Cady has observed, "Premier Pibun Songgram's tactic of seemingly hesitant collaboration with the Japanese succeeded to the extent of sparing Thailand the material devastation experienced by Burma . . . ."96

Of course, not everyone in the Thai government agreed with Phibunsongkram. One of the most important dissenters was M. R. Seni Pramoj who was Thailand's Ambassador to Washington at the time. After receiving the Thai declaration of war on America, the Ambassador refused to deliver that fateful note as directed by the Premier. Instead, the Thai Ambassador, who was also the leader of the "Free Thai" movement in America,

95 Ibid., p. 16.

96 Cady, Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development, p. 579.
"personally informed President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull that it did not represent the will of the Thai people and he requested American assistance to liberate his country."  

In response, "the United States government agreed to this request and refused to recognize the declaration of war."  

It is clear from the previous pages that militarily and politically Thailand had been one of the strongest nations of Southeast Asia until the middle of the nineteenth century. The traditional foreign policy of the country had always been to protect herself from invasions by other Asian countries, the most dangerous of which was Burma. And in the meantime there was a tendency for Thailand to expand her territory and extend her control whenever it was possible. 

Thailand's traditional way of dealing with other nations had to be gradually changed because of the appearance of European powers' aggressive designs in Asia. Instead of using force to fend off the danger to the country's security, a more peaceful method had to be utilized because of Thailand's inferior military forces in comparison to those of France and England. Rama IV was the first monarch of the Chakri dynasty to deal with European powers through diplomatic means instead of using military forces to uphold the country's sovereignty.  

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98 Ibid.
In the process, Thailand had to give up a great deal of her territory. But in the final analysis this policy of not becoming too closely involved with any foreign powers, especially those from the West, proved to be essentially correct in the sense that the country's independence was not jeopardized the way other Asian countries had to suffer.
CHAPTER IV

CHANGE IN THE NATURE OF THAILAND'S FOREIGN POLICY

Thailand was on the Japanese side at the end of the Second World War. When the time came for negotiations with the Allied powers, the United States was clearly sympathetic, while England regarded Thailand as an enemy. The main evidence for this was the United States government's agreement that Thailand's declaration of war on America was invalid. Thus, there was no serious conflict between Thailand and the United States after the war was over, and diplomatic relations were resumed on January 5, 1946.

In addition to America, Thailand was also able to come to terms with other members of the United Nation's Security Council. But she had to rely on the United States' influence in order to come to an agreement with Great Britain and France. With respect to England in particular, Thailand relied on American pressure on the latter to drop its plans to seek economic advantages from her. An Anglo-Thai peace treaty was signed on New Year's Day of 1946. Thailand returned certain pieces of territory taken during the war from British-Malaya in the south and from French-Indochina in the northeast.

With some prodding from the U.S., for the first time a treaty establishing diplomatic relations between Thailand and Nationalist China was signed in January, 1946. A similar agreement had also been reached with the Soviet Union. These moves meant that, although Thailand was Japan's ally, her international position had once again become stabilized shortly after the termination of the Second World War. The United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Thailand's application for membership in December, 1946.

The end of the war was the time when the United States emerged as the preeminent power in Asia and elsewhere. But in terms of American policy, "from the surrender of Japan on August 14, 1945, to the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in Peking on October 1, 1949, the United States had followed traditional policy of deference to other powers in Southeast Asia." With regard to domestic political developments in Thailand the United States appeared for a time to be leaning in favor of the popular-elected government of Thailand. This can be seen in the American negative reaction to the news of the military seizure of power in Thailand in June, 1947. As was pointed out, the military in Thailand called for national elections which subsequently resulted in the installation of a civilian as Prime Minister.

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But after the formal recognitions had been extended by the Western powers, the military seized the power again for the second time in less than a year. Again, the United States showed an unfavorable attitude. But it was fortunate for the Thai military that the Cold War was growing in the West and elsewhere. By this time "the American containment policy of the Soviet Union was well under way and China was moving fast toward communism."³ Therefore, the United States had no trouble recognizing the military government in Thailand simply because of the fact that the latter appeared to be anti-communist. The upshot of United States-Thai relations from 1948 was that "the United States appeared less interested in the development of constitutional democracy in Thailand than in building positions of strength to stop Communist expansion."⁴ In this connection it might be added that in addition to a few members of the original coup group, this point was not lost on other military men who would later become Thailand's policy-makers.

Thailand between the Korean War and 1963

Thailand relied more and more on United States assistance after the military took over in 1947. But Thai-American relations from 1947 to 1950 were carried out cautiously by

⁴Ibid.
both sides. Then in 1950 the cautious nature of the relationships began to change. In February of that year Philip Jessup, U.S. Ambassador-at-large, held a conference in Bangkok with senior American diplomats stationed in the Far East. Afterwards there was a meeting between Ambassador Jessup and the Premier and other leading members of the Thai government. The basic American objective was expressed by Ambassador Jessup when he "urged that Thailand recognize the newly proclaimed independent Vietnam headed by Emperor Bao Dai."  

The American proposal in the early part of 1950 was the first major effort to convince Thailand to adopt a posture that was to be in harmony with the United States' Asian policy. This Vietnamese question produced a split between the Thai Prime Minister and military leaders on the one hand, and the civilian Foreign Minister on the other. The latter was against the move to recognize the Bao Dai government because he believed that the Vietnamese people were not really behind the emperor. Moreover, he pointed out that before Thailand made such a critical foreign policy decision she should be more cautious and wait for further developments in Vietnam.

The professional opinion of the Foreign Minister went unheeded, however. The Premier decided to recognize the Bao Dai

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6Ibid.
government because he "believed that he could expect a large amount of aid from the United States in return for his pro-Western policy." The Premier and his military colleagues were not disappointed, for in April Thailand received an American mission which was making a survey to assess the need for economic and technical assistance to the countries in the area.

In response to the Premier's decision, the Foreign Minister resigned his post. Internationally, the communist and neutral countries were clearly displeased. In one sense, this move was highly unfortunate in its impact on relations between Thailand and the Vietnamese patriots who were trying to regain independence. Under the leadership of civilians prior to the 1947 coup, Thailand had been sympathetic to Ho Chi Minh and Vietnam. Now, Thailand took the first step toward becoming an active anti-Communist country in the hope of getting military and other forms of aid. In the process the Communist threat to Thailand's security was exaggerated to justify the government's pro-Western policy.

The Thai military government had an additional argument to justify its anti-Communist policy when the Korean war broke out. In July, 1950, it proposed to send 4,000 troops to

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8Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, p. 106.

bolster the United Nations forces.  In this connection, it is interesting to note that "Thailand's proposal to send ground forces to South Korea was the first offer from an Asian nation, and the Americans promptly seized its propaganda value to counter the Communist charges that the Korean conflict was merely another example of Western imperialism." On the United States' part, "these cooperative moves erased virtually all doubts in the minds of the Americans regarding the pro-Western sympathies of Phibun, and thereafter the former dictator was treated with great respect by the United States in the heightened tensions of the Cold War."

It was clear by this time that the Thai Premier needed American support to maintain himself in power. Similarly, the United States was seeking an Asian partner in its early anti-Communist effort in Asia. The extraordinary event of Korea clearly accelerated the process of cooperation between the United States and Thailand. Accordingly, there was a series of contacts between the two governments following Thailand's decision to send troops. First, the "Melby-Erskine Joint State-Defense MDAP Survey Mission" came to Bangkok in August, 1950. Then there was the Economic and Technical

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12 Ibid.

13 Fifield, Southeast Asia in United States Policy, p. 19.
Cooperation Agreement in September, 1950. Finally, a Military Assistance Agreement, which in retrospect was a milestone in American-Thai relations, was agreed upon in October, 1950.

According to a former U.S. Ambassador to Thailand,

This agreement is not a military alliance, nor is it a defense pact. This agreement contains no provisions for military, naval, or air bases. The government of Thailand has not offered such bases, nor has the government of the United States ever requested such bases or any special concession. The agreement follows the request by the government of Thailand for arms and equipment to strengthen Thailand's forces with a view of enabling them better to defend Thailand and Thailand's people from any aggression which may threaten the peace and tranquility of this country... It is in this spirit that the government of the United States has responded to the appeal from the government of Thailand and has decided to give army and military equipment which will replace old equipment now being used by the armed forces of Thailand and to supply a number of American officers and technicians for demonstration training purposes.14

An additional step in the same direction was taken on December 27 and 29, 1951, when the two governments exchanged notes which provided Thailand with an assurance that she would be entitled to receive military assistance according to the Mutual Security Act of 1951.15 By the end of 1951, relations between America and Thailand were closer than they had ever been up to that point.

Once the pro-Western position was taken, the Thai government under Marshal Phibunsongkram seemed determined to make the


most of it. As a result of Thailand's adoption of pro-Western posture, a chain reaction process was thus started. In 1952 Moscow and Peking began propaganda attacks on Thailand's policy. The Thai government reacted by starting anti-Communist campaigns which were directed mainly toward the suspected Chinese in Bangkok and toward the Vietnamese refugees living in the northeast. This action, in time, led to more fear of Communism when Peking, either acting on its own initiative or as a reaction to events in Thailand, "announced the establishment of a Thai Autonomous People's Government in the province of Yunnan, where a sizable number of Thai-speaking people live."16 Moreover, Nuechterlein has pointed out in this connection that

The Thai leaders' fear of a Communist conspiracy coupled with outside assistance were further strengthened in the spring of 1953 when Viet-Minh forces moved into Laos for the first time and set up a so-called Free Laotian Government. Thailand feared that this was a prelude to an open appeal to the Thais living in the northeast provinces who are ethnically and culturally related to the Lao people . . . A state of emergency was declared in the provinces adjacent to the border . . .17

In a sense, this development could be seen as evidence that the fear of the spread of Communism from across the border was not entirely unfounded. On the other hand, however, there is room for some doubt as to the extent of the Communist threat as perceived by the Thai leaders. For one thing, no one was able to establish that the Viet-Minh forces, by moving into

16Nuechterlein, Thailand and the Struggle for Southeast Asia, p. 112.
17Ibid., p. 113.
Laos, had a plan to invade, or incite unrest, in Thailand. For another, Marshal Phibunsongkram was not the sole power holder in Thailand and it was clear that by pointing out the communist threat in Laos he was able to obtain both aid from the United States and an acquiescence from the leading contenders for power in his government. Consequently, "within a short time the stress on nationalism, the fear of Communism and the presence of American arms discouraged all but a few people from opposing the policies of the military-dominated government."18

Even before the formal termination of the first Indochina war in Geneva, the United States was already involved heavily on the French side. President Eisenhower's expression at a press conference early in 1954 was indicative of the official American attitude toward developments in Indochina. In that famous statement, President Eisenhower pointed out that "you have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the next one is that it will go over very quickly."19 Thus, the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the subsequent Geneva Conference which confirmed it were viewed with deep apprehension by the United States.

Because they were thought to be "advantageous to world Communism at the expense of Western interests, the Geneva

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18Darling, Thailand and the U.S., p. 87.

arrangements gave impetus to American efforts to establish a collective security system in Southeast Asia."\(^{20}\) Accordingly, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was set up. As a member of SEATO, Thailand began receiving increased amounts of American military and economic assistance. By the end of 1954 the net effect of American assistance seemed to be two-fold. First, it increased the prestige and, more importantly, the power of the Thai army. Secondly, it demonstrated the willingness of the Thai government to take still another step in the direction of the anti-Communist camp.

Yet Thailand under the leadership of Marshal Phibunsongkram did not become as closely related to the United States as would be the case in subsequent years under Sarit and his successor, Thanom. Phibun was clearly pro-American but at the same time he did not intend to be, and actually was not, absolutely anti-Communist. That is, elements of flexibility in Thailand's policy toward communist countries can be found even after she had become a member of SEATO. For instance, "after joining the U.S.-sponsored Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in 1955 . . . the Thai Government . . . reinsured itself by signing a secret 'peaceful coexistence' agreement with Peking."\(^{21}\) Then there was the Afro-Asian Conference which was held in Bandung,


Prince Wan Waithayakorn, the Thai Foreign Minister at that time, expressed Thailand's concern over a number of issues with which the People's Republic of China had been directly or indirectly involved such as the setting up of a Thai autonomous state in Yunnan and the appearance of Viet-Minh troops in Laos. Moreover, Prince Wan explained Thailand's decision to join SEATO and her fear of communist subversion in general.\footnote{David A. Wilson, "China, Thailand and the Spirit of Bandung (Part 2)," \textit{The China Quarterly} (July-September, 1967), p. 98.} In response, Chou En-Lai assured the Thai delegates that there was nothing to fear with regard to China's intentions. For example, Chou made it clear that the establishment of a Thai autonomous state in Yunnan was very similar to the way other states for various minority groups were set up and thus it was not a threat to Thailand. On the issues of subversion and invasion, Chou claimed that China had the desire neither to subvert nor to invade her neighbors. Moreover, the Chinese delegates offered to make a treaty on the problem of Chinese immigrants in Thailand.

Although no specific agreement was reached, the fact that representatives of the two countries could meet shows that
Thailand at that time was still flexible in her dealings with the most powerful communist country in Asia. Evidence of this could be found from the fact that "beginning in 1955 a substantial amount of Chinese goods . . . began to appear in the Thai market at competitive prices."\textsuperscript{24} And "between early 1956 and the end of 1957 a mixed bag of left party members of Parliament and Journalists, a delegation of trade unionists, a cultural troupe of dancers, singers and actors . . . made their way to the mainland."\textsuperscript{25}

In one important unofficial mission to China in early 1956, members of the Thai parliament were received by Chairman Mao and Premier Chou themselves. While there, the Thai delegates had the opportunity to hold extensive conversations with both Mao and Chou on a wide range of issues of interest to both sides. The Chinese stated attitude toward Thailand could be found in Chou En-Lai's remark on the question of peace in Asia which reads, in part, as follows:

It is our opinion that the Asian nations ought to have a treaty of peace and live together in peace without any aggression. We do not support military treaties; therefore we are happy to receive you who come in friendship and peace. We will be friends and live in peace.\textsuperscript{26}

Despite the private nature of this trip, it was evident that the Thai government was interested enough to follow the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[24] Ibid., p. 124.
\item[25] Ibid., p. 118.
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progress of this sort of talk closely. And there were signs that Thailand might change its China policy if more progress could be made in future conversations.

In the face of these signs, the military coup in Thailand in 1957 gradually eliminated most of the elements of flexibility in Thailand's foreign policy. The military government, in January of 1959, banned all imports from the People's Republic of China and travel to that country. The sources which may have inspired this type of action could be traced to an allegation made by Marshal Sarit against the previous government. According to one observer, "one justification of Marshal Sarit's 1957 coup was Phibun's alleged dealings with the Communists." 27 In retrospect this was highly unlikely because "in the years since then no hard evidence has come to light on this point, and what we know on the subject came chiefly from Sarit himself." 28

In addition to the official justification, there are two other lines of reasoning concerning the coup. The first, according to Jay Taylor, is that Thailand became anti-Communist because Cambodia under Prince Narodom Sihanouk had a close relationship with Communist China. Since Thailand was having serious border disputes with Cambodia, she was afraid that Peking might


28 Ibid.
give support to Cambodia. The second factor which could be used to explain why Thailand suddenly severed relations with mainland China is the amount of American aid, which suddenly increased from $24 million in 1957 to $46.5 million in 1958. In this connection, it is worth noting that Premier Sarit had illegally amassed more than $100 million for personal use during his tenure from 1957 to his death in 1963. In light of this fact it is obvious that American aid, which doubled in one year, was one important factor that persuaded Sarit to become anti-Communist.

Thus, Thailand's anti-Communist policy was adopted as a consequence of a combination of these factors. In the process, an unrealistic step was taken in the orientation of Thailand's foreign policy. Subsequently, another military man was to take Thailand further away from her traditional way of dealing with other nations. This policy was unequivocally backed by the United States. That is, "the Eisenhower administration maintained large-scale military aid programs and it continued to view the country as a strong anti-Communist base in Southeast Asia." It should not be surprising that "at times the Americans actually indicated a desire to increase the size of the armed forces."31

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29 Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, pp. 275-276.

30 Darling, Thailand and the U.S., p. 170.

31 Ibid.
It is clear by now that in the late 1950's there was a definite connection between the Thai military government's fear of Communism and the support and advice it received from the United States. Since Communism was regarded as the most dangerous threat to Thailand's security and because Thailand's foreign policy from 1957 to 1973 had been derived from this premise, it is necessary to consider briefly the nature of Communism in Thailand.

The Communist Party of Thailand, the CPT or TCP, was said to have been established in December, 1942, and the group was composed almost exclusively of overseas Chinese. From that time on, the Thai Communists were rarely able to operate due to government pressure and the lack of appeal to the masses. Nevertheless, in the decade after its inception, there were times when government restrictions on the CPT were relaxed. But the CPT appeared to be unable to take advantage of such opportunities. As one author observed, "the party's movements were considerably more hesitant than the government's determination to expunge it."\(^{32}\) In terms of external support in the 1950's, Peking "really had little interest and even less faith in the communist movements"\(^{33}\) in Thailand. This was one major reason behind the Thai Communist Party's failure to gain

\(^{32}\)Melvin Gurtov, China and Southeast Asia--The Politics of Survival (Massachusetts, 1971), p. 7.

\(^{33}\)Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, p. 262.
strength in the two decades after the Second World War in comparison to other Southeast Asian Communist parties. Another important reason was "because of the unproductive social-political climate in Thailand, particularly the absence of a colonial past and a major peasant problem." In general, this assessment of the Thai Communist Party was accurate until roughly the early 1960's.

As a member of SEATO, Thailand was entitled to receive outside assistance in case her sovereignty was threatened. But the SEATO decision to give help to a member was to be made collectively through consultation by all members in order to be effective. Because of this clause of the treaty, it was believed that Thailand was dissatisfied with it. But actually there was practically no reason for Thailand to fear the threat of either Communist invasion or subversion between her joining of SEATO and Marshal Sarit's decision to sever relations with Peking. As was pointed out, neither the external nor the internal Communist threat were as grave as the Thai government under Sarit proclaimed.

From the time Sarit assumed power and his death in October, 1963, political and military developments in Laos were, for the most part, the main cause of concern. This is understandable if one considers the fact that Thailand at that time was in favor of a rightist general, Phumi Nosavan, who was head of one of

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Ibid., p. 252.
the three Laotian factions seeking predominance in that country. The rationale behind the Sarit administration's policy was that neither the Laotian Neutralists nor Leftists could be allowed to become the ruling group. Rightly or wrongly, to let that happen would mean that Chinese troops would be able to infiltrate into Thailand through Laos, which has a 1,000-mile common border with Thailand. The Thai government's reasoning on Laos coincided with the United States government's. As a former advisor to President Kennedy has pointed out,

... Laos had an evident strategic importance. If the Communists gained possession of the Mekong valley, they could materially intensify their pressure against South Vietnam and Thailand. If Laos was not precisely a dagger pointed at the heart of Kansas, it was very plainly a gateway to Southeast Asia.35

Obviously, Thailand and America held a similar view on the Laotian situation. On March 6, 1962, the American Secretary of State and the Thai Foreign Minister issued a joint declaration which stated,

The Foreign Minister and the Secretary of State reviewed the close association of Thailand and the United States in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and agreed that such association is an effective deterrent to direct Communist aggression against Thailand. They agreed that the Treaty provided the basis for the signatories collectively to assist Thailand in case of Communist armed attack against that country. The Secretary of State assured the Foreign Minister that in the event of such aggression, the United States

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intends to give full effect to its obligation under the Treaty to act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. The Secretary of State reaffirmed that this obligation of the United States does not depend upon prior agreement of all other parties to the Treaty, since the Treaty obligation is individual as well as collective.  

This joint statement was, in effect, a major revision of the original provisions of the SEATO Treaty as far as the United States and Thailand were concerned. Now America could extend a helping hand to Thailand without having to wait for the consent of other signatories of the SEATO Treaty. Hence, this bilateral agreement was a clear testimony of Thailand's willingness to take still another step to become more closely identified with the United States.

Not very long after this joint declaration was unveiled, the United States had the chance to show both Thailand and the Communist forces in Laos that she meant business. In May, 1962, the right wing faction in Laos was routed and the Pathet Lao forces appeared to be winning. The dangerous aspect of this development was that "the communists appeared to be starting a drive toward the Thai border." In response, Thailand called on the United States and other members of SEATO to act. President Kennedy apparently felt that the situation was grave enough to warrant American intervention. Accordingly, 5,000


37Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, p. 476.
troops were sent to Thailand to be stationed in Udorn Thani, a provincial capital near Thai-Lao border. And some units of the U.S. Seventh Fleet were moved into the Gulf of Siam. In addition to the United States, three other members of SEATO, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, also sent token forces to Thailand for the same purpose.

The appearance of combined forces from four SEATO member countries seemed to have been taken into consideration by leaders of the Pathet Lao faction. That is, the Communist offensive stopped a few weeks after the SEATO members' show of force. Thus, it was logical that the United States, Thailand, and other SEATO members who participated in this undertaking would draw a conclusion that the best way to deal with Communist intransigence was to use force or the threat thereof. Undoubtedly, the incident made a deep impression on a good many of Sarit's deputies who were later to become Thailand's policymakers. From the crisis in Laos to the end of 1963 there were no other international incidents which had such a bearing on Thailand. In December, 1963, Marshal Sarit died and the reins of government passed to General Thanom Kittikachorn, a deputy of Marshal Sarit.

Thailand's Foreign Relations from 1963 to 1973

The Thai government under the leadership of Premier Thanom Kittikachorn lasted ten years, from 1964 to October, 1973. In this period Thailand identified with a Western nation and its
policy to the extent which was unprecedented in comparison to the country's previous relations with foreign nations.

Even before the death of Premier Sarit, the French-educated Foreign Minister, Mr. Thanat Khoman, was already prominent as the leading voice in the making of foreign policy. Although he did not have the last word in the adoption of policy, Mr. Thanat had been by far the most influential figure, after the Prime Minister, in the Thai government. Because he was to remain important in the field of foreign policymaking until near the end of the Thanom government, it may be helpful to consider Mr. Thanat's ideas as had been expressed in an interview. In response to a foreign correspondent's question about Thailand's position in connection with the conflicts in Indochina, the Thai Foreign Minister answered, in part, in the following terms:

When France left Indochina after the Geneva Conference some countries, like North Vietnam, saw a chance to take the place of the colonial power and tried to extend their influence and control to countries which then became independent. At the same time they concluded agreements with other countries professing the same ideology and with China in particular. . . . Besides the war in Vietnam there is the war in Laos. All this forms part of a general plan of the Asian colonialist powers to impress their hegemony over the whole Southeast Asian peninsula and no doubt over the rest of the continent as well.38

This, in effect, is a standard expression of the view that the political troubles in Southeast Asia were caused by

the sinister plan of Communist countries which were monolithic in their basic essence. The Thai Foreign Minister had no trouble convincing the Premier and other powerful figures in government that his view of Communism was basically correct and that the foreign policy of Thailand should be constructed from this premise. In following the staunchly anti-Communist policy recommended by the Foreign Minister, the military may have had more than the safety of Thailand in mind. This is because, like Premiers Phibunsongkram and Sarit before them, the Thai military leaders, in adopting an anti-Communist posture, were able to obtain material and moral support from the United States to sustain themselves in power.

As has been pointed out, there was really no serious Communist threat to Thai security, either from within or without, prior to Premier Thanom's assumption of power in December, 1963. There were, however, growing propaganda attacks from radio stations in China and North Vietnam on Thailand's move toward a closer relation with the United States. The rationale behind these propaganda attacks may be better understood if one looks at Thailand's pro-American stand from Peking's point of view. Surely, no major power would want to see one of its neighboring countries being transformed into its adversary's giant air base.

The rise to power of General Thanom Kittikachorn in Thailand happened shortly after President Diem of South Vietnam
was killed. After the fall of Diem, it looked like South Vietnam was about to fall into the hands of Communists. Fearing that it was the realization of the domino theory, the United States decided to intervene. In the context of 1964, American intervention in Vietnam seemed to possess every trapping of legitimacy. In support of President Johnson's early Vietnam policy, the American Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August, 1964, which held, in essence, that Congress "approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." Consequently, as Schlesinger points out, President Johnson, . . . in early 1965 decreed the Americanization of the war in Vietnam, sending American combat units for the first time to the south and American bombers for the first time on a continuing basis to the north. This brought about a major change in the nature of the American involvement.

Within this context, there was a major change in the nature of Thai-American relations as well. Without any provocation from North Vietnam or other Asian Communist countries, Thailand agreed to let the United States build and operate six new air bases on her soil for the sole purpose of facilitating the air war in Vietnam and later in Laos and Cambodia as well. On its

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40 Ibid., p. 176.
part, the United States government realized that it would be more economical to fly from bases in Thailand than from the decks of aircraft carriers of the American Seventh Fleet, from Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, or from bases in Guam. For example, the flying distance from Guam to bombing targets in South Vietnam is about 2,550 miles, but from bases in eastern Thailand the distance is only about 425 miles.41

Therefore, the American Ambassador to Thailand at the time, Mr. Graham Martin, initiated a series of joint Thai-U.S. talks which culminated in an overall agreement between the two governments in 1964. In contrast to the Rusk-Thanat memorandum of 1962 this agreement, which has also been known as the "secret contingency plan," was secret at the time it was signed and it was not until 1969 that some of its provisions became known to the public. Moreover, while the 1962 memorandum was signed by the two countries' Foreign Ministers, the 1965 contingency plan was signed by General Stilwell, the Commander of all American forces in Thailand at the time, and General Thanom who acted as Thailand's Minister of Defense.

Although the Thai-American secret contingency plan of 1965 is said to be "a monument to ambiguity,"42 it is now possible to find out about some of the most significant provisions.

41Melvin Gurtov, China and Southeast Asia--The Politics of Survival (Massachusetts, 1971), p. 35.

First of all, the plan "called for a coordination between U.S. and Thai troops in any of a number of detailed patterns in case of overt attack by land, sea or air."\(^\text{43}\) Secondly, the plan specified the American Air Force units which would fly to Thailand in case of overt attack and it "also stipulated where ammunition, arms, and other equipment would be stored during fighting on various fronts."\(^\text{44}\) Another known provision called "for a permanent stockpile near Korat, where the U.S. had built an army camp for logistical and engineering units."\(^\text{45}\) Then there was a provision that stipulated that all American combat troops "introduced into Thailand would fight under Thai authority."\(^\text{46}\)

Perhaps the most important element of this agreement was the classified one concerning Thailand's consent to let the United States build and operate six air bases. But the only available explanation of the American-Thai agreement regarding air bases could be found in a statement of a former American Ambassador to Thailand. Testifying before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations' Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Ambassador Leonard Unger stated that "the USAF/RTAF have a Joint Use and Air Defense

\(^{\text{44}}\)Ibid.
\(^{\text{45}}\)Ibid.
\(^{\text{46}}\)Ibid.
Operations Agreement which is concerned with jointly used facilities and with coordinating air defense operations."47

The passage in Ambassador Unger's testimony that is most revealing concerning the American use of Thai bases is that "during 1964 the U.S. and the RTG agreed to certain measures to upgrade the logistical complex in Thailand and to certain air deployments."48

The American air bases in Thailand had been in existence for two years before Ambassador Martin officially revealed their existence in January, 1967. On its part, the Thai military government grudgingly agreed with Ambassador Martin's pronouncement. In this connection, the number of both the American war planes and troops increased according to the tempo of the Vietnam War. For example, the number of American servicemen in Thailand increased from 32,000 in 1966 to around 50,000 in 1969. Like so many other aspects of the Vietnam War, it is interesting to note that before the fact about American air bases in Thailand became known, most Americans "have probably assumed the troops were there to deal with local communist insurgency."49


48Ibid., p. 615.

With considerable prodding by the United States, Thailand agreed to become actively involved in the Vietnam conflict. In 1966, the Thai government sent 200 Navy personnel to man two U.S.-supplied war ships patrolling in South Vietnamese waters. Then in 1967, as a result of the American request, the Thai government sent a ground combat unit of 2,207 officers and men to South Vietnam. Subsequently, more forces were added and the total number of Thai troops fighting in Vietnam rose to about 12,000 by late 1969. In addition to providing bases for American planes and sending troops to South Vietnam, Thailand also went along with the American effort to fight a secret war in Laos. According to one account, "up to thirty battalions of 'Thai volunteers' had fought on the Vietnam side in the Laotian segment of the Indochina war with U.S. financing." Naturally, there were some apprehensions among Thai leaders after President Johnson announced his intention not to seek reelection in March, 1968. This is because by that time Thailand had become probably the most deeply committed Asian nation with regard to America's anti-Communist effort in Vietnam. As far as the Thai leaders' fear of Communism was concerned, the

50 Senate Hearings on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, p. 624.

51 Ibid.

situation seemed to get worse because of the impact of anti-war movements in the United States. As Simon has pointed out,

In September, 1969, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution which, in effect, superseded the 1962 Rusk-Thanat understandings on U.S. security guarantees to Thailand outside the SEATO contract. The Senate resolution insisted that no American ground forces be employed in the event of war in Thailand.53

Shortly after taking office, President Nixon made a reassuring statement that "the United States will stand proudly with Thailand against those who might threaten it from abroad or from within."54 In terms of American Indochina policy as a whole, President Nixon unveiled his new approach or the Nixon Doctrine which, in effect, meant that there was to be "a contraction of the American force on hand to meet those commitments, with the gap to be filled by local force."55

The Nixon Doctrine, of course, was most relevant in South Vietnam where most of the fighting took place. As far as Cambodia and Laos were concerned, the Nixon Doctrine appeared to have only limited bearing since the majority of anti-Communist forces in these two countries were either native soldiers or volunteers from Thailand. However, there were some exceptions such as the joint American-South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia in May, 1970. When it was applied to Thailand, the Nixon Doctrine had two implications. First of all, the

53 Ibid., p. 39.

54 Schlesinger, The Imperial Presidency, pp. 202-203.

55 Ibid., p. 300.
aspect of the Doctrine on the replacement of American with local troops has no meaning because Thai troops alone bore the burden of fighting local insurgents. On the other hand, Thailand was a key to the success of the Nixon Doctrine’s attempt to bolster anti-Communist forces in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam through her permission to let the United States use bases in Thailand. According to one American journalist, the sole mission of American personnel in Thailand was to "bomb North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Laos. They have no constructive local function. Thailand has become a bomb rack for our war."\(^5\)\(^6\)

As the anti-war movements in the United States gathered momentum, some members of the Thai government began to express doubt as to the reliability of the American commitment. Ironically, the most notable doubter of the policy of supporting American effort in Vietnam was Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman who, it may be recalled, had been the outspoken advocate of the pro-American policy just a few years earlier.

Apparently, Mr. Thanat changed his mind in 1969. It may be speculated that Thanat, as the most knowledgeable member of the cabinet on foreign affairs, sensed that the Nixon administration might be changing its Vietnam policy in the face of the growing anti-war movement among the general public and in the Congress. Furthermore, if America should decide to reduce

its role in Southeast Asia, which it subsequently did, the best course of action for Thailand was to decrease its tie with the United States while trying to improve relations with Peking and Hanoi. Accordingly, the Thai Foreign Minister decided to try to veer the course of Thailand's foreign policy from the pro-American stand.

Before he could carry out his plan, Thanat was faced with a major obstacle in the person of Premier Thanom and other military men in the government. Beginning in 1969 the Thai Foreign Minister, during interviews with foreign correspondents, "proclaimed that Thailand was ready to sit down for discussions with the Chinese Communists and that a stable settlement for Southeast Asia would require the agreement of China."57 In early 1970 Thanat "called for another Bandung conference and a revival of the Bandung formula with necessary modifications."58 In another context in the same year Thanat was quoted as saying that Communist China "will become pivotal to peace, security, and freedom in Asia as it turns from internal preoccupation to outside interests and as the United States tries to sneak out of the Asian scene."59

By themselves, these conciliatory announcements of the Thai Foreign Minister did not produce an immediate result as far as

57Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, p. 349.
58Ibid., p. 350.
59Ibid.
Peking's expected reaction was concerned. But there were some other public moves which were meant to bolster Thanat's aim of mending fences with Communist countries in Asia. First was the Thai government's decision in 1970 to pull its troops out of South Vietnam. There was also a decision not to send troops into Cambodia to help the Lon Nol government in its fight with the Cambodian Communists, the Khmer Rouge.

A combination of Thanat's positive comments and Thailand's decisions with regard to Cambodia and South Vietnam seemed to have perceptible effects on Peking. For instance, while the New China News Agency "continued to originate its own articles . . . on the guerrilla war in Thailand, references to China's support for the revolution began to drop in 1970."60 Relations with North Vietnam had also been improved. The main issue was the approximately 40,000 Vietnamese who came to Thailand as refugees during the bitter fighting between Ho Chi Minh's patriotic forces and the returning French colonialists after the close of the Second World War. Since then Thailand had been trying to send these people back to their homeland. By the first half of the 1960's, negotiations between the governments of North Vietnam and Thailand were being carried on and a certain number of refugees had actually returned to Vietnam. But the bombing of Vietnam by American planes from bases in Thailand in 1965 caused North Vietnam to withdraw from talks

60 Ibid.
on ways to return the refugees. It was not until 1970 that the talks were reoppened again.

Even though Thanat's positive gestures toward Communist countries were ostensibly approved by the Prime Minister in 1969 and 1970, conflicts over this issue began to develop in 1971. And in early 1971 Thanat "began to complain more bitterly of the drop of U.S. economic aid to Thailand, the American 'intrusion' in the world rice market, and U.S. press and Congressional criticism of Thailand."\(^{61}\) Moreover, later in May after the U.S. ping pong team was invited to mainland China, Thanat

... sounded optimistic about Sino-Thai relations, claiming that through third parties China and Thailand had made indirect exchanges leading to better mutual understanding. Thanat also used the term "People's Republic of China" for the first time, and he said that the policy of relaxing tensions with China had been approved by the prime minister and the cabinet.\(^{62}\)

At that time the Premier and other cabinet members may or may not have endorsed the claim made by Thanat with regard to Thailand's policy toward China. But the conflict between Thanat and pro-American members of the cabinet was kept out of public view until November, 1971. In that month Thanom staged a coup against his own popularly elected government. Like many other coups before it, the one in 1971 was carried out

\(^{61}\)Ibid., p. 351.
\(^{62}\)Ibid.
in order to put an end to increasingly troublesome domestic political opposition elements. Equally important were conflicts over the control of the direction of Thailand's foreign policy. That is, "in his list of reasons for the coup, the marshal cited first the need to forestall a small but growing movement among some politicians to begin exploring new relations with China and to retain the reins of foreign policy firmly in his own hands." Accordingly, as the new cabinet of the revolutionary government of Thailand was formed, the name of Thanat was not on it.

During the period in which Foreign Minister Thanat was trying to modify the course of Thai foreign policy, talks on plans to reduce American troops in Thailand between the U.S. and Thai representatives were started. But the actual reduction of the number of troops and air bases in Thailand seemed, more or less, to be dependent on the progress of America's Vietnamization program. That is, the American troop level in Thailand was being reduced in proportion to the success of the phased withdrawal from Vietnam. As American troops were being pulled out of Vietnam in 1970 and 1971, the number in Thailand was also decreasing from over 50,000 in 1968 to a little over 30,000 by the end of 1971. At the time it looked like the American troop level in Thailand would be decreased at a faster rate as Thailand under the guidance of Thanat was trying to

63 Ibid., p. 353.
make her own foreign policy without having to rely on American approval. Then came the 1971 coup which resulted in the banishment of Thanat. And Thailand was back almost exactly where she was in 1964 as far as the ability and confidence to make an independent judgment on foreign policy matters were concerned.

It may be remembered that in the spring of 1972 North Vietnam started another massive military offensive and the United States immediately retaliated. Since the American ground forces in Vietnam had already been substantially cut, the only remaining alternative to prolong the life of the Thieu government of South Vietnam was the use of her overwhelming air power. Indeed, even prior to the 1972 North Vietnamese spring offensive, according to Senator Fulbright, President Nixon had already established himself as the greatest bomber of all times by virtue of "having dropped more than one ton of bombs for every minute of his Administration." In a way reminiscent of the decision to bomb Vietnam in the 1964-1965 period, the most practical, economical, and quickest way to punish, but not to kill, North Vietnam was to do it from bases in Thailand. Again, the Thai government went along with the idea. Thus, recently closed air bases were reopened and the total number of U.S. planes in Thailand jumped from 450 at the end of 1971 to 750 by June, 1972. Along with an increase

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in air strength the number of servicemen stationed in Thailand went up from 32,000 to 49,000. Interestingly enough, the increased American personnel in Thailand were transferred from Vietnam according to President Nixon's pledge to the American people to reduce the number of troops in Vietnam to 49,000 by July 1, 1972. By that date Thailand and South Vietnam had approximately the same number of American troops in their countries.

In 1973 after the danger in Vietnam had passed, the number of Americans in Thailand was reduced again. American troops were pulled out not because of the Thai government's request but because Washington saw no reason to keep them there after the emergency was over. Thus, it is abundantly clear that the Thai government from 1964 to 1973 under the leadership of men from the army had neither the capacity nor the wisdom to conduct an independent foreign policy.
CHAPTER V

CONSEQUENCES OF THAILAND'S ANTI-COMMUNIST POLICY

Costs and Benefits

There is no doubt that over the years Thailand has received considerable national security, economic, military, political, and other benefits from its association with the anti-Communist policy of the United States. On the other hand, there were a number of problems which occurred as a consequence of Thailand's decision to become one of the most staunchly anti-Communist countries of Asia. With the end of the Vietnam War and the existence of a more relaxed atmosphere between the Communist and anti-Communist countries of Asia, it is now possible to consider the benefits and costs to Thailand which were the consequences of post-war Thai leaders' decision, especially during the 1964-1973 period, to join in the crusade against Communism in Asia.

The first item on the list of benefits to Thailand is, of course, national security. The principal justification for the Thai government's decision to adopt a pro-Western policy has been the safeguarding of the country's sovereignty and national independence. Such a policy was derived from the premise that the forces of monolithic Communism were out to subjugate the free world. Proceeding from this precept, the Thai government
had, over the years, tried and obtained security guarantees from the United States. On the basis of the collective security principle, the United States and Thailand concluded a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements such as those in 1950, 1954, 1962 and 1965. There were also a number of private assurances made by high American officials to the effect that the United States would stand firmly behind Thailand if her national sovereignty were threatened.

But the serious threat that required the sending of American troops to Thailand occurred in 1962 when there were reports that Pathet Lao troops were advancing in the direction of Thailand. Subsequently, Americans went to Thailand for the expressed purpose of bombing Vietnam and Laos. Thailand went along with the American war effort because her policymakers believed that the fall of Indochina to Communists would lead to the fall of Thailand. This, of course, was the main thrust of the "domino theory" argument.

Clearly related to security considerations was the military benefit to Thailand. By becoming America's ally, Thailand received substantial military aid through the years. For instance, between 1949 and 1970 Thailand received the total of $874.4 million in military aid from the United States. From this figure, $522.9 million was for the period between 1963 and 1970.¹ Figures for the 1970-1973 period are still classified

at the present time. But from available figures, it is evident that Thailand received most of the U.S. military assistance during the Vietnam war years.

There is no doubt that American military assistance went a long way toward the modernization of the Thai army. And through the years the Thai army had three basic functions. The first was to defend the country from external armed attack by hostile powers. But the Thai army in modern times had never really been tested in this regard and it was highly unlikely that there would be any overt armed attack from outside. The second principal function of the army was the suppression of internal rebellion. But the problem of insurgency, which will be discussed in more detail later, became serious only after the Thai government had allowed the United States to use Thai air bases to bomb Vietnam. Thus, the Thai army may not have had to cope with the insurgents had the government under the military men not taken an explicit pro-American stand. Finally, the modernized army was most useful in keeping the generals in power. In this sense the American military assistance indirectly contributed to the perpetuation of the military clique's hold on political power in Thailand.

The third benefit to Thailand was in the economic realm. In general, there were two types of American economic assistance to Thailand. The first consisted mainly of direct economic loans and grants. From 1946 to 1965 Thailand obtained the
total amount of $433.7 million of this type. Subsequently, from 1965 to 1972 the total amount in this category was $261.7 million. The substantial difference in the total American assistance between the two periods can clearly be noted from these figures. American economic assistance enabled the Thai government to build or improve communication networks, educational facilities, irrigation projects, etc. Moreover, part of this assistance was used to stimulate social and industrial development programs and the like which in turn have helped increase the output of the Thai economy.

Another assistance to the Thai economy was related to the expenditures which were the result of the American effort in Vietnam. Despite its indirect nature, this type of assistance to the Thai economy could be regarded as considerable. That is, the United States from 1965 to 1972 spent $1,457.1 million in Thailand as a part of the overall expenditures to fight the war in Indochina. This sum of money had been spent for a number of purposes, two of which should be mentioned here. The first was the various construction projects such as air bases, a new network of highways linking these bases, ammunition


\[4\text{Ibid.}\]
depots, and a new deep water port. However, it should be pointed out that most of the various construction projects were done by American companies. Hence, certain parts of the money spent for building military facilities in Thailand went back to the United States. Another type of expenditure had to do with the money spent for rest and recreation purposes in Thailand by American servicemen on leave from Vietnam. Taken together, these two types of expenditures accounted for an increase in revenues for many Thais who worked for Americans. But there were certain Thais with influential connections who seemed to benefit more from this American expenditure. And it should not come as a surprise if most of these influential Thais happened to be the generals who supported the pro-American policy in the first place. Monetary benefits to the Thai generals from the American expenditures were obtained in the following way: "Foreign construction companies were awarded fat contracts if they arrange suitable kickbacks, and additionally the generals have firms of their own in their wives' names which also get government contracts."\(^5\)

In sum, the economic benefits which were the results of the American expenditures for her war efforts in Vietnam went directly to the following groups of Thais. These are the well-connected and influential Thai army and air force generals,

\(^5\)Alex Campbell, "Thailand, Is This Something to Fall Back On?" *The New Republic*, March 26, 1966, p. 18.
engineers and construction workers, owners and employees of construction and transportation companies, hotel and restaurant owners, operators of various tourist attractions, food contractors, and prostitutes. It should be noted that, in comparison to other people in the same professions, these people were a distinct minority. But because the amount of money the Americans spent in Thailand throughout the Vietnam War years was not anything that could be regarded as small and insignificant, it must therefore be admitted that the American spending indirectly contributed to the growth of the Thai economy during this period.

In addition to these three main benefits to Thailand, there were also a few others. Political benefit to the ruling group is an obvious example. As a consequence of becoming America's ally, Thailand's international reputation seemed to be solid and respectable in the 1950's and early 1960's as far as other anti-communist countries were concerned. On the other hand, the Thai military leaders' hold on political power was supported by the United States in two fundamental ways. First the United States had not objected to, and in a few instances seemed even to endorse, the system of military dictatorship in Thailand which existed from 1957 to 1969 and from 1971 to 1973. Secondly, the ruling clique was backed by the army and air force that, in turn, received considerable military assistance from the United States. As far as educational and technical benefits were concerned, it seems safe to say that the Thai people had little to gain.
On the other side of the coin, Thailand had to pay the price for its leaders' decision to adopt an explicit pro-American posture from 1963 on. That is, there was a critical issue of relations with China. In connection with this issue, insurgency in Thailand was a ponderous domestic threat from 1965 to the present day. It is important, therefore, to examine the issue of insurgency in the context of Thailand's pro-American stand.

Peking's attitude toward political developments in Thailand varied according to the changing circumstances. As was pointed out, Peking-Bangkok relations were warming up when the military coup took place. Consequently, Thailand initiated her own anti-Communist policy which did not differ much from the Americans'. Mainland China reacted by starting propaganda campaigns in various forms such as anti-Thai radio broadcasts from southern China and Hanoi and diplomatic attacks on Thailand's pro-Western policy during the international gatherings of Communist and neutralist nations. Furthermore, China was a place in which Thai politicians and journalists with a socialist point of view usually ended up after their expulsion from the country.

As to the dissidents still living underground in Thailand, the only visible form of support from Peking was superficial verbal encouragement but even this came only once in a while. As of 1963, armed insurgent movements were practically unheard of because the level of violence created by them could be best
described as insignificant. It would be misleading, however, to say that there were no rebellious activities for the country as a whole. That is, "actually, from 1959 to the end of 1964, such rebellious activities as did occur tended to be carried out by a variety of dissident bands, organizations, and individuals having separate aims, leadership, and base areas."6 According to an expert, "what limited information on China's early involvement with the Thai Communists exists provides little evidence of a meaningful Chinese effort to foment trouble in Thailand."7 Thus, as 1964 began it was difficult to imagine that Thailand would soon have to devise concrete plans to cope with the insurgency problem.

It is obvious that from 1958 to 1963 Thailand's anti-Communist policy did not have serious and negative domestic consequences. Nor did that policy have a serious external consequences beyond the propaganda attacks by Chinese and North Vietnamese radio broadcasts. Less obvious was the fact that during the same period of time there were no foreign troops and military installations in Thailand. There was one exception, however, and that was the assembly of soldiers from the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand as part of SEATO response to Communist advances in Laos in 1962.

7Ibid., p. 16.
The key period in which the Thai government's decision to support openly the American's Vietnam policy created very grave consequences for Thailand's internal stability was between 1964 and the end of 1965. Thus, it is necessary to examine in some detail the developments in the 1964-1965 period because what happened inside Thailand after 1965 was, for the most part, the direct consequence of its leader's decision in those two years.

As 1964 began, the Thai leaders became increasingly apprehensive over the situation in Laos and Vietnam. Between the two, Thailand was more concerned with what happened in Laos than in Vietnam. And by the summer of 1964, it became an open secret that certain Thai troops and a number of American Special Forces personnel were fighting in Laos. On the other hand, the United States was greatly alarmed by the deteriorating political and military situation in Vietnam.

Then came the Tonkin Gulf incident in August, 1964, and the subsequent increase in America's human and material assistance to the South Vietnamese government. In the process, the United States invoked its SEATO obligation as a main justification for getting involved in the Vietnam conflict. Other SEATO members were asked to make contributions in this direction. Thailand, by virtue of its geographical proximity to the conflict, was in an excellent position to provide air bases from which attacks against Communist troops could be launched.
Accordingly, negotiations between Thai and American representatives on the issue of the latter's proposal to use the former's territory as air bases were apparently conducted in the early part of 1964. Thailand's somewhat naive position in the 1964 negotiations was that "the Vietnam conflict, having become a veritable testing ground of the American commitment to Southeast Asia's security by virtue of the scale of the American presence, requires consistent Asian support."\footnote{Ibid., p. 23.}

Considering this type of pre-determined pro-American attitude on Thailand's part, the negotiations were merely a forum for the consideration of technical details of the air base construction.

As was noted, the Thai Communist Party had been in existence for many years but until 1964 it was merely an ineffective clandestine organization operating underground. Then in 1964 a number of secretly distributed leaflets of the TCP surfaced in Bangkok and "in October the Thai Communist Party received its first official attention from China in many years."\footnote{Jay Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements (New York, 1974), p. 290.} That is, a message from the TCP was published in Peking. The gist of the TCP message was a call for the government's overthrow and for an expulsion of American forces "but neutrality was still preached as the appropriate foreign policy for Thailand."\footnote{Gurtov, China and Southeast Asia--The Politics of Survival, p. 13.}
A month later, Peking announced the formation of the Thai Independence Movement (TIM) which was headed by an exiled Thai politician living in China. Then in January, 1965, there was an announcement of the formation of another front organization, the Thai Patriotic Front (TPF). Like the TCP and TIM, the TPF "leveled its attack on United States-Thai military cooperation, demanded the removal of all American troops and the overthrow of the government, and espoused a six-point program of 'peace and neutrality' in a new government run by 'patriots and democrats.'"11

Thus, by the end of January, 1965, there were already three Communist organizations, all of which have similar aims and were supported by Peking and, to a lesser extent, by Hanoi. Even at this point in time subversive activities and armed clashes between government forces and Communist insurgents were still very rare.

At this juncture, a very pertinent question may be raised. Why did the indigenous Communists not launch armed attacks or initiate subversive activities in Thailand after Peking declared its support in the fall of 1964? Answers to this question may be divided into two groups. The first has to do with relations between the Thai insurgents and their backers, Peking and Hanoi. The second group of answers, which is more significant than the first, involves the possibility of Peking's desire to influence Thailand's foreign policy.

11Ibid., p. 13.
In the first category, it is possible that "China only intended, with collateral assistance from North Vietnam, to sustain their revolutionary enthusiasm, not to equip them with the tools for a serious insurgency." Furthermore, "the apparent limited increases in tangible external support of the Thai Communists between the fall of 1964 and the spring of 1965, when placed beside the rudimentary character of their indigenous organization at that time, imply a certain tentativeness about the commitment of Peking and Hanoi to a revolution in Thailand."13

In the second category, because the TCP, TIM, and TPF were heavily dependent upon Peking's ideological and material support, their relative lack of activity may be the result of Peking's desire to see if it could influence the direction of Thailand's foreign policy. By publicly encouraging the Thai Communists but covertly giving only limited material support to them, "Peking's principal interest may have been to give Bangkok a preliminary signal that further Thai involvement in support of American objectives in Indochina risked an expansion of the Communist effort in Thailand from primarily political to military action."14 In other words, "Peking may have decided that the best way it had to warn Thailand against permitting her bases to be used by American planes and to be

12Ibid., p. 18.
13Ibid.
14Ibid., p. 22.
manned by United States personnel was to hint at the possibilities inherent in Chinese support of a Communist insurgency in Thailand.\(^{15}\)

The Thai government, however, was not able to link its own support of the American war effort in Vietnam and the possible rise in insurgency activities in Thailand. The reason may have been due to two incidents which, in the context of 1965, seemed to be the cause for Thailand's concern. That is, "in January 1965, there were reports that the Bank of China in Hongkong had made large purchases of Thai currency, and according to later press reports, Chen Yi\(^{16}\) in the early part of January informed a Western diplomat that a war of national liberation might start in Thailand by the end of the year.\(^{17}\)

The bombing of North Vietnam was reported to have started on February 7, 1965. Shortly thereafter, "the New York Times first reported that U.S. jets were operating out of Korat in central Thailand on April 9, 1965."\(^{18}\) As far as Peking's attitude toward Thailand's reaction to developments in Indochina was concerned, it is interesting to note that during the first

\(^{15}\)Ibid.

\(^{16}\)Chen Yi at the time was the Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China.

\(^{17}\)Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, p. 290.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 291.
two months of 1965,

Comments in the Chinese press on the situation in Thailand and on Thai policy were at first confined to quotations of VTP\textsuperscript{19} broadcast, report from Western news agents, and republications of statements from North Vietnam. All these statements were published after the first series of American air raids on North Vietnam in early February, and all concerned the role being played by Thailand in the Vietnam conflict.\textsuperscript{20}

However, news and comments from mainland China on Thailand and the Vietnam conflict were suspended from April 8 to April 26. This suspension was due perhaps to the fact that between April 18 and April 25, the tenth anniversary celebration of the Bandung Conference was held in Djakarta, Indonesia. Both Thailand and Communist China sent representatives to this meeting. The Thai and Chinese representatives did not talk as much as in the first Bandung Conference in 1955 and no official agreement or communique was produced. Nevertheless, the conference seemed to encourage "speculation that at the Djakarta meeting Peking may have made a last attempt to sway Thailand's leaders away from their Indochina involvement before directly indicating support for the Thai Communists."\textsuperscript{21} Thus, it is highly probable that China suspended its propaganda attack on Thailand in the middle of April as a gesture of Chinese goodwill so that Chou En-lai and his fellow Chinese representatives could point out to the Thai representatives the danger of following

\textsuperscript{19}"Voice of the Thai People," news and commentaries in the Thai language from radio stations in China.

\textsuperscript{20}Gurtov, China and Southeast Asia--The Politics of Survival, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
American policy in Indochina. If this was what happened, the Chinese attempt clearly failed to persuade Thailand.

After the conference was over, the Chinese media started to comment on Thailand's involvement in the war in Indochina in a more threatening fashion. In comparison to the previous commentaries on Thailand, the one in late April was much more specific. Part of it runs as follows:

Recently, U.S. imperialism has been intensifying its use of Thailand as a base for expanding its aggressive war in Vietnam, and moreover has exerted all efforts to drag Thailand into the Indochina war. The Thai authorities, following the aggressive policies of U.S. imperialism, has permitted U.S. military personnel and jet aircraft to enter Thailand continuously. U.S. aircraft have taken off from Thailand one after another to bomb the DRV and Laos. Under the urging of U.S. imperialism, the Thai authorities have also prepared to send military personnel to South Vietnam to participate in the aggressive war.

All these things . . . cannot but severely harm Thailand's sovereign independence and national interests, cannot but stimulate the fierce dissatisfaction and anger of the Thai masses. A popular war against the Thai authorities' selling out of the national interest and their serving as the accomplice of the United States is ARISING in Thai territory. THIS IS THE INEVITABLE RESULT of the Thai authorities' following a policy of toadyism to the United States and selling out the country.\textsuperscript{22}

In retrospect, the Chinese commentaries in late April, 1965, were remarkable in two respects. First the Chinese references to the American use of air bases in Thailand were both very accurate and up-to-date. In fact, it was not until two years later, 1967, that the Thai and American governments

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., pp. 25-26 (emphasis added).
publicly admitted that U.S. planes were bombing Vietnam and Laos from Thailand. Secondly, "it may be more than coincidental that the noticeable intensification of Communist-supported dissidence in northeast Thailand occurred soon after Commentator's remarks."23 Despite this noticeable increase, "armed incidents were then still few and far between; and the estimated number of rebels was a mere 200 to 300, a figure that would jump roughly six times two years later."24

Still, the Thai government stuck to its pro-American posture. And throughout most of 1965 only the police were used to cope with the insurgency problem which occurred only in the northeast. On Peking's part, comments on developments in Indochina and Thailand were continued. For instance, one such comment in October pointed out that "the Thai authorities must know that the ringleader (the United States) will be punished and that the accomplice (Thailand) cannot escape . . . ."25 This and other similar comments were qualitatively different from what Peking had to say a year later. As Gurtov has argued,

For one thing, Chinese commentaries throughout 1965 referred to antigovernment developments in Thailand's northeast as the work of "the people's arms." Nothing had yet been said about a people's war or a Communist "people's army." For another, Commentators and others fell to silence about the Communist Party

24Ibid., p. 27.
of Thailand, instead, the leading Communist groups were said to be the TPF, the TIM, and the "Federation of Patriotic Workers of Thailand." In view of the importance attached by Mao and the Chinese leadership generally to a party-led revolution, this omission seems significant.26

In December, 1965, "guerrillas in the Northeast launched their first raid on a police station, and the TPF announced, again from Peking, that armed struggle had begun in several parts of the country."27 By this time, "Western intelligence sources estimated that the guerrillas in the six North-eastern provinces numbered between 500 and 800."28 And for the first time the situation looked serious enough for the Thai government to replace the police with the army troops for combating the insurgents.

The turning point in Peking's decision to give up trying to persuade the Thai government apparently came in early 1966. That is, "in its 1966 New Year's message, the TPF formally proclaimed that armed struggle was under way in the Northeast and in the central and the southern provinces, and it proclaimed itself as the center which unites all political forces."29 In turn, Peking publicly endorsed the TPF's undertaking by

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26Ibid., p. 27.

27Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, p. 292.


29Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, p. 292.
printing a number of articles on Thailand in its official newspaper, Jen-min Jih-pao. According to Gurtov, "the gist of these articles was that the Americans were continuing to entrench themselves in Thailand, that Thailand had already completely lost its national independence, and hence that the Thai people's determination to carry out a people's war is absolutely correct." In comparison to comments in the preceding years, "remarks in the Chinese news media on dissidence in Thailand changed in 1966 from indirect hints of impending trouble to direct reference to people's war." And it was certainly not a coincidence for Thailand that throughout 1966 "assassinations, ambushes, and armed propaganda campaigns in the villages all increased throughout the Northeast." Specifically, "there were approximately 100 incidents of insurgency during that year, ranging from assassinations of local officials to hit-and-run on small, isolated Thai police units." And by the end of 1966 "the insurgency had reached such a momentum, and Thai reaction had been so inadequate, that the U.S. Air Force's 606th Air Commando Helicopter Squadron . . . had to be used to fly Thai troops into combat." 

30 Gurtov, China and Southeast Asia--The Politics of Survival, p. 31.

31 Ibid.

32 Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, pp. 292-293.


34 Casella, "Communism and Insurrection in Thailand," p. 203.
It was clear that by the end of 1966 a point of no return had been passed as far as Thailand's willingness to reduce its contributions to America's war effort in Indochina and Peking's patience were concerned. In view of the fact that the insurgency problem has continued to be the main threat to Thailand's domestic stability up until the present time, a legitimate question might be raised as to the appropriateness of the Thai leaders' decision in the last decade to support America's Indochina policy. Specifically, was it in Thailand's best interest to be inflexible toward Communist China and North Vietnam, which were closer neighbors, while being overly flexible toward the United States? Clearly, the answer is negative.

Thailand made a mistake by refusing to heed Peking's repeated warnings against her support of the policy of the United States. In support of this position, one can look to what authorities on Asian politics have to say on this issue. According to Jay Taylor, "... the history of the creation of the revolutionary organization in Thailand suggests that China's objectives in promoting a Communist revolution in Thailand were merely a product of the Vietnam War and the policies of the Thai government."35 Another scholar has pointed out that large scale Chinese support for the Thai Communist Party's insurgency activities in various parts of Thailand began only after the Tonkin Gulf incident and American bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail had

35Taylor, China and Southeast Asia: Peking's Relations with Revolutionary Movements, p. 291.
led to the involvement of Thai personnel and Thai bases in the Vietnam War.36 Furthermore, Gurtov has concluded that

The study of China's support of the Thai Communists' rebellion has developed the theme that the CPR was primarily motivated by concern over Thailand's and the United States' role in Laos and Vietnam rather than by the opportunity to implement long-term plans for an insurgency in the northeast. As it evolved from October 1964 to the end of 1966, China's support was intended to sustain a CPT-led uprising as a counter to the Thai government's active cooperation with the United States policy. It was not a commitment to a Communist overthrow of the RTG. So far as can be discovered, China's part was (and has remained) more political than material; and it was staged in careful phases during 1965 and 1966, apparently to give Thailand time to reconsider her foreign commitments.37

Indeed, with regard to the insurgency problem the cost to Thailand for her pro-American policy was rising at an alarming rate from 1967 on. As pointed out, Thailand in that year had already sent troops to Vietnam. In that year, the first group of B-52 bombers was moved from Guam to a base in Thailand. In response to these moves, Peking for the first time "charged that the Thai bases had become part of the American base system that was being used to encircle China and give the United States added capability to attack the underbelly of China."38

From 1967 on, the Communist insurgents were found not only in the northeast but also in the north, in the central plain,

37 Gurtov, China and Southeast Asia--The Politics of Survival, p. 35.
38 Ibid., p. 35.
and in the south as well. Activities of insurgents in the
northeast from 1967 on were at a higher level than in 1965
and 1966. But on the overall basis, the insurgents had not
been able to capture and hold large areas in that part of the
country for any extended period of time. As a consequence,
some commentaries have tended to belittle the real and potential
strength of the northeastern insurgents.39 As a corollary,
the insurgents' relative lack of success was attributed to the
combined efforts of the Thai and the United States governments.
The main basis for these commentaries' argument seems to be in
a comparison of the insurgency problem in Vietnam and in Thai-
l land. Such a comparison showed that the problem in Vietnam had
been much more serious. Thailand should not have to worry too
much over this problem. The fact, however, is that these argu-
ments and observations invariably missed the point. Actually,
the Vietnamese conflict was "anticolonial war and then civil
war."40 The insurgent problem in the northeast and other parts
of Thailand developed as a direct consequence of its support of
America's anti-Communist policy.

In addition to the northeast, the same point is applicable
to the problem which proliferated in other regions after 1967.
In the north, where the land was mostly mountainous, there were

39 J. L. S. Girling, "Northeastern Thailand: Tomorrow's

40 J. William Fulbright, The Crippled Giant (New York, 1972),
P. 62.
various tribesmen who earned their living principally by growing opium. The original source of dissatisfaction came from the Thai government's policy to substitute other crops such as rice for opium. Some of these mountain people grudgingly agreed to follow the government's policy, while others who refused fled to hard-to-reach locations where they continued growing opium. Still there was no violent opposition to the government prior to 1967. But in 1967 a number of instigators who allegedly came from southern China began infiltrating into the area. The Communists apparently made a few converts from the dissatisfied tribesmen. At least, fighting broke out in 1968. Due to the insurgents' familiarity with the terrain, the pursuers were soon frustrated. The Thai Air Force was soon called in for a wholesale leveling of villages suspected of concealing the enemy. This tactic, as in Vietnam, proved to be advantageous to the insurgents since the indiscriminate use of napalm meant that innocent villagers were often left injured or homeless. Tribesmen who were formerly unwilling to lend support to or join the Communists, often changed their minds. This helped contribute to a general increase in the insurgents' strength. For most of the four-year period from 1968 to 1972, the northern Communists roamed the area unmolested. Then in March, 1972, the Thai government decided to undertake a major military operation for the specific purpose of wiping out the insurgents. In the process, which took several weeks, "some 12,000 Thai army troops
sought to destroy the insurgent forces estimated at a few hundred men."\(^{41}\) But when it was over, the government forces had managed to capture only a few prisoners. Again, as in Vietnam, "the Thai military leaders and some American military advisors were pleased with the operation despite its meager result."\(^{42}\) Since then, the Thai government has been content to let the northern communists have a relatively free hand in far-away places as long as no evidence of a major threat, such as the establishment of an army of tribesmen for the separation of northern provinces, is found.

The problem in the central region has been somewhat related to the spillover from the northern part of the country. That is, rebellious activities in most of the central region were rare but those which occurred tended to be found in the provinces in the periphery bordering on the northern region. Again, the situation which developed after 1967 was similar to that in the north. Tribesmen were forced to follow the government's policies and those who refused were usually subject to various forms of pressure. Then came the Communists, and fighting soon broke out. In one instance, "on November 20, 1968, an attack was launched against a village defense post . . . approximately 300 to 400 guerrillas took Thai officials by surprise, and in December they were obliged to send elements of the 3rd and 6th armies to the


\(^{42}\) Ibid.
area."43 As in similar undertakings in Vietnam, the Thai government with the help of American advisors tried to institute a resettlement program in the hope of separating the majority of the mountain people from the insurgents. The program turned out to be a complete failure. It was so bad that ". . . U.S. officials in the field were ordered by their superiors to have nothing to do with it lest they be blamed for its failures."44 In their fight against Communism, the American and Thai officials seemed to forget that the villagers and the people from the mountains, though primitive by Bangkok and/or Western standards, were also human beings who liked to live where they felt most comfortable. Moreover, the tribesmen and villagers from the highlands tend to become ill easily in the lowlands due to their low resistance to disease. Hence, it was not their fault that most of the mountain people refused to live in the government's resettlement camps and went back to their regions where, no doubt, they would have to be on good terms with the Communist insurgents for the sake of their safety, if for no other reason.

Insurgency activities in the south were different from those in other regions in some instances and were similar in others. The southern problem, for example, did not reach dangerous


44Ibid.
proportions until 1967. Another similarity has to do with ethnic differences between the Thai government and the people in the central plain on the one hand and, on the other hand, the mountain tribesmen in the north, the Thai-Laos in the northeast, and the Thai-Moslems in the south.

On the other hand, there are a number of differences. First of all, Communist terrorists in southern Thailand were almost indistinguishable in most cases from members of the Malaysian Communist Party. Secondly, unlike Communists in other parts of Thailand, they have been operating in the four southernmost provinces since the end of World War II. Because the Communists there have been using both the Thai and Malaysian territories as their bases of operation, this problem has always been a continuing concern for both governments. Therefore, Thailand and Malaysia started a joint operation against them and, as a result, the Communists were for the most part unable to pose a major threat to either government prior to 1965. In contrast to the preceding years, from 1965 the Communists were having considerable success in converting certain numbers of the Thai Moslem population to their cause. Furthermore, a number of Communist agents from the northeast, who heretofore were unheard of in the south, began appearing in the area. And the Thai government learned about this connection only after a number of them were arrested. \(^{45}\) At about the same time that

\(^{45}\text{Ibid.}, p. 206.$
evidence of a connection between the deep south and northeastern Communists came to light, other groups of insurgents began appearing in the central and northern portions of the southern section of Thailand. By the end of the 1960's only 4 out of the total of 15 southern provinces were said to be free of Communist insurgents.  

Another significant difference between the insurgency problem in the south and in other parts of Thailand is that the south, especially the four southernmost provinces, is the only part where separatist tendencies have always been potent. There are three reasons for the existence of this tendency.  

First is the different dialect used by people in the south. But this difference has not really been the most important since people in the north and northeast also have their own dialects and these are different from one another and from the official language. Secondly, an overwhelming majority of the people living in the south are Muslims and, as such, radically different from the rest of the Thai population who are mostly Buddhists. The third reason involves the popular belief among the local people that the government in Bangkok has always been unfair to them, taking substantial wealth out of mineral-rich south without trying to improve the lot of the people. Thus, from 1965 on, the Communists have been trying to play up these differences in the hope of strengthening their

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position vis-a-vis the Thai government. In response, the government adopted a variety of measures ranging from military operations to administrative reforms in the hope that the situation would not reach a point where military occupation of the area was necessary. So far, the government has not been able to completely wipe out the southern Communists. On the other hand, the insurgents' progress has not been spectacular either.

In sum, it is evident from the foregoing that Thailand did not have to cope with the danger of internal subversion resulting from the spread of Communist insurgents' activities until it became heavily involved with the American policy in Asia in general and in Indochina in particular.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Thailand's foreign policy goal has always been the preservation of her independence and sovereignty. Since the Thai people settled in its present location seven centuries ago, there were a number of actual and potential threats with which their leaders had to cope. Although most Thai leaders were successful in protecting the country from external danger, some of them were not so fortunate. In this respect, the fall of the old Thai capital at Ayudhaya in the second half of the eighteenth century is a prime example.

The first three Kings of the Chakri dynasty adopted a policy of minimal involvement in their relations with European nations. Even Thailand's relations with her neighbors were at a relatively low level during the period. This was due, for the most part, to the fact that from 1800 on, many Asian countries had become the target of colony-hunting Europeans. For example, Burma, which had been a perennial threat to Thailand prior to 1800, became increasingly vulnerable in the face of growing British pressure. In the Malay peninsula, British presence and pressure were also increasing among a number of Malay states, some of which were under Thailand's control. And in the east the French were busy colonizing the areas which were then known as Cochinchina, Tonkin, and Annam.
European pressure on Thailand increased gradually throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. The overt object of the Europeans was trade. Great Britain in the 1820's was the first nation to try to negotiate a general treaty with Thailand. With the passage of time, many countries surrounding Thailand rapidly fell into the hands of the Europeans. Even as late as 1850, however, King Rama III still refused to open diplomatic and commercial relations with European nations.

By the time Rama IV ascended the throne in 1851, the Europeans had apparently lost their patience and concluded that the best way to deal with Thailand was through the use or the threat of military force. There was hardly any doubt that the European powers would have forced Thailand to open up the country had the King still refused to talk. If that had been the case it was highly probable that Thailand would have suffered the same fate as that of her neighbors.

It was fortunate for the Thai people that King Rama IV was completely different from his three predecessors in his ideas on foreign affairs. While the first three Kings wanted Thailand to have nothing to do with the Europeans, Rama IV realized that such a policy was no longer possible. Instead of continuing their policy, Rama IV began the policy of selective and limited relations. The rationale was the preservation of national independence.

There were a number of points in the new policy enunciated by Rama IV. The first was that in the face of growing European
power and influence in Southeast Asia, it was necessary for Thailand to accept a diminished role in her relations with her neighbors. Second, to counter the immediate threat of European imperialism, Rama IV thought it was absolutely necessary that Thailand modernize. Finally, the most important point was that Thailand must be flexible toward powerful European countries if she wanted to retain her independence. Moreover, in pursuing a flexible foreign policy, Thailand must not put too much faith in foreign countries' advice. In the final analysis, the Thai leaders must decide for themselves. Rama IV wisely pointed out that, as far as Thai national interests were concerned, neither the crocodile of France nor the whale of Great Britain could be trusted. More importantly, Rama IV observed that "the only weapons that will be of real use to us in the future will be our mouths and our hearts, constituted so as to be full of sense and wisdom for the better protection of ourselves."¹

The French and British threats to Thailand's sovereignty during the second half of the nineteenth century were both immediate and real. In the years following Rama IV's reign, however, the other Kings relied to a large extent on his advice. That is, Thailand was able to escape the yoke of colonialism because her leaders adopted a foreign policy of selective and limited involvement. Also, the Kings began modernizing the country and agreed to the unequal treaties which were sought

¹Abbot Low Moffat, Mongkut, the King of Siam (Ithaca, 1962) p. 124.
by Western powers. Of course, Thailand's geographical position, Anglo-French rivalry, and sheer luck were factors which contributed to her success in preserving her independence. But the Thai Kings' ability to carry out a flexible foreign policy must be regarded as one of the most important factors that helped the country go into the twentieth century as an independent nation while all of her neighbors and most other Asian nations were merely colonial possessions of Western powers.

At the beginning of the present century the thrust of European imperialism began to diminish. With the help of an American advisor, Thailand was able to regain the right to control foreign nationals on her soil. However, the story was different with regard to the effort to regain certain lands that were lost to France and England. That is, Thailand had to give up the lost territory.

But the most important problems with which the Thai Kings had to contend in the first three decades of the twentieth century were domestic. The general dissatisfaction of a foreign-educated younger generation of civil servants with Thailand's absolutist system of government, deteriorating economic conditions, and the Kings' indecisiveness were the main causes of the bloodless revolution of June, 1932. From that time on, power shifted from the King to a group of men under a system of constitutional monarchy.

Internal struggle for power was the salient characteristic of Thai politics from 1932 to 1938. By the time the Second World
War broke out, a military faction clearly emerged as the most powerful force. It was this group that voluntarily made Thailand an ally of Japan's Greater East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Thailand came out of the Second World War, however, in relatively good shape compared to other Asian nations that were on the Allied side. Although it was the Thai Ambassador in Washington who asked the United States not to accept Thailand's declaration of war, some credit for Thailand's successful re-entry into the international community must be given to the United States government. It was also the United States government that endorsed the comeback of Marshal Phibunsongkram, who had headed the government during most of the war years. The Americans supported Phibun because he appeared to be anti-Communist at the time when the Cold War was beginning in Europe. Thus, while America wanted an anti-Communist outpost in Southeast Asia, the Thai leaders also needed a powerful external support to maintain themselves in power. But Thai-American relations by the beginning of 1950 could be best described as low-key, cool, and cautious.

The Korean War was the first in a series of events which played an important part in bringing the two countries closer politically, diplomatically, and militarily. For the most part the United States was the more active partner of the two. From the sending of Thai troops to South Korea, to the diplomatic recognition of Emperor Bao Dai in South Vietnam and the establishment of SEATO with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand's
military men went along on the basis of a questionable assessment of the real situation. That is, the government adopted the American policy of anti-Communism without really knowing whether the policy had any real relevance to Thailand or not. The only available indications of possible danger were reports of the establishment of a state for the remnants of the Thai population still living in China by the Chinese Communist government and the moving of some of Ho Chi-Minh's Viet-Minh forces into Laos. But these two developments could be said to have only limited and remote relevance to Thailand's national security. Thus, the justification of the government's claim that Thailand had to join in the West's anti-Communist undertaking was, at best, pretty dubious and self-serving. It would make more sense to point out that the Thai military governments used the fear of Communism and the American material and moral support to maintain themselves in power.

In foreign relations, if the Phibun government was less flexible when compared to the absolute monarchy, it was more flexible than the later military governments. That is, while adopting an obvious pro-American posture the Phibun government did not completely turn its back on Communist China and other Communist countries. Representatives of Thailand and China officially met and exchanged views on various issues of common concern at the Afro-Asian Conference in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. Although no agreement was reached, the fact that the Thai and Chinese representatives could meet in a friendly
fashion meant that no serious conflict between the two existed. Evidences of growing friendship between China and Thailand were found in various forms. Following the official meeting at Bandung, many groups of Thais from various backgrounds traveled to China for various purposes and almost without exception, these delegates were warmly received in Peking and other Chinese cities. Moreover, Chinese goods began appearing in Thai markets in increasing number. The meaning of these interactions was that relations between the two countries were warming up and that Thailand was being flexible toward mainland China. Clearly, such a policy of not being totally committed to one particular posture was in keeping with the traditional foreign policy of Thailand.

One of the most important consequences of the 1957 military coup in Thailand was the change in the country's policy toward Communist countries. Instead of maintaining good relations with both sides, the Thai military leaders deviated from the country's tradition in foreign affairs by committing Thailand to the Western policy of anti-Communism.

Beginning as a passive partner in the first half of the 1960's, Thailand soon became an active participant in the Indochina conflict after 1965. Despite the repeated warnings of Communist China as to the consequences of supporting American policy, the Thai government went ahead with its decision to join the war in Indochina. Consequently, Thailand had to pay the price for not taking the Chinese warnings seriously.
Communist insurgents began appearing in increasing numbers only after Thailand's decision to let the United States use Thai air bases and to send troops to Vietnam and Laos. And the insurgent problem has remained one of the most serious internal threats today even though the Indochina conflict is already over. Clearly, this cost to Thailand for supporting the U.S. Indochina policy was far too high.

As far as Thailand's domestic situation was concerned, the Kings of Thailand in the second half of the nineteenth century and, to a lesser extent, in the first three decades of the present century did not need any foreign power to sustain themselves in power. In contrast, the post-war Thai governments always needed American military and moral support to bolster their hold on power. This was done in the name of national interest. But the fact was that the policy of close association with the United States was adopted because of the military men's public as well as private considerations.

From another perspective, Thailand was safe during the height of European imperialism because France and England, who represented the two most powerful forces in Southeast Asia in the second half of the last century, needed a buffer state to serve a purpose of separating their respective colonies. By the same token, Thailand should have followed this example by expressing its desire to act as a buffer state between Communist countries and the anti-Communist states of Southeast Asia.
In sum, it can be seen from the foregoing that the Thai military leaders made a major mistake in the 1960's by deviating from the traditional pattern of Thailand's foreign policy as enunciated by King Rama IV. That is, Thailand should not have become too closely associated with any particular foreign power. It did not take long after the pro-American policy was adopted to find out that there are problems which come as a consequence of deviating from traditional Thai foreign policy. The best course for the foreseeable future should be the one which is in line with the advice of Rama IV.
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