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Will Thailand Become A Victim of Its Own Success?

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Beside human nature, geography is the most enduring factor in international politics, the source of a continuum of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, aspirations and fears, which often defies the passage of time. So it has been proved in the relation between Thailand and its Indo-chinese neighbours.

Since the thirteenth century, Thai civilization has been based in the central plains area which is fed by the Chao Phraya River and its tributaries. While providing immense material abundance which has nurtured Thai power, prosperity and resilience through seven centuries of change and challenge, this region has also proved to be vulnerable to land-based threats, particularly from the west and east, and consequently has conditioned the Thais to be highly sensitive to such threats. Although Burma, whose power reached its zenith under King Alaungpaya (1752-60) and one of his sons, King Hsinbyushin (1763-73), was the earlier nemesis, it is the threat coming from the east which hitherto has proved the most enduring.

Even more so than the central plains region of Thailand, the trans-Mekong region is a rich and accessible area, with the river being a natural line not of division but unity between the population and resources on either side of it. While unable to exert direct control over this area, the Thais have always had a keen interest in it, not only for economic reasons but also for strategic ones given the fact that this area and the central plains form one geographical continuum unbroken by an easily defensible natural barrier, and consequently have always viewed with alarm any change which might lead to the domination of this area by another power.

The rise of Vietnamese power, the first phase of which had begun in the fifteenth century and reached its climax with the unification of Vietnam by Emperor Gia Long in 1802, by its very momentum threatened the trans-Mekong region. The Thais responded first, as Hugh Toye said in his book "Laos: Buffer State or battleground" (published by Oxford University Press, 1968), "by brutally laying waste to areas in Laos as a defensive measure directed against Vietnam... (for) by emptying the country beyond the Mekong (they) secured the river as a possible defence line for (themselves), denied it to Laotian rebels of the future and made to return of Vietnamese more difficult," and then by challenging Vietnam over Cambodia. The measure of the Thai threat perception can be gauged from the fact that during the reign of Rama III (1824-1851), the Thais fought four wars of varying intensity with their rival, twice campaigning well into Cambodian and Vietnamese territories (1833 and 1841).

While British imperialism eliminated the threat of Burma, French imperialism accentuated the threat coming from the east, "for in building her empire France had behaved towards Siam much as a powerful Vietnamese emperor might have done and had made the same demand." Again the crucial importance of the trans-Mekong area in Thai perception was demonstrated when, with French power declining before and after the defeat in the hands of Germany in 1940, the Thais immediately attempted to recover territories which they were forced to cede to France in 1893, 1904 and 1907.

After the Second World War, with the French Indochinese empire being torn asunder, the fear of Vietnam reemerged. Although the Thais were initially sympathetic towards the Vietminh, the latter's successes and advances towards Luang Prabang in the early 1950's were one of the factors which induced Thailand to align itself with the United States. The traditional conflict between Thailand and Vietnam became intensified by ideological differences and Cold War power politics, and again the two rivals fought one another both directly and through "proxies" in Laos and South Vietnam.

For a brief period after the American failure in Vietnam, it seemed that Thai perception of Vietnam as well as of the importance of the trans-Mekong area was changing. With the de facto reunification of Vietnam imminent, Prime Minister Kukrit Pramroj stated to the House of Representatives what might be seen as a new direction in Thai foreign policy;

"This government will pursue an independent policy taking into account national interests which are based on economic and security considerations.

"This government will promote peaceful coexistence by befriending every country which demonstrates goodwill toward Thailand, irrespective of differences in ideologies or political systems; rather, non-interference in internal affairs, justice, and equality will be the considered principles (in ordering bilateral relations)."

The new policy of peaceful coexistence was undertaken even more energetically, except for during the Thanin period (1976-77), after the communist takeovers in Laos and Cambodia. Most notable were the achievements of the Kriangsak Government (1977-80) which brought about, perhaps for the first time in this century, a degree of "normalcy" in Thai-Vietnamese relations.

However, the change in Thai perception proved to be more apparent than real. The crucial importance of the trans-Mekong area in Thailand's security was again demonstrated when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in December 1978 and January 1979. The American failure in Vietnam and the defeat of South Vietnam were traumatic experiences for Thailand and willy-nilly it had been forced to accept Vietnam's domination over Laos.

But the situation in 1978-79 was different: The Thais have by then recovered a good deal of their self-confidence, and self-respect, and a large number of Vietnamese troops were actually undertaking combat operation on their doorstep. The Thais measured but firm and unyielding response to the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia indicated that for geo-strategic reasons they are not willing to tolerate the projection of Vietnamese power into the whole of the trans-Mekong area, especially when the projection of that power is supported by an external actor, which itself is a potential threat, that is the Soviet Union.

The Thais' fear of Vietnam is strongly borne out by a recent study made of the Thai elite's perceptions of national security issues. (Study conducted by Kramol Tongdhamchart, Kusuma Snitwongse, Sarasin Viraphol, Arong Suthasana, Wiwat Mungkandi and Sukhumbhand Paribatra on The Thai Elite's National Security Perspectives: Implications for Southeast Asia. Publication of the study by the Institute of Security and International Studies is forthcoming).

It was found that in general almost all respondents (97.37%) see Vietnam as a threat in one form or another and that Vietnam ranks high in many forms of threat (direct military invasion, political subversion, undermining of ASEAN's regional solidarity and support of military aggression by other country(ies)).

More specifically concerning the present problem in Cambodia, there was near unanimity in the elite's opinion that the Vietnamese invasion and occupation of Cambodia has definitely affected Thailand's security. The majority (close to 60%) felt that the adversity of the impact is grave, while some 38% indicated the intensity in a lesser degree. Nearly all respondents agreed that the impact has assumed various dimensions including invariably, armed tension along the Thai-Cambodian border, the refugee influx, an unnecessary drain on the national budget, transformation of Cambodia into a base for threatening Thailand's sovereignty and territorial integrity, aggravation of regional tension and intensification of superpower rivalry in Southeast Asia. (Among these various factors, tension at the border, the refugee influx and Cambodia as a base for threatening Thailand, received the highest frequency of mention.).

Nearly all respondents (More than 98%) rejected the notion of acquiescence to the Vietnamese military domination of Cambodia as an acceptable solution. The majority (some 45%) opted for opposition against the Vietnamese action, while a sizable portion of the elite (about 26%) saw the wisdom of opposition as well as finding a way to come to terms with the Vietnamese. Roughly the same size of the population of respondents, nevertheless, wanted to reach some sort of a compromise with the Vietnamese-without, however, acquiescing in the Vietnamese domination.

When queried as to the methods of opposing the Vietnamese in Cambodia, the majority of the respondents avoided suggesting military engagements-including joining with other nations in opposing Vietnam militarily; however, the military means as part and parcel of other non-military options, received a small percentage of approval (some 6%). Most elite saw the merit of collaborating with other nations and the United Nations in pressuring Vietnam by non-military means, including the application of economic sanction and diplomacy, while also supporting various anti-Vietnamese Kampuchean factions.

Hence, while most of the elite indicated the preference of opposing the Vietnamese action in Cambodia, they still expressed a desire to seek a way out by accommodation. In answer to the question of how Thailand should seek flexibility vis-a-vis Vietnam, it was indicated that the discontinuation of support to the anti-Vietnamese Cambodian factions could be raised as a quid pro quo for the Vietnamese withdrawal from Kampuchea. The majority (some 48%) thought the withdrawal must be a total one, while only a small percentage was content to settle for a partial withdrawal either from the Thai-Cambodian border or west of the Mekong River. A sizable part of the respondents (some 26%) suggested such methods as diplomatic dialogue, economic cooperation and non-involvement as possible approaches to seek an accommodation with Vietnam.

During the period under survey, Vietnam had proffered "flexibility" in its position over Cambodia apparently by suggesting that it might be willing to withdraw from the Thai-Cambodian border or reduce its troop strength in Cambodia, provided that Thailand and ASEAN recognize the Heng Samrin regime. Vietnam had offered a partial withdrawal of troops from Cambodia in exchange for a de facto withdrawal of recognition of Democratic Kampuchea as well as the conclusion of a non-aggression pact with Thailand. The majority of the elite (some 62%) rejected this proposal by Vietnam, while 33% found it acceptable only in parts. (Less than 5% could accept in in toto.) Apparently, the elite was reasonably optimistic that a better concession could yet be extracted from the Vietnamese in return for the abandonment of the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

Along with this continuity in the Thais' perception of the threat emanating from the east, there has been a continuity in the means used to cope with this threat. Since the reign of Rama III, the Thais have found it beyond their capability and will to undertake unilateral military operations to protect and extend their interests in the trans-Mekong area. Thus, they have generally resorted to diplomacy aimed at promoting a mutually beneficial attachment to a hegemonic power which would act as a protector and benefactor of Thai trans-Mekong interests.

In this sense, as John Girling astutely points out, the patron-client structure of internal Thai politics is paralleled by a preference for a patron-client relationship in foreign affairs. This was first seen in the conduct of Thai relations with Britain to help ward off, or attempt to restrain, France's territorial ambitions. Then the erosion of British power during the first World War and the interwar years induced the Thais to shift closer to the rising star of Japan who showed greater sympathy with Thai eastern "irredentism". Finally, after the second World War and a brief period of "good neighbour" relations, Thailand attached itself to the United States, the new, immensely powerful hegemonic state.

This continuity of means seems to have been broken by the end of Pax Americana in the region. The US failure in the Vietnam War led to the loss of the American capacity and willingness to exert power and influence to protect its interests, friends and allies in Southeast Asia. It also led to a redefinition of those interests and subsequently a corresponding stream-lining of its once extensive commitments. Thus, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, the Thais could not rely on the United States as before to protect their security along the eastern border. The Thai response has been to promote an overwhelming correlation of forces, political, military and economic, to buttress the kingdom's position vis-a-vis Vietnam and the latter's "benefactor", the Soviet Union. Such has been the rationale for the conduct of their relationships with China, Japan, the ASEAN countries, the EEC, Australia, New Zealand and Canada and for the manoeuvring in the hallowed halls of the United Nations.

What is not usually understood is that in this context, although its power and importance have diminished, the United States still plays a crucial role, perhaps arguably even the central one. Thai leaders continue to attach great significance to the UN connection, time and again re-emphasizing the Manila Pact and the Rusk-Thanat Communique as well as the need for transfers of advanced weapons such as Harpoon surface-to-surface missiles and F-16's.

The survey of the Thai elite's perception of national security, mentioned above, serves to point out that an overwhelming majority of the Thai

elite still cherish the relationship with the US and expect the latter to lend aid and comfort in all exigencies in all manners possible. Perforce, the client has to stand more on its own feet but the patron remains patron and the fundamental continuity of means still endures.

There is no doubting the fact that Thailand has been successful in buttressing its position vis-a-vis Vietnam in the past 4-5 years even if the latter has not been driven from the trans-Mekong area. Thai self-confidence is high and the belief is that given its economic weaknesses, time is against Vietnam. However, Thailand may yet become a victim of its own success.

For success breeds over confidence and over confidence obfuscates the fundamental need for compromise in any conflictual situation. With Vietnam perhaps even more intransigent, the prospect is that the present stalemate will persist into the future. One danger for Thailand is that there may be increasing possibility of more serious conflagration along the Thai-Cambodian border. Another is that contrary to Thailand's and ASEAN's aspiration that Southeast Asia become a "zone of peace, freedom and neutrality", the stalemate in Indochina may lead to even more involvement by great powers.

Instead of having a president who warned of an "inordinate fear of Communism", the United States now has a leader who, as Stanley Hoffman has succinctly described, prefers "High Noon" style of diplomacy with simplistic division of the world into good and evil, Sheriffs-Marshalls and robbers-gunman, and greater US intervention, undoubtedly short of direct military participation, is not inconceivable in this region.

The continuation of the present conflict over Cambodia would increase by leaps and bounds the possibility that Southeast Asia would once more be embroiled deeply and fruitlessly in another Cold War.

The third danger is that the conflict may become institutionalized in Thailand. The logic of traditional Thai national security interests led Thailand to participate fully in the American war efforts in Indochina and this involvement became fully institutionalized in the Thai political structure as reflected in the Thanom-Praphat military dictatorship, the security-oriented development plans, and counterinsurgency operations.

The present conflict is already somewhat institutionalized at the regional level with the litany of solemn words spoken against Vietnam and its aggression being the sine qua non of most ASEAN meetings. In Thailand, the continuation of the conflict, together with other political trends already discernible, may lead to a straight and narrow "remilitarization" of the Thai political system at the very time that the system should be proceeding in the opposite direction, that is to seek to harness, not destroy, the plurality of interests and forces prevalent in the modern Thai society into one organic, stable and constructive whole, to look beyond the traditional, that is military and geo-strategic, conception of national security interests and take into consideration the myriad of issues which the Thais, as well as the rest of mankind, has to confront in the coming "Pacific Century".

For the kingdom, this, and not Vietnam, is the real challenge and pre-occupation with the Cambodian problem may lead to a failure to meet this challenge. It is no longer logical to endure with the old logic.

2. Have We Become Victims of Success? No, Sir.

"Interested Observer"

(A rebuttal of the analysis presented above, published in the Nation Review, 21 November 1983, p.4. The author is believed to be an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, in his article which appeared in the Nation Review on November 10, asserts that Thailand's success in buttressing its position on Kampuchea vis-a-vis Vietnam may lead to overconfidence which "obfuscates the fundamental need for compromise in any conflictual situation." This, according to M.R. Sukhumbhand, may bring about a serious conflagration at the Thai-Kampuchean border, greater involvement by the Great Powers in the Southeast Asian region and the "remilitarization" of the Thai political system. Thailand's preoccupation with the Cambodian problem, contends M.R. Sukhumbhand, may lead to a failure to meet the challenge of the coming Pacific Century.

M.R. Sukhumbhand's foregoing analysis borders on conjecture. Where is the evidence for his assertion that Thailand's success vis-a-vis Vietnam on Kampuchea has led or will lead to the overconfidence of the Thai leaders there-by inducing them to refuse to compromise?

If M.R. Sukhumbhand takes time to analyse the records of the Thai Government's pronouncements during the past five years since the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, he would see that Thailand has led the way to bring about a comprehensive political solution to the Kampuchean problem which would take into account the legitimate security interests of Vietnam vis-a-vis Kampuchea.

However, for a compromise to be enduring, it must be perceived as just by both sides. For Thailand to offer a unilateral concession while Vietnam is adamant in retaining its fruit of conquest by force would be tantamount to a surrender by Thailand of her vital security interests vis-a-vis Kampuchea.

It should be emphasized again and again that for a compromise on the Kampuchean problem to be brought about, Vietnam must cease to dictate that Thailand accept Vietnam's conquest of Kampuchea by force in exchange for a paper guarantee of Vietnamese non-aggression against Thailand. Only when Vietnam is willing to talk about the total withdrawal of its troops from Kampuchea and the restoration of a genuinely independent, neutral and non-aligned Kampuchea, posing no threat to any of its neighbours would a negotiation with Vietnam have a chance to lead to a compromise which is just and enduring. So far, sadly to say, there is no sign at all that Vietnam would be willing to enter into such a negotiation. Vietnam is still confident that there is no need to compromise the gains it made on the battlefield.

M.R. Sukhumbhand fears a serious conflagration at the Thai-Kampuchean border and rightly so. For as long as Vietnam maintains nearly half of its 180,000 troops in Kampuchea near the Thai-Kampuchean border, there is always the danger of Vietnamese incursion into Thailand to intimidate the Thai Government and people. This is why the Thai Government must pay attention to the Kampuchean problem. No country can ignore the presence of massive armies ope-

rating at its doorsteps. In the present state of international anarchy, every country must be alert against any potential threats to its national security, especially in a situation which its neighbour's military capability can be transformed into military threat to its security at any time. The Thai Government is only being prudent in being concerned about the Kampuchean problem.

M.R. Sukhumbhand expresses concern that the present stalemate in Kampuchea would lead to more involvement by the Great Powers in Southeast Asia, thereby involving this region "in another Cold War". It is hard to believe there is any more room for greater Great Powers' involvement in this region on the Kampuchean problem.

The Kampuchean conflict could be viewed as a proxy war between the Soviet Union and the PRC. It should be noted that Vietnam invaded Kampuchea one month after the signing of the Treaty of Friendship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Thus, it was Vietnam which brought the Sino-Soviet conflict into the Southeast Asian region.

The Kampuchean war is an East-East conflict which impinges on Thailand's national security because the war has been fought right alongside the Thai-Kampuchean border sending hundreds of thousands of Khmer refugees into Thailand. Therefore, Vietnam and Vietnam alone was responsible for bringing Great-Power conflict into Southeast Asia and is responsible for the present regional instability.

M.R. Sukhumbhand also expresses fear about the institutionalization of the Kampuchean conflict leading to the remilitarization of the Thai political system. M.R. Sukhumbhand's foregoing conjecture is typical of the method employed by the American historians of the Revisionist School, who contend that the military-industrial complex in the US pursue aggressive foreign policy in order to perpetuate itself in power. In M.R. Sukhumbhand's case, he fears that the Thai military would use the Kampuchean conflict as a pretext to derail the march towards full participatory democracy. The reality is quite different.

Traditionally, the Thai military's orientation was domestic as seen in its prominent role in the Thai political system as well as its operational activities in the counterinsurgency warfare. The loss of the traditional buffer states of Laos and Kampuchea in 1975 and the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in 1978 eliminated the margin of safety that Thailand had had on her eastern border since the end of the Second World War.

This new geopolitical situation confronts Thailand with a new strategic threat so close to Thailand's heartland, thereby forcing the Thai military to reorient its strategy towards a conventional build-up in order to cope with the looming external threat to the Kingdom's security.

The Kampuchean war, furthermore, has made this external threat very vivid to the Thai military, influencing them to turn increasingly towards fulfilling of their professional roles as evident in the oft-repeated pronouncements of the present generation of military commanders that they are "professional soldiers".

Thus, the impact of the Kampuchean conflict has produced the opposite effect to that feared by M.R. Sukhumbhand. One can only hope that by pointing

out that the Thai military may use the Kampuchean conflict as a pretext to re-militarize the Thai political system, M.R. Sukhumbhand has not inadvertently given food for thought to those whom he seeks to warn against?

3. We Must Build Inner Strength.

Sukhumbhand Paribatra

(A reply to the rebuttal, published in the Nation Review on 24 November 1984, p.4.)

After reading the article written by the mysterious "Interested Observer" in The Nation Review Monday, which was a brilliant rebuttal to my article published earlier, I feel that the record must be set right.

First of all, I wish to point out that the article was written in eight hours in a hotel room in Singapore since I was called upon to manufacture it at a short notice. This meant that the structure and the main arguments of the article were a trifle imbalanced, a failing I attempted to correct in my oral presentation which of course was not incorporated into my written version when I had the unexpected honour of having it published by The Nation.

One further point I tried to put across orally was that I have no doubt Vietnam is a threat to Thailand's security; any nation which can boast one of the world's greatest armies and deploys it in combat operations in the vicinity of our beloved land ipso facto must be considered a threat, and self-defence against that country should be one of our priorities.

In this question I am no dove. Nor did I condone Vietnam's actions. I specifically wrote in the paper that perhaps Vietnam has been even more intransigent. Thus, I cannot be considered an apologist for Vietnam and feel a little bewildered by the implicit charge that I have taken up the dubious intellectual mantle of the cold war revisionists.

Another point was that I did not advocate a rupture of the Thai alliance with the United States. Thus, I do not consider myself as belonging to the equally dubious intellectual tradition of those who wrote the "Internal Security Operations Command Textbook No.6601".

Where I depart from the "orthodox" viewpoints, which are succinctly expressed by "Interested Observer", is that firstly I do not believe Vietnam to be the only or the greatest threat to Thailand's security and secondly I do not believe the Thai connection with the United States entails our having to follow the path of the latter into another round of cold war. On the contrary, I believe that there are a host of other problems, mainly internal which Thailand must try to solve.

If the Kampuchean problem persists into the future, our chances of being able to "put our house in order" are remote. For there are great risks of more serious conflagration at the border which would mean our having to divert scarce resources towards this issue area. Moreover, more extensive great

power intervention might result.

In this I must confess that I am a little perplexed by my critic's observation that "it is hard to believe there is any more room for greater Great Powers' involvement in this region on the Kampuchean problem."

One of the lessons which can be learned from history is that there is no law of nature which sets a limit to great power interventions; the simple fact of life is that if there is a will to go with the capability and if there is an opportunity, nay a "requirement", to be involved, great powers will intervene, witness Grenada.

The United States is now going through a belated process of "re-awakening" and being a pluralistic society where the mobilization of public opinion is a necessary but difficult task, the American leaders must exaggerate the nature of the threat.

The exaggeration of the Soviet threat elevated the existing and inevitable conflict of interests and values with the Soviet Union to the present level of intensity and there is no law of nature that requires us to follow the United States blindly as before into the topsy-turvy world of cold war power politics at the very time that we should be spending all our psychological and material resources on bettering the quality of life, political, social, economic, of our own people.

The last and most important danger is that the conflict might be "institutionalized" in the Thai political system. I differ from the Revisionist School in that I do not think nor indeed have ever stated that during the second Indochina war there was a conspiracy to use the external conflict as a means of consolidating the leadership's power base at home or that the present Thai leaders are conspiring to do likewise.

My point is that the conflict exists, certainly partly due to Vietnam's aggression, and if it persists, it may make the people more and more accustomed to the requirements of a national security state, that is a growing defence budget (which in fact has grown from 2.77% of GDP in 1975 to 3.68% in 1982), the centrality of the military's position in the affairs of state, repressive laws against internal dissent and maverick views like mine, growing paramilitary and territorial defence formations, and, most importantly, the fostering of the perception that there is no alternative but to accept these requirements for the sake of "national security."

In such an environment, a military coup d'etat may be considered "legitimate". I would like to point out that in the past the guardians of our territorial integrity had oftentimes claimed that they had no political ambition and that they were "professional soldiers" but at the same time they had never hesitated to show their "professionalism" in protecting their country from "subversive elements" and "threats to national security" by usurping political power.

If the border situation worsens, and indeed certain unfortunate turns of events, such as another flooding of Bangkok, take place, a military takeover is not inconceivable. A remilitarization of the Thai political system at this juncture would deal untold damage to the body politic which is fast becoming pluralistic and complex.

Turning the clock back to the Thanom-Prapath era and refusing to face the challenges created by this growing pluralism within the Thai society would in the end turn out to be the most effective way of tearing our national security asunder, something which the Vietnamese have never been able to do and, provided we keep our house in order, will never be able to do.

For these reasons, I propose that it is in the nation's interests to settle the Kampuchean problem as quickly as possible. In this connection, I expressed my doubts whether the Thai Government had tried hard enough.

I continue to suggest that we as a nation have become overconfident, as evident from the number of times we say that "time is on our side"-the meaning is that "we are doing all right, thank you very much; we have the US, China and over a hundred UN members on our side and there is nought to worry about; and if next year and after we can maintain this support, we will be in even a stronger position and the Vietnamese will have to kowtow to us... or perish."

In fact, our overconfidence borders on arrogance. I fail to see the reason why we have become so upset by the Australians whose partial change of foreign policy is a reflection of domestic factors rather than any desire to downgrade the relationship with ASEAN or any fondness for Vietnam.

Our overconfidence has obfuscated the need for compromise. The Thai government's policy has not changed in the last five years in any fundamental way-that is, it has demanded a total Vietnamese withdrawal and, so long as the withdrawal does not take place, the Thais will continue lending political support to the Khmer Rouge and facilitating the latter's arms supplies.

If the Khmer Rouge were paragons of virtue, or our good friends, I would heartily lend my humble support to this venture, but as it has been proved the Khmer Rouge have a different definition of morality from the rest of humanity's and mutatis mutandis they would be fighting us now and not the Vietnamese. They are dangerous and should be disarmed by our cutting off their arms supplies and, if necessary, by force, especially since their disarming may facilitate the beginning of a truly meaningful dialogue with Vietnam. As a quid pro quo we might ask Vietnam immediately to make an initial withdrawal of thirty of forty kilometres.

Two objections immediately come to mind. Firstly, it might be said that disarming the Khmer Rouge by force, if force is needed, would be beyond our capability. My answer is that our guardians have always claimed they could handle a full-scale Vietnamese attack and if they cannot disarm 20,000 plus Khmer Rouge they would be failing in their duty. In truth, will, and not capability, is lacking.

Secondly, it might be said that China might object. My answer is that "of course it will, but so what?" China has made a virtue out of necessity by promising to end its support to the CPT while in fact it has simply lost the channels to do so and, provided we put our house in order, its capacity to subvert us will be more and more limited.

Furthermore, it is a moot point whether China will be hostile to us; a case could be made that China needs ASEAN more than ASEAN needs China. Whatever China chooses to do, however, we should not take it too much into our consideration.

We have been greatly sensitive and deferential to great powers' requirements in the past and it is time to assert our own voice. If it is in our interest to settle the Kampuchean question by disarming the Khmer Rouge, so be it.

Our present course, I believe, will not succeed. Exerting pressure on Vietnam, or what I termed at the Singapore conference, "Vietnam-bashing" is likely to be unsuccessful and counterproductive. The Chinese have tried it; the French have tried it; the Americans have tried it. They all failed and who are we to succeed? Moreover, making Vietnam a "pariah" state can only hinder, not help.

A pariah by definition is answerable to no one for his behaviour and accepts no externally imposed "rules of the game", thus extremely likely to engage in actions which are considered "irrational" and "unpredictable" by others.

It is in our interests to find some common ground with Vietnam so that the latter can identify with and have a stake in a relationship based, not just on power and deterrence which is ultimately fragile, but also on mutually beneficial cooperation.

Thus, I believe it is time to take stock of the situation and reconsider our policy directions in the light of the dangers I have pointed out above.

The points of view put forward by the "Interested Observer" are in my mind most welcome. For the first time, through the courtesy of The Nation Review, there is a debate in public over an issue which Thais, both government officials and private individuals, have scarcely debated.

Hitherto, a kind of bureaucratically induced and sustained consensus has prevailed but the problem is that the existence of consensus does not guarantee the correctness of policy. Thailand claims itself to be a democracy and as such must constantly engage in a process of soul-searching, or intramural negotiation if you will, asking questions when answers are not clear, rejecting answers when answers may be misdirected or counterproductive, and finding new answers when new answers are called for.

The public's right to participate in this process cannot be ignored, nor can it be usurped or obfuscated by the bureaucracy for any reason no matter how pressing or vital.

P.S. "Interested Observer" was silent on a number of my points. Do I take it that he concurs with my analysis, for example my definition of US-Thai relations being one of patron-client?

KEY STATEMENTS AND DOCUMENTS

1. TEXTBOOK FOR INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND (ISOC) PROJECT 6601 TRAINING PROGRAMME VOL.1, PUBLISHED BY THE INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND* IN 1982

Preface

This is a text to supplement the Project 6601 Training Programme. This first volume is divided into fourteen chapters with an introduction explaining the Prime Minister's Office Order No.66/2523, dated 23 April 1980** which is itself an extension of the PM's Office Order No.5/2524. This introduction is intended to clarify the policy, objectives and operationalisation of the Order so that the Order can be fully studied and understood.

This document in fact had been intended for individual study by officials recruited for the 6601 Project only. However, the Executive Committee came to the conclusion that since it is useful for disseminating knowledge concerning the strategies contained in the Prime Minister's Office Order No. 66/2523, dated 23 April 1980, on "The Fight to Win Over Communism", this textbook should be distributed more widely within the Royal Thai Army and the Internal Security Operations Command. Accordingly a committee was set up to review, amend, expand the original text, which was already (the product of) a worthwhile initiative, and make it into the first of several volumes. The guiding principle is "Know Them, Know Ourselves", meaning that the more knowledge we have, the greater the possibility of using that knowledge to fight to win over Communism completely within a short period of time. Moreover, this knowledge (acquired) can be used to build unity, and uniformity in the thinking of the nation's military; once the nation's military think along the same line, the nation's armed forces will be automatically strong.

Once the armed forces are strong, the power of the state will be strong also and will surely serve as a (the) foundation for the successful development of true democracy in order to guarantee a secure position for the Nation, Religion and King for ever more.

* This textbook is a highly controversial one, incorporating many ideas which, if implemented as they may well be, may fundamentally change the face of Thailand's political system and foreign policy directions. Here ISIS Bulletin presents a translation of the preface, the introduction and the first chapter; the remainder will be published in issues to follow. Translated, edited and paraphrased (where "officialese" becomes impossible) by the editor.

** See ISIS Bulletin, Vol.2, No.1, pp. 17-20.