

THAILAND'S VIETNAM POLICY, 1978-1991

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "Thailand's Vietnam Policy, 1978-1991" submitted by Sri K. Raghu Ram is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University, or any other University and is his own work.

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PREFACE

This dissertation is an analysis of Thailand's Vietnam Policy during 1978-91. The year 1978 is a landmark in the history of Southeast Asia because it was in that year the Vietnam sent its forces to overthrow Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. Again 1991 is important because of the signing of Paris Peace Accord on Cambodia. Thailand being the frontline state, played a crucial role in containing Vietnamese influence in Cambodia. Its diplomatic and strategic manoeuvres were so subtle and interesting that it had its impact on the international community and as a result Vietnam felt isolated on the question of Cambodia. Vietnam thought it prudent to withdraw from Cambodia and thus the efforts towards peace making were accelerated. Now at present Thailand and Vietnam are involved in commercial and economic interactions and the relations are improving.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter first gives an introduction of Thailand's Vietnam relations in the historical past and explains the issues arising after December 1978. Second chapter tries to analyse the place of Vietnam in Thailand's decision making. How Vietnam in Thailand's decision making. How Vietnam was

perceived during the cold war years and how it was perceived after 1978 and what policies were evolved to tackle Vietnamese challenges. Third Chapter deals with Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia (1978) and its implication on Thailand. Thus it has explained the role of Thailand as a frontline state to prevent Vietnamese consolidation of power in Cambodia. Fourth chapter explains the reasons for Thai collision during 1978-1991 on the question of Cambodia. This tries to examine the motivating factors that prompted China and Thailand to collaborate in bleeding Vietnam white." Fifth chapter examines the interaction of Thailand amongst ASEAN member states to evolve a collective stand to face Vietnamese expansion. ASEAN being a regional organization of the six countries Southeast Asia played a crucial role to work out compromises amongst the warring factions in Cambodia and finally helped in the signing of the Paris Peace Accord on Cambodia (1991). Finally in chapter six, there are some concluding observations.

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(K.RAGHU RAM)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thailand, situated in the centre of Southeast Asia, is bordered by Burma on the west and north by Laos and Cambodia on east and Malaysia on south. Its northern borders are on scant hundred miles from the People's Republic of China, while Vietnam is less than a hundred miles to the east.¹ Thailand had been strong enough to protect its sovereignty in the historical past. It was flexible enough to bend with the strongest wind through various diplomatic postures and was never colonised.

Thailand has a national tradition of skillful adjustment to the threat of outside superior force, the kingdom was saved from colonization in the nineteenth century by brilliant exercise of the policies pursued by King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn.² Thailand retained its independence due to diplomatic moves and survives the

1. Blanchard Wendell, Thailand: Its People, Its Society and Its Culture (New Haven, 1957), p.3.
2. C.P.Fitzerald, China and Southeast Asia Since 1945 (Hongkong, 1973), p.65.

entire colonial period as free and independent.³ Independence and stability have given the Thais confidence but not to the extent of warping their very realistic assessment of most situations especially in the international field. Between 1850s and 1930s Thailand found itself totally preoccupied with finding a basis for its own survival and strengthening itself through modernisation.⁴

By twentieth century a strong sense of nationalism spread all over Thailand. The Thais began to look upon the Chinese and other foreigners as intruders in their country. In 1927 there was mass exodus of refugees from China into Thailand due to civil war between nationalist and communist forces in China.⁵

Internally government was in serious financial difficulties which made the people rise in discontent. It was from this stage that Thailand faced troubles from communist countries. Its borders and internal security was threatened. Insurgency movements slowly gained in border

3. George K. Tanham, Trial in Thailand (New York, 1974), p.4.
4. Sarasin Viraphol, Directions of Thai Foreign Policy (Singapore, 1976), p.8.
5. Virginia Thompson, Thailand: The New Siam (New York, 1967), p.102.

areas between Thailand and Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. This phenomenon gained momentum soon after the conclusion of Second World War. The communist guerrillas were a potential source of threat to Thai's borders.

By 1950, the full meaning and objectives of communism became clear - their desire to capture and then subvert the local nationalist and anti-colonialist movement. Vietnamese communist fought against colonialism and was more anti-colonialist. To safeguard its security, Thailand entered into an agreement with U.S.A. on economic, technical and military areas. This was followed by an active participation in Korean war. Thailand became a key country in the security policy of the United States in the area.⁶ This pro-US policy was also a result of increasing Soviet influence in the late 1960s. At this juncture the Communist Party of Thailand which was formally evolved in 1952 became very active and gave support to armed insurgencies at Nakhon Phanom province in northeast Thailand in August 1965. Besides it also supported some of the insurgencies that were taking place in Phu Phan mountains in Nakhon province and Sakon Phanom provinces, Leoi, Ubon, Rat Chetlam, Kalasin, Udon Thani (all in northeast), Surat Thani, Nakhon Si

6. Russel H.Fifield, The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia: 1945-48 (New York, 1958), p.247.

Thammarat, Krabi, Trang and Prachuap Khiri Khan (in south). Moreover communism were making attempts at turning a greater portion of Thai population against government. Added to it the war in Indo-China further threatened Thailand's security. The country's leaders put implicit faith in the Americans and hoped that by aiding the U.S.A. in military activities in Indo-China, they could prevent evolving forms of Maoist government in the region. Apart from relying on Western powers, Thailand took interest in getting support from regional countries which later came up as Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967. The predominant policy was anti communism and to check threat from Vietnam.⁷ This trend of anti-communism was seen through out seventies as insurgencies continued particularly in northeast. Thailand was facing a crisis both internally and externally.

Externally Thailand's neighbours Laos and Kampuchea had gone under communist rule. Furthermore, U.S. defeat in Indo-China war was a cause for concern. Internally, the condition in Bangkok and elsewhere was chaotic. There was lack of efficient public services. Economic discomfort, hunger and destitution were growing. The new phenomenon of strikes by public service employees, including garbage collectors and postal employees marked the month of -----

7. Sarasin, n.4, p.14.

September 1975 and was not only a menace to the security of ruling class but also a demonstration to many Thais of continued bureaucratic inadequacy.⁸

In 1976 Thailand's relations with the United States further strengthened as Thailand's vulnerability exposed much to communist infiltration.⁹ Internally, the emergence of the hardliner, Thamin Kravichien Government put an end to strikes and other troubles in industries but it was obvious that the political scenario was tense. A coup was staged and his successor Kriangsak Chomanand for the sake of security stressed the need for improving relations with the neighbouring communists.

The Vietnamese involvement in Kampuchea engaged Thailand militarily along its borders. This was the result of the Vietnamese crossing the borders in pursuit of Pol Pot's men. Thailand was already burdened by a large number of refugees and Vietnamese military action in Kampuchea caused exodus in Thailand. Besides taxing Thailand economically and socially, the refugees posed other problems too. Anti-Vietnam feeling led to growing demonstrations

8. Jusuf Wanandi, "Dimensions of Southeast Asia Security", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol.1, no.4, March 1980, p.34.
9. Richard Nations, "Back in the Game", Far Eastern Economic Review, 10 November 1978, p.21.

against the small Vietnamese community by the Thais.

Towards the end of 1979, Thailand's fragile kingdom groomed under the presence of unwanted refugees.¹⁰ The Thailand leaders perceived Vietnam as a direct threat to its stability. Moreover Thailand was major beneficiary of China's concern over increasing Soviet influence in Southeast Asia and its desire to establish counter weights against Vietnam. The Chinese could not tolerate the Soviet backed Vietnamese becoming a force in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, Thailand was assured of all possible help by the Chinese.

The Chinese have supplied weapons to the Khmer Rouge as Beijing Government wanted to reduce Vietnamese pressure on the Thai-Cambodian borders by keeping sizeable forces of its own on the borders.¹¹ Similarly USA reassured to assist Thailand militarily in accordance with the Manila pact. The attack on Kampuchea in December 1978 by Vietnam showed that there was no longer a 'buffer state' between Vietnam and Thailand. There was concern in Thailand that Vietnam may give support to insurgents. A direct assault was not on

10. Thomas A.Marks, "Thailand: The Threatened Kingdom", Conflict Studies, no.115, February 1980, p.2.

11. Hung Nguyen Manh, "Sino-Soviet Conflict: Powerplay Among the Communist Neighbour", Asian Survey, vol.19, no.11, November 1979, p.1041.

cards but the infiltration and subversion via local communist parties or other insurgency groups posed a real danger. For the first time Thailand and Vietnam posed a serious and direct threat one another. In the past, Thailand and Vietnam were able to keep Kampuchea and Laos as traditional buffers but their removal left Thailand in the uncomfortable position of having new neighbours it would have preferred to live without. Thus Thailand's policy of Vietnam was shaped by the following factors:

- (a) historical
- (b) geopolitical
- (c) economic
- (d) strategic, and
- (e) ideological.

Thailand and Vietnam historically were expansionist, centralizing states that pushed outward into ill defined frontiers and against crumbling empires. Thailand invaded Kingdom of Vietnane (1778-79) to preempt Burmese encirclement and Khmer as well as Lao rulers turned to Vietnam for protection from Thailand. By early twentieth century both Vietnam and Thailand felt that their security would be jeopardized if the states between them were left free to cooperate with major enemies.

The French conquest forced the Thai-Vietnam rivalry into suspension and two countries turned inward. The

Vietnamese communism ultimately build a 'people's army' and defeat the French but Thai army ceased to wage a war for a century as it became an instrument of internal royalist consolidation, not external defense.¹² These differences laid base, not only for political, economic considerations but also for quite different security orientations on the part of modern elites in two countries.

Another crucial dissimilarity arose in connection with peace, each occupied in other's consciousness. For external security during the colonial period, Vietnam suffered France's protection, while Thailand was a buffer between French and British possessions. Self defense was must for Vietnam, unnecessary for Thailand. The security also pertained to numerous shooting incidents along Thai-Laotian and Thai Cambodian frontiers particularly the latter.

Geopolitically, Thailand's rivalry with Vietnam was for political influence in Indo-China and both countries have geographical proximity with China. Thailand tried to use China card since it recognized China in 1975, with a view to settling its bilateral problems with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Apart from this, refugees question and fishing disputes come in this arena. Refugee problem particularly

12. David K. Wyatt, Thailand: A Short History (New Heaven, 1984), p.139.

after Kampuchea's occupation burdened Thailand's exchequer. With the large influx of refugees, the Thai government had unexpectedly changed its policy on refugees. Large holding centres, the most important being the Khao I Dang, Kamput, Mairut and Sakaeo centres were established under the management of UNHCR (United Nations High Commission on Refugees).

The two countries have also serious disagreements over the sharing of the waters of the Mekong which flows through Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and into the Mekong delta in South Vietnam before entering the sea. As a result fishing disputes arose very often. Thus it was only in the aftermath of Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea in 1978 that the power configuration in the mainland Southeast Asia shifted fundamentally. Previously, the strategic balance had been constructed with neutralist Cambodia and Laos as the pivotal buffer states between the two power contenders - Vietnam and Thailand. The consolidation of Indo-China under Vietnamese control resulted in disturbing the strategic balance. Thus Thailand assumed frontline position with support from USA, PRC and other ASEAN members.¹³

Economically, Thailand had the support of the United

13. Khatharya Um, "Thailand and Dynamics of Economic and Security Complex", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol.13, no.3, December 1991, p.252.

States and West in the post Second World War era, whereas Vietnam receives aid from Communist bloc. Theoretically the shift in Thailand's foreign and domestic policy might best be represented in terms of its economic and political system. There is little doubt that the predominant economic system, adopted primarily from U.S. was based on a scheme of monopoly capitalism. This infusion of Western capital, either directly from a foreign government to the Thai government or indirectly through multinational corporations, which in some cases maintained 100 per cent ownership (e.g. Firestone, Toyota and Omess) was readily accepted by many of the Thai government's leaders like Sarit, Phibhun and Thomom to be proper path to economic development.¹⁴

As early as January 1988 Thailand began to encourage private sector trade with Indo-China in view of Bangkok's need for timber, coal and precious metals.¹⁵ The Thai Government under Prime Ministership of Chati Chai believed that Indo-China would be linked to ASEAN peacefully through a new web of economic interdependence. Bangkok would serve as a primary conduit for commercial transactions with

14. Ross Prizzia, Thailand in Transition - The Role of Oppositional Forces (University of Hawaii, 1985), p.103.

15. Clark D. Neher, "Change in Thailand", Current History, vol.89, no.545, March 1990, p.220.

Vietnam and Thailand's relative economic advantage could serve to manage ASEAN relations with Vietnam. The Vietnamese leadership itself acknowledged severe economic problems directly related to its Cambodian adventure. The Thailand Premier Chatichai's much publicized policy to turn Indo-China had produced a profound positive impact in terms of forging closer private sector ties between Thai and neighbouring Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.¹⁶ The Vietnam's policy of Doi Muoi or renovation helped, between 1986 and 1992, inflation dropped from a phenomenal 775 per cent to 17 per cent, exports went up from nil to \$2.5 billion and GDP grew at an average rate of 5 per cent, reaching a height of 8.2 per cent so far.

It also attracted up to 1992, a foreign investment of over \$6.5 billion more over 60 per cent of this is in and around the newly emerging commercial capital, Ho Chi Minh city (formerly Saigon). With its highly literate and hard working labour force, abundant natural resources and strategic location in the heart of Southeast Asia, Vietnam has already being dubbed as the next emerging tiger of the region. In other words, the grand strategy of Vietnam is to advise the ideals of socialism using the tactics of a worker

16. Surachai Sirikrai, "Thai Perceptions of China and Japan", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol.12, no.3, December 1990, p.257.

economy. US embargo does not affect the Vietnamese economy as much as it does American business. Given the remarkable history of Vietnamese people one cannot put this apparently contradictory task beyond them.¹⁷

Strategically, Thailand's policy of Vietnam has been changing after Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in 1978. Before this Thailand's most pressing threat to stability and security came from communist insurgencies. Thailand tried to prevent consolidation of Vietnamese predominance in Indo-China. This endeavour prompted to take support from China and other ASEAN countries. China gave timely support to Thailand as its attack against Vietnam proved a costly blow to PRC lives, material and prestige. The exposure of China's southern flank to Hanoi's expansionist designs was main cause for attack against Vietnam. Chinese defeat forced Beijing to seek alternative avenues to achieve its strategic and political goals against Hanoi and in Southeast Asia overall. One avenue directly led to Bangkok.. China offered a wide range of military exports to Bangkok including artillery, munitions, armoured personnel carrier, aircraft, tanks, missiles and naval bases. The first transfer of major weapons was a grant-in-aid package which included heavy artillery guns, anti-aircraft guns, anti tank

17. Bangkok Post, 19 November 1993, p.6.

guns, and 24-T 59 Main Battle Tanks (MBTs).¹⁸ This procurement beefed up Thailand's eastern borders defenses and counter attacks strength against incursions from Vietnamese and Vietnamese backed forces in Cambodia. The Thais also bought Chinese HY-5 portable heat seeking anti-aircraft missiles and long range artillery guns. In addition, Beijing made low priced offers to Bangkok for the transfer of anti-craft missiles, Romeo class submarines and F-7 fighter jets.¹⁹ In March 1988 a second major purchasing wave by Thai defense forces began. General Chaowalit approved the purchase of 23T-69 MBT, 360 APC an anti air craft radar guidance system and 130 mm ammunition. Royal Thai navy announced its intention to acquire Jianghu-class frigates from the PRC.²⁰ The third and last wave of purchases was, in 1989, involved with large and more sophisticated weapons. Thai military acquired F-7 fighter jets, three submarines, missiles, additional MBTs more Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), C-801 ship to ship

18. R.Bates Gill, "China Looks to Thailand - Exporting Arms, Exporting Influence", Asian Survey, vol.31, no.6, June 1991, pp.528-29.

19. Sheldon W.Simon, "Friendship-Arms Sales", Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), 19 March 1987, pp.15-16.

20. China Daily, 4 April 1991, A Report.

missiles. Thus PRC arms exports to Thailand made it very formidable strategically to counter any attacks from the Vietnamese. Thailand's perception of Vietnam is indeed shaped by the developments in the region, particularly the ASEAN.

ASEAN is an important factor in the foreign and security policies of its member states because these policies especially those related to regional issues are to be a large extent harmonized within the organization, either formally or informally. As an organization ASEAN contributes to the peaceful resolution of possible conflict, that may arise among the member states because of region's ethnic, religious and cultural diversity.²¹ It also serves as a vehicle for enhancing each member state's security and increasing its political clout especially vis-a-vis militarily and economically more powerful international actions. By working together to forge a common approach to certain issues, the individual member states, which taken individually have very limited political and economic leverages, increase their chances of achieving their goals and objectives. This tends to become even more important as perceptions of security threats from outside ASEAN intensify

21. Julius Caesar Parraenes, "China and Japan in ASEAN's Strategic Perceptions", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol.12, no.3, December 1990, p.206.

as a result of increased uncertainty or international shocks.²²

The different member states also had some other specific motives for membership in the organisation that reflect their various strategic perceptions. However, there is a common interest in regional cooperation that springs from the interdependent nature of the Southeast Asian countries. Internal and external security problems in one state affect the security of the neighbouring states to a great degree - a situation arising not only from geographical proximity but also from ethnic, religious, social and economic linkages between them. Indo-China and South China sea are two vital areas in which ASEAN countries' security interests are linked with each other.

22. M.Rajendran, ASEAN's Foreign Relations: The Shift to Collective Action (Kuala Lumpur, 1985), pp.17-18.

CHAPTER II

VIETNAM IN THAILAND'S DECISION-MAKING

National level politics in Thailand has always involved only a very few people. Kings, royalty and nobility reigned supreme during the Sukhothai, Ayuthaya and Bangkok eras; and the 1932 coup d'état which overthrew the absolute monarchy did not bring any fundamental changes in the pattern of rule: a bureaucratic elite replaced the monarchical elite. The major decision makers in contemporary Thai national politics have been the top level bureaucrats, high ranking military officers, members of the royalty, distinguished journalists, directors of large business and corporations, intellectuals and politicians with mass constituencies.¹

The domination of politics in Thailand by a select few results from the political system of the Thailand. The political socialization has fostered specialized political skills to few persons, and from the traditional attitude that those in power have the right to rule while those who are not in power have the duty to obey, had been accepted norm.

1. M.R.Kukrit Pramoj, a member of Thai Upper House, quoted in Siam Rath, 1 August 1968.

Above these three branches, and theoretically and legally above politics is the monarchy. Indeed it is difficult to conceive of Thai politics without the magnificent pageantry that surrounds His Majesty, the Lord of life, the king of Thailand who is revered by his subjects as are few other modern monarchs.

The executive branch of government dominates the political scene. Since 1932 the Prime Minister has wielded great authority as the leader of the cabinet, through his office as Prime Minister and in his capacity as leader of the military. Prime Minister is aided by other cabinet level ministers, representing ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Finance, Justice etc. Except at the highest bureaucratic levels, the civil servants do not participate in politics. Even with the changes in elite leadership since 1932, the customary bureaucratic personnel have provided a high degree of administrative stability.²

The legislature had never been a politically powerful branch of the government. On the contrary, the legislative branch has not often been used to enhance the power of the executive. The resources available to the legislative branch had been minimal, and hence legislators had been

2. Clark D. Neher, ed., Modern Thai Politics - from Village to Nation (Cambridge, 1979), p.273.

forced to rely on the executive branch for favours. Executive control of the legislature had come about partially through the government's power to appoint half of the legislative body and partially because the ever present threat of a coup had prevented legislators from carrying out their constitutional duties. When the legislature had attempted to perform its proper functions, as in 1971, thereby threatening the power of the executive branch, it had been disbanded by the army.

A principal problem of the Thai legislature had been that it was never accepted sovereign by either the bureaucratic elites or the Thai masses. Indeed the legislature had been treated with disdain by all elements of the society. For the elites, the legislators were seen as alien interlopers who threatened the traditional patron-client, authoritarian and hierarchical patterns of Thai politics. The power base of most of the legislators lay in their local constituencies and their claim of a mandate from the people, that is "democratic legitimacy" was granted to the regimes in power while legitimacy was more spurious. Thus for the legislature had been peripheral to the military dominated political system of Thailand. That is not to say

that Thai parliament had never fulfilled its obligations.³

In the struggle for power, wealth and status the military had been particularly successful. Since, the overthrow of the absolute monarchy the military had dominated the office of Prime Minister. The military leaders had seized power in the absence of institutionalized norms of succession. And even during the constitutional period, military leaders had used the coup d'état to seize power from both civilian and military regimes. The coups, which were ideal mechanism for politically ambitious military groups, had become the standard means by which Thai governments change. Indeed several constitutions had deemed the coup d'état a legitimate and sanctioned means for establishing new governments.

Thailand is a superb example of a nation with the proper preconditions for a coup d'état. Since high political posts were held by only a very few people and since governmental participation was concentrated in the bureaucracy, it was possible to dominate the entire political system merely by controlling the bureaucratic structure. Finally, Thailand had been independent of foreign influence that opposed the means or the results of

3. David Morrell, "Legislative Intervention in Thailand's Development Process: A Case Study", Asian Survey, vol.12, no.8, 1972, pp.627-46.

coup d'etat. Since World War Second the U.S. had had pervasive influence in Thailand but had not opposed the leaders of coups, principally because the latter consistently proclaimed themselves anti-communist and pro-American.

Traditionally Thailand's flexibility in policy making largely derived from its experience of dealing with powers that were able to maintain only a temporary presence in the region. The European colonial powers, the Japanese during World War Second and the U.S. during Vietnam war introduced various policy errors into region's history that were relatively transient.⁴ Flexibility in decision making was of necessity a protective reaction to the transitory nature of the dominance established by extra regional powers.

As Thailand reacted to Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia by drawing upon Chinese support, a process was initiated that progressively limited the kind of flexibility that was the hallmark of Thai's policy making during the period of extra regional hegemony. A relationship with China was a conspicuous counter move against a reunited Vietnam after U.S. withdrawal from Indo-China. In the context of accommodation to China, however, the limitations

4. Leszek Buszynski, "Thailand: The Erosion of a Balanced Foreign Policy", Asian Survey, vol.22, no.11, November 1982, p.1037.

and restrictions upon policy inherent in this relationship was likely to be of a longer term Thai leaders themselves were willing to admit. The policy of balanced relations, which was a Thai description of their own flexibility was eroded.

Vietnamese factor in Thailand's decision making can be traced from the rise of communism in the region. The communist political activity and influence were introduced into country as early as the middle and late 1920s primarily among Thailand's Vietnamese and Chinese minorities.⁵ Ever since this early period, the Vietnamese have played an important role as a channel for the penetration of communist influence into Thailand.

In 1928, Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh began organising Vietnamese communities in Thailand to support his revolutionary movement in French Indo-China, these efforts became part of the beginnings of the Indo-Chinese communist party which was formed in 1930. Not long thereafter, the Indo-Chinese party even moved its headquarters temporarily to northeast Thailand during 1931-33 to escape severe repression by the French colonial authorities in Indo-China.

Developments after World War Second further

5. Robert F. Zimmerman, "Insurgency in Thailand", Politics of Communism, vol.25, no.3, May-June 1976, p.19.

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strengthened these Vietnamese connections. The communist leadership of the Viet Minh once again sought to use Thai territory as a privileged sanctuary for their post war struggle against the French in Indo-China and during the late 1940s and 1950s sizeable number of Vietnamese fled into Thailand as refugees. These developments had posed a great concern for Thai's decision makers. The question of accommodating these refugees had created troubles in the intellectual class of Thailand. The establishment of Communist Party of Thailand in 1952 and its support to armed insurgencies in Thai Phanom district, Nakhon Phom province in Northern Thailand in August 1965 had irked the top think tank. Besides some of the insurgencies bases are Phu Phan mountains in Nakhon Phanom and Sakon Phanom provinces, Leoi, Ubon, Ratchathani, Kalaqin, Udon Thani (all in north coast), Surat Thani, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Krabi, Trang and Prachuap Khiri Khan (in south).

In Central Thailand, communist insurgency had not presented a serious problem for policy matters. There were only few communist insurgents in the entire area surrounding and immediately north of Bangkok. The intensity of these movements were less than those of Northeast and South. Ironically the danger from Vietnam was much less when the military dominated governments of Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kitlikachoru were in power from 1958 to 1973. Yet these

governments were much concerned about communist problem in Bangkok than anywhere else in the country.⁶ After October 1973, however, because of reduced military authority and the government's stronger commitment to democratic principles, it became far more difficult for the government deal with clandestine activities of Vietnamese communists.

Sanya Dharmasakti's government in 1974 decided to lift longstanding ban on trade with China that had been imposed by Field Marshal Sarit in 1958 and took measures to receive Chinese support against Vietnamese. Keeping in view the presence of Vietnam, Kukrit Pramoj who became Prime Minister on 14 March 1975, announced the decision to establish diplomatic relations with China and to seek complete withdrawal of US forces within one year as US position in Indo-China collapsed. At this stage two concurrent processes were culminating in Thai's policy of Vietnam-diplomatic relations with China were deemed essential in the Vietnam's anticipated attacks and the withdrawal of American forces was to pave the way for eventual reconciliation with the Vietnamese communists.⁷ The Thai leadership decided to evoke Soviet support after Thai-Laotian clash of 17 November

6. *ibid*, p.23.

7. Buszynski, n.4, p.1039.

1975 during which a Thai patrol boat was sunk on Mekong river and Thai suspected Vietnamese hand behind it. However, much to Thailand's astonishment Soviet had supported to Vietnamese. As a reaction to this, the policy makers made efforts to retain US forces as the then commander in chief of Army, General Bonchai Bamrungpong observed that Thailand is now in a precarious position to fight a major communist offensive.⁸ Meanwhile military resentment against the civilian government's domestic policies found expression in the coup of 6 October 1976. It felt that civilian government had made Thailand more vulnerable to Vietnam. Thanin Krainchien said of Vietnam "I would like to repeat again that the enemy did invade us, and is currently invading and will continue to invade our country".⁹

The government of General Kriangrak Chomanan decided to adopt a less alarmist view of Vietnam by noting that it had been pursuing a policy of accommodation. As a result diplomatic relations between both the countries were established formally on 2 December 1977. Kriangsak announced that his government would pursue an independent

8. Strait Times, 1 February 1976.

9. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 30 December 1976.

policy of Vietnam and would promote ties with ASEAN and Indo-China states.¹⁰ Vietnamese factor had prompted Kriangsak's visit to China from 29 March to 4 April 1978, at a time when Chinese leadership was seeking regional allies against Vietnam. Convergence of interests against Vietnam ensured Kriangsak's visit a success as Chinese promised to extend their support in case of Vietnam attacks. This offer by China was interpreted by policy makers of Thailand as constructive relationship between Thailand and China. The Thai conception of a constructive leadership was one that would offer the Vietnamese into retaliatory action, all the more reason for Thai to emphasize at least the intention of pursuing a balanced policy while acquiescing in Chinese aims.

The Vietnamese resented the implications of the burgeoning relationship between Thailand and China, a factor that probably contributed to their decision to eliminate the strategic danger that the antagonistic Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia represented. As a result to this Vietnam attacked and occupied Kampuchea in 1978. This invasion had led to radical changes in Thailand's policies. The Thai-Vietnamese diplomacy remained deadlocked after the incursion. Thailand

10. News Bulletin (Thai Foreign Affairs Ministry), November-December 1977, pp.15-16.

and ASEAN rejected the proposals made by the Vietnamese, Laos and Heng Samrin regimes which called for a demilitarized zone on both sides of Thai-Kampuchean border, negotiations between the Thai and Heng Samrin governments, Thai action to disarm Kampuchean resistance forces, the relocation of refugee camps in Thailand away from the border, the placing of all international aid to refugees under the auspices of Heng Samrin government and non-aggression treaties between Thailand and Indo-Chinese states.¹¹

In a situation of threat, Kriangsak turned towards the great powers for reassurance in a series of moves that should what Thai assessments of ASEAN were. His decision to visit Washington in February 1979 paid in the form of President Carter's understanding that the US would react under the Manila Pact if Thailand's security were threatened.¹² Having assured itself of US support to bargain with, Kriangsak visited Moscow the following month (21-27 March) in what was first visit by a Thai Prime Minister to Soviet capital. His first intention was to

11. Larry A.Niksch, "Thailand in 1980: Confrontation with Vietnam and Fall of Kriangsak", Asian Survey, vol.21, no.2, February 1981, p.226.

12. Larry A.Niksch, "Thailand and Manila Pact", The World Today, February 1980, p.36.

signal to Moscow that rights of consultation over regional affairs would be linked to tangible efforts to control the Vietnamese. He reportedly advised Soviet leaders that Thailand's policy was one of 'strict neutrality'¹³ and upon returning to Thailand stated that they had assured him that Vietnam had no plan to the country. Secondly, his intention was to remind the Vietnamese that the Soviet Union's regional aims in seeking ASEAN assent to collective security could conflict with Hanoi's efforts to consolidate its position in Indo-China, which ASEAN opposed.

However, Kriangsak's efforts to reassert a balance in Thailand's policies with the great powers lost all meaning after Soviet supported Vietnamese incursions at Non Mark Muon on 23-24 June 1980. These incursions were in retaliation for the Thai decision to repatriate Khmer refugees, which Vietnamese regarded as a deliberate attempt to reinforce the Khmer Rouge. This event showed Thai decision-makers that they could not rely upon Soviet assurances regarding Vietnam's behaviour. Meanwhile there was economic crisis in Thailand which ultimately toppled General Kriangsak's government.

General Prem Tinsulanond who came to power on 21 March 1980 initiated a process of carefully linking Thai with

13. Far Eastern Economic Review, 6 April 1976.

Chinese policy. Under Prem, Thailand had attempted to organize international pressure against Vietnam to force a settlement of the Cambodian issue. The Thais sought to use Chinese support to arrive at a solution that would ultimately block the pursuit of Chinese interests. For the Chinese, Cambodia had been an instrument of pressure against Vietnam and they could not be expected to deny themselves any opportunity to coerce Vietnamese compliance on outstanding issues between their countries, i.e., Vietnam's alliance with the Soviet, border disputes with Chinese, Status of Paracel and Spratlay, Chinese minority in Vietnam and Vietnamese control of Laos. Thus Vietnam had become a factor in decision-making of not only for Thailand but also for China. It had become a thorn in the policies of Thailand and China.

The convergence of Thai and Chinese policy that Prem's Government had fostered was acknowledgement of the obvious fact that China was the only great power that fully shared the immediate Thai concern that Vietnamese forces be withdrawn from Cambodia. However Thailand and China shared short term interests in seeking Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia but differed in long-term aims. Thailand like other ASEAN states, would like to preserve Vietnam as a regional counter-weight to Chinese influence but China seeks Vietnam's humiliation. Thailand's vulnerability, however,

links it with Chinese aims. Thailand's dependence upon or subordination to China heightened due to Vietnamese factor.¹⁴

Thailand's policy of Vietnam during mid 80s particularly since beginning 1985 revolved around three principle dimensions strengthening the country's external and internal security, strengthening its external economy and lastly increasing its influence on international politics to strengthen Thailand's national and economic security. The then foreign minister Siddhi Savetsila of Thailand outlined the new policy principles in four points:

- (1) Active diplomacy provides the best guarantee for Thai national security;
- (2) Solidarity with the other ASEAN countries;
- (3) Development and strengthening of Thailand's relations with major powers;
- (4) The conduct of policy that extricably linked to the well being of Thai people.

Thus the Vietnamese factor prompted Thailand to embark on a new policy based on initiative, novelty and omnidirectional overturns. During this period Bangkok seemed to take its future into its own hands. Flexibility was the new key word in Bangkok's relations with all

14. Bangkok Post, 20 November 1985.

countries including Vietnam. It intended to delink relations with Third World countries from the Cambodian problem as a sole criterion and means of any policy. Pragmatism, strategy and flexibility were hallmarks of Saranrom Palace's new policy during mid 1980s. Meanwhile there was political transition in Thailand. King Bhumibol Adulyadej pronounced that Thailand's brand of democracy was not working well because it was patterned on foreign models and it really needs a government that could make a concerted effort to help people.¹⁵ The Thai army commander-in-chief General Chaovalit Yongchaiyut assumes charge as commander-in-chief of Army and took complete in charge of affairs. During this tenure military remained as the most influential actor in Thai's semi democracy - Chaovalit became immersed in every aspect of political life and was the principal spokesman for reform and change in Thai political system.

The military prestige of Chaovalit was shaken when it attempted to oust the Vietnamese troops at Chong Bak Pass near Thailand's border with Laos and Cambodia end in failure. The year witnessed numerous disputes and skirmishes on borders between Thailand and Cambodia and

15. Clark D. Neher, "Thailand in 1987 - Semi-Successful, Semi Democracy", Asian Survey, vol.28, no.2, February 1988, p.192.

Thailand and Laos. Developments created many troubles to decision makers of Thailand for a concrete settlement. However in late 80s Thailand's continuing capacity to cope with changing demands and to assert its own destiny, like from menacing internal and external forces remained intact. The decision making of Thailand danced according to the tunes of either military or popularly elected government leaders. This phenomenon was much witnessed during late eighties and early nineties also. In early 1991 armed forces once again took power from elected government of Chatichai Choonhavan on 23 February. Internal turmoil due to political developments was more witnessed in Thailand. The constitution was abrogated, national assembly dissolved, political freedom prohibited etc. were developments. Thus decision making and Vietnam factor always revolved on these developments.

However the end of year 1991 witnessed movements for restoring democracy in Thailand. ASEAN and Indo-Chinese states continued to occupy the centre of attention in Thailand's policy of Vietnam. Anand's policy of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos did not basically depart from that of Chatichai as both emphasized efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the Cambodian conflict and strengthen ties, particularly in the economic sphere. The year 1991 was a turning point in Thai relations with these three neighbours.

After 12 years of violent conflict, peace finally came to war-torn Cambodia. A peace treaty was signed on 23 October by four fighting factions and Supreme National Council (SNC) headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

Thus Vietnam factor in Thailand's decision-making slowly relegated as Thailand's relationship with Vietnam improved markedly. The two governments realized the necessity for closer ties particularly when peace in Cambodia became a reality. Vietnam was enthusiastic about opening up the country more trade and economic relations with the outside world. Anand's government was ready to reciprocate. Premier Vo Van Kiet's visit to Thailand and an exchange of detained fisherman in October 1991 marked an important step in Thailand's decision to improve its relations with Vietnam.

CHAPTER III

VIETNAMESE INTERVENTION IN CAMBODIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THAILAND

Thailand played a key role in the affairs of the region ever since the ouster of the Khmer Rouge government from power in December 1978. Formerly the staunchest supporter of the American policy of containment of communism,¹ Thailand adopted a two pronged policy after the withdrawal of the American forces in 1975 from Indo-China to retain its regional importance and national interests.

On the one hand, it took the initiative to strengthen relations with the People's Republic of China with which it was involved in polemics and disputes ever since 1945.² On the other hand, Thailand tried to stop Vietnam to have a foothold next door. Though China and Vietnam are both communist countries and neighbours, Thailand's attitudes towards them were not the same. Though, the Prime Minister of Thailand, Kukrit Pramojo was not against Vietnam, he

1. Frank C. Darling, Thailand and the United States (Washington, D.C., 1965).
2. Ganganath Jha, Southeast Asia and India: A Political Perspective (New Delhi, 1986), pp.76-88.

looked towards the ASEAN to evolve a common consensus on Indo-China. In October 1976, there was military coup d'etat in Thailand. The new government appreciated the policy of rapprochement with China, because the Thais were apprehensive of Vietnam. Thai rulers were concerned about the influence of the Vietnamese communists in the region, who were held in high profile and lived in burgeoning morale.

China, on the other hand, understood and appreciated Thai susceptibilities of Vietnam. China wanted North and South Vietnam to remain separated. But the Vietnamese comrades did not pay heed to Chinese advice and instead worked for unification of the two parts. China was unhappy about this development as it viewed the emergence of a strong state on its southern frontier with misgivings. It felt that the unification of the two parts of Vietnam would result in a strong step towards the formation of Indo-Chinese federation.³ China became active and worked to thwart Vietnamese political ambitions and thus attempted to break the solidarity of the Indo-Chinese countries. It found a desirable ally in the government of the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea. China promoted Democratic Kampuchea to act as

3. D.G.E.Hall, A History of South East Asia (London, 1968), p.849.

a 'trouble shooter' against Vietnam. At the same time Chinese rulers were astute enough to forge an understanding with Thailand on this issue.

On the other hand, the democratic Kampuchean government was lukewarm in its attitude towards Vietnam. Its strategy was to delink itself with Vietnam as soon as possible. It wanted to maintain a distinct identity vis-a-vis the Vietnamese communists. Its policy included the abolition of the currency system and forcefully bridging the gap between rich and poor. It had initiated a 'resettlement plan' to transfer the urban population to the rural areas and vice versa. In the realm of foreign policy, it attached great importance to China. It laid claim to the Vietnamese territories and adopted a harsh attitude towards the overseas Vietnamese in that country. It was least concerned about Vietnam's sensitivity. Vietnam was greatly disturbed by these developments and subsequently it helped the forces led by Heng Samrin to overthrow the Khmer Rouge government. The removal of the Khmer Rouge from power with the help of the Vietnamese forces in league with the national united front for national liberation, established a bad precedent in Southeast Asia. In December 1978 the army of Vietnam entered Kampuchean territory and Heng Samrin was installed in Phnom Penh as the President of People's Republic of

Kampuchea (PRK) on 7 January 1979.⁴ The Vietnamese domination of Kampuchea and presence of Vietnamese troops in large numbers across the frontiers in Kampuchea and Laos highlighted the vulnerability of Thailand's transmekong area in particular and security as a whole.

The Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea had manifold implications on Thailand. The implications can be broadly classified as the following:

- (a) Political
- (b) Economic
- (c) Security
- (d) Military
- (e) Refugees and insurgencies.

Politically, the situation on borders between Thailand and Laos and between Thailand and Kampuchea was becoming difficult. Meanwhile Thailand tried to use China card, since it recognized China in 1975, with a view to settling its relations with Indo-Chinese communist countries.⁵ The exchange of visits between the Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak (March-April 1978) and the Chinese Vice-Premier Deng

4. Bernard K.Gordon, "The Third Indo-China Conflict", Foreign Affairs, vol.65, no.1, 1986, p.66.

5. Khien Thurant, "An Overview of Politics and Foreign Relations: Thailand", Southeast Asian Affairs, vol.21, no.1, 1979, p.305.

Xiaoping (November 1978) underlined the growing friendliness between Thailand and China. In February 1979 the People's Republic of China launched its shortlived lesson against Vietnam which proved to be a costly blow to PRC lives, material and prestige. This setback forced Beijing to seek alternative avenues to achieve its strategic and political goals against Hanoi. One avenue led directly to Bangkok. Strategically, Beijing wished to see the eclipse of Soviet and Soviet backed Vietnamese strength in the region. Politically it sought to establish a more influential regional presence by developing closer ties with Southeast Asian countries. By offering support directly to Thailand, Beijing strengthened the frontline against further Vietnamese military expansion. The supply of arms, both through and to Thailand became principal means by which several strategic and political forces were met. Thus they evolved building relationship between China and Thailand,⁶ which was a direct implication of Vietnamese attack on Kampuchea.

Secondly, Thailand had extended support to Khmer Rouge, which was fighting against Vietnamese rule in Kampuchea. Thailand became a sanctuary for Kampuchean rebels. The

6. R.Bates Gill, "China Looks to Thailand - Exporting Alms, Exporting Influence", Asian Survey, vol.31, no.6, June 1991, p.527.

third political implication was seen in the form of its indispensable alliance with US for ensuring its national security.

Economically, refugee problem had burdened Thailand's exchequer. In the spring of 1979 Kampuchean refugees began crossing into Thailand. International aid started flowing in. By June 1979 there were 17000 refugees in United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) holding centres and another estimated 40,000 in the border zones between Thailand and Kampuchea. These first refugees were typically former members of the urban middle class, shopkeepers, teachers and civil servants who immediately tried to escape labour system of the collective forms collapsed. They were often carried with them their few possessions of jewellery and objects of gold. In September-October 1979 there began a massive flood of refugees in which nearly half a million ill and starving people sought safety along the border with Thailand. These were remains of the army and cadres of the Khmer Rouge accompanied by a part of the population which had followed more or less voluntarily.⁷ Vietnamese troops had broken up the support areas planned by the Khmer Rouge inside Kampuchea and had driven these people into the

7. Kiljuneu Kimmo, "The Tragedy of Kampuchea", Alternatives, vol.9, no.2, June 1983, p.301.

uninhabitable mountain and jungle areas. The Khmer Rouge however tried desperately to keep these people under their control by preventing their escape to the Vietnamese side of Thailand.

In October 1979, at the time of large influx of refugees, the Thai Government unexpectedly changed its policy on refugees and opened the door. Large holding centres, the most important being the Khao I Dang, Kamput, Mairut and Sakaeo centres were established under the management of UNHCR. Khao I Dang was laid out for 300,000 refugees. It was imagined that all of the refugees were as starving and weak as rose who had been under Khmer Rouge control. The Thai government calculated that the number of refugees could rise to one million or even two million which it was believed would seriously rock the new Phnom Penh government.

Table 1: Khmer Refugees 1975-81

Total Refugees (1975-81)	8,50,000
Fled to:	
Vietnam	1,50,000
Thailand (1975-78)	50,000
Thailand (1979-81)	6,30,000
Laos	20,000

Source: UNHCR, Regional Office for Western South Asia, Bangkok.

The refugees began to burden Thailand itself, particularly when it turned out that the Western countries were not prepared to accept as many Khmer refugees as had been expected. Moreover Thailand's gross domestic product had increased from 469,952 million baht in 1978 to 684,930 million baht in 1980. Defense budget during the above period rose from 16,405.1 million bahts to 22,384.3 million bahts an increase of nearly 40 percent.^B

As a result of economic burden the government of Thailand repeatedly presumed the international aid organizations to change the locations of their holding centres. In January 1980 Thailand closed its border and refugees were directed into camps on the frontier. There were more than 20 of these border camps which housed over 200,000 refugees. During 1979-80 various political and military organizations fought among themselves for the control and supervision of these camps. The borderline was not completely undisputed and Thailand claimed that the camps were on the Kampuchean side. The background to this could be seen as an attempt to gradually close all of the UNCHR supervised boarding centres and transfer some one hundred thousand refugees still in them to the Kampuchean

B. The Budget Bureau, Summary of Budget for fiscal year 1983 (Bangkok, 1983).

side.

Table 2: Khmer Refugee Camps in Thailand, February 1982

<u>UNHCR Holding Centres</u>		<u>Border Camps</u>	
<u>Camp</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Northern Zone (WFP* RTA**)</u>	<u>Population</u>
		<u>Camp</u>	
Khao I Dang	43,000	Nam Yun	2,500
Ban Kaeng (Sakeo II)	24,500	Chong Chom (O'Smach)	2,000
Kamput	14,500	Ban Sara (O'Ksach)	6,000
Phanat Nikhom	9,000	Pact Um (Smrong Kiot)	14,000
Lumpuk (refugees 75-78)	2,000	Naeng Mut	300
		O'Bok	1,500
Total	93,500	Total	26,300
<u>Central Zone (WFP, UNBRO+)</u>		<u>Southern Zone</u>	
Nong Pra	8,000	Sok Sann (Kraduk Chan)	9,000
Tap Prik	8,000	Borai	19,000
Ban Sangal	11,000	Ta Luen	17,000
Nong Samet	44,500	Total	45,000
Phnom Chat	13,000		
Kok Tahan	7,000		
Nong Chan	36,500		
Total	128,000		

Sources: UNCHR, Regional Office for Southern Asia, Bangkok.
 UNBRO Office, Asanaya Prathet
 *WFP = World Food Programme
 **RTA = Royal Thai Army
 +UNBRO - United Nations Border Relief Operation.

On the other hand, the border camps were in practice bases controlled by the Kampuchean opposition movements. Thus Thailand apparently attempted to create on its frontier some kind of buffer zone (composed of Khmer refugees) from

which political and military elements opposed to the Phnom Penh Government could recruit new forces, rather than to create the possibilities for refugees to return to their home, which has the goal of UNHCR refugee policy. According to UNHCR representatives, Thailand's policy could be characterized a relocation rather than repatriation, which was what UNHCR itself was aiming at. The relocation programme was aimed at instability in the area rather than facilitating the search for a lasting solution.

There had been numerous cases of Thai army violating the generally accepted international rights of refugees by forcibly moving people from UNHCR holding centres to border camps. It was estimated that between the end of 1980 and the beginning of 1982, 20,000 refugees were subject to this kind of illegal transfer. Similarly when UNHCR tried to move 9000 refugees over the border into Kampuchea at the end of 1980 troops of the opposition movement with indirect support from the Thai army attacked the returnees causing the deaths of several dozen. Since then UNHCR had not tried to carry out its repatriation programme via border.

The physical conditions for life in the refugee camps had been relatively good. In order to reduce the incongruity between the refugees and the local Thai population, the international aid organizations had begun a programme under which food and medical aid were provided for

80,000 to 120,000 inhabitants of Thai affected villages.

Thus the refugee problem and opposition movements were unadulterated tried to Thailand as a result of Vietnamese installed government in Kampuchea. Thailand could manage this menace due to aid it received from international organizations.

The military and security implications in Thailand could be seen from the view of its defence expenditure during 1975-82, reliance on China for arms and ammunition and support from ASEAN countries. The third Indo-China war was institutionalized at the regional level as well as in the Thai political system: the defence budget has grown from 2.77 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1975 to 3.68 per cent in 1982, the Royal Thai Armed Forces extensive role in the nation's political, social and economic development had received official recognition and became fully legitimate after the promulgation of the office of the P.M.'s orders No.66/2523 (1980) and no.65/2525 (1982),⁹ the persistent involvement of General Arthit Kamlang-ek, the then supreme commander and army commander-in-chief, together with Lieutenant General Chaovalit Yongchaiyum, the deputy Army Chief of Staff and Major General Pi Chit Kullavanich, the commander of Pivotal First Army Division, in all issues

9. ISIS Bulletin, Bangkok, vol.1, no.2, pp.14-18.

of political importance had become evident and para military formations were being strengthened by the creation of a new elite armed unit, Santi Nimitr, which had been given wide powers to campaign against communism and proposed merger between the Thai Natural Defence Volunteer Force and essentially civilian village scouts. All these measures were to strengthen its security.

Table 3: Kingdom of Thailand's Defense:
Expenditure (1978-82)(a)

Fiscal year	Defence(b) budget (million baht)	% increase over previous year	% of total budget	GDP(c) (million baht)	Defence as % of GDP
1978	16,405.1	-	20.3	469,952	3.49
1979	19,056.9	16.2	20.7	556,240	3.43
1980	22,384.3	17.5	19.5	684,930	3.27
1981	27,722.6	23.8	19.8	786,166	3.53
1982	31,617.6	14.0	19.6	858,370	3.68

(a) includes 1.1 Administration of nation's defence
(Ministry of Defense, Supreme Command H.Q.)
1.2 The various branches of armed forces
1.3 Territorial defense
1.4 Others including the National Security Council

(b) Source: The Budget Bureau, Summary of Budget for Fiscal Year 1983 (Bangkok, 1983).

(c) Source: National Economic and Social Development Board Report 1983.

Apart from defence expenditure, Thailand had decided to procure some sophisticated measures to further tighten its security. The promising relations with China helped Thailand to acquire heavy artillery guns, anti aircraft guns, anti tank guns and 24T-59 Main Battle Tanks (MBTs).¹⁰ Apart from this Thailand expressed its interest in buying Chinese HY-5 portable heat seeking anti aircraft missiles and long range artillery guns. In addition, Beijing made low priced offers to Bangkok for transfer of anti aircraft missiles, Romeo class submarines and F-7 fighter jets.¹¹ This procurement beefed up Thailand's eastern border defenses and counter attack strength against incursions from Vietnamese and Vietnamese backed forces in Cambodia and it opened the door to much wider PRC-Thai military cooperation especially in the form of arms transfers.

Finally, there were also some diplomatic implications as a result of conflict. Vietnamese threats and provocation against Thailand had appeared in diplomatic forms too. During October 1979 Hanoi media reported that there were

10. Bangkok Post, 7 March 1987.

11. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, From Enmity to Alignment: Thailand's Evolving Relations with China (Bangkok, 1987), p.56.

Thai troops in Kampuchea's Battambang Province. However a statement issued by Thailand's Foreign Ministry vehemently denied the accusation as completely groundless. The ministry notified that the rumour was spread by Phan Hien, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister to cover up both the Vietnamese military provocations along Kampuchea. Thai borders and Vietnam's spreading of flames of war to Thailand.¹² Then there was case of the overflights of Soviet military transports across Thailand. Soviet air force had made numerous flights, many of them unauthorised, across Thai airspace to supply the war of aggression in Kampuchea. Initially Thailand had authorised some of these flights but became highly alarmed when the number began averaging more than one a day. Diplomatic officials were thoroughly shocked when some special flights began wandering around Thailand, apparently gathering intelligence. Thus there was absolute diplomatic stalemate.

Vietnam itself engaged in a brief exercise of nasty then nice then nasty diplomacy in the middle of October 1979. Vietnam Nguyen Co Thach turned up in Bangkok, ostensibly for a meeting of the economic and social commission for Asia and Pacific. His real purpose however

12. Michael Haas, "The Indo-China Tangle", Non Aligned World, vol.2, no.1, January-March 1984, p.85.

was clear. He carried a letter from Pham Van Dong to Thai Premier Kriangsok which glibly stated that "there was no problem" between Thailand and Vietnam that could not be settled by direct consultation".¹³ "Vietnam", Thach said, could not attack Thailand. The Thai government did not fall for any of this. Asia Week on 2 November put it: This was quickly seen in Bangkok as another bid to panic Bangkok into isolating itself from a collective ASEAN position. Thach's visit came only 72 hours after the scolding of the Thai Ambassador in Hanoi and less than 24 hours before four Thais and Kampuchean lay dead after a Vietnamese mortar attack on a Thai village. This incident was a black spot in the history of Thailand's diplomacy towards Vietnam. Since then mutual suspicions among diplomats were the order of day.

To sum up this chapter, Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea had enormous implications on Thailand in political, economic, military, security and diplomatic terms. Refugee problem bothered it and threat of Communist insurgencies haunted it. But it enlisted the cooperation of China, ASEAN and the Western world to contain Vietnamese influence in the region.

13. Bangkok Post, 18 October 1979.

CHAPTER IV
SINO-THAI COLLUSION VIS-A-VIS VIETNAM

The failure of the American adventures in Indo-China affected its image and morale. At the same time, the end of the war in Vietnam reduced the strategic importance of Thailand for the United States. On the eve of the American withdrawal from Indo-China, Thailand was experiencing democratic rule. Democracy had come to Thailand after years of military rule in October 1973, but it was only for a brief period, i.e., till October 1976. The democratic rulers were willing to maintain an equidistance in their relations with all the major powers. There was an effort to change the pro-American bias characteristic of the early period and therefore, the American withdrawal from Indo-China did not disturb them. As a matter of fact, the withdrawal provided an opportunity to the democratic rulers to reappraise Thai-American relations more easily.

China acquired greater diplomatic clout than ever before with regard to Kampuchean issue. Since its political break with Hanoi in 1978, Southeast Asian policy had revolved around four major political and security objectives:

(a) weakening and isolating Vietnam;

- (b) preventing Vietnamese hegemony over Kampuchea and possibly Laos;
- (c) containment of Soviet influence in the region; and
- (d) preventing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) from reaching an accommodation with Vietnam.¹

Meanwhile, Pol Pot of Democratic Kampuchea was engaged in a border war with Vietnam. The Vietnamese proposal of mutual withdrawal of troops to points five miles from Kampuchea-Vietnamese border, an international presence on the border to ensure that neither side moved its troops forward and negotiations on a border agreement could have avoided the rise of a destabilizing Vietnamese move. China ignored the Vietnamese proposal and chose to increase military assistance to Pol Pot while publicly rejecting any negotiated solution to the conflict.² Clearly, China's desire to maintain Kampuchea's independence from Vietnam was in conflict with China's desire to make Vietnam pay off its betrayal of Sino-Vietnamese Friendship Treaty.³ Tension

1. Gareth Porter, "China in Southeast Asia", Current History, vol.85, no.512, September 1986, p.249.
2. Nayan Chanda, "Cambodia: Waiting for the Inevitable", Far Eastern Economic Review, 24 November 1978, p.10.
3. Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith: Memoirs of President (New York, 1982), p.194.

escalated between Vietnam and Kampuchea over borders and in December 1978 Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea and occupied it. Vietnam installed a puppet regime in Kampuchea, as a result the power configuration of Thailand Southeast Asia shifted. The policy of Thailand towards Vietnam took a dramatic change. The crucial importance of Transmekong area to Thailand's security was exposed.

For geostrategic reasons Thailand was not willing to tolerate the projection of Vietnamese power into the whole of Transmekong area especially when the projection of that power was supported by an external actor (i.e., Soviet Union) which itself was a potential threat.

The strategists were also concerned about Vietnam's design on Thailand's fourteen north-eastern provinces and regard construction of road links from Vietnam to points along the Mekong and from Vietnam into Sayabury province. The Thai farmer perceived that the Soviet support of Vietnam tilted the balance of air power against them, bought a permanent Soviet naval base at Cam Ranh Bay and sustained Vietnam's determination and capability to dominate Indo-China.⁴ As a result there was a metamorphosis in Thailand's foreign policy. China, a former enemy became a new ally to

4. John Franklin Copper, "China and Southeast Asia", Current History, December 1985, p.405.

Thailand. Sino-Thai collusion vis-a-vis Vietnam took place as a direct consequence of Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea. Moreover the American failures in the wars in Vietnam and Laos and disengagement of the USA from mainland Southeast Asia were some of the reasons that prompted Thailand leaders to go in for Chinese succour.

The Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng urged the Thai counterpart Kriangsak to support China in the light of Vietnamese aggression. Moreover Thai-Sino treaty was concluded on 9 November 1979 on scientific, technical cooperation between Kriangsak and Chinese Vice Premier Deng Hsiaoping.⁵ China's then foreign minister Huang Hua and Thai's counterpart Air Chief Marshall Siddhi Savessila signed first commercial air agreement linking the two countries. Provisions of all agreement permitted Thai International Airlines to fly once a week to Guanzhou and once a week to Shanghai. Similarly China's Civil Aviation Administration of Chia (CAAC) allowed flights to Bangkok and mountain resorts of Chiangmai in the north.⁶

Meanwhile China followed stringent measures against Vietnam. It cancelled all its projects in Vietnam and

5. Bangkok Post, 11 November 1979.

6. Bangkok Post, 2 January 1980.

increased number of troops on the Vietnamese border apparently as a sequel to mass exodus of Chinese residents from Vietnam and a spate of incidents involving Vietnamese forces on the other side. In 1980 China ordered Vietnam to close consular sections in three Chinese cities of Canton, Nanking and Kunming. Chinese troops poured across Vietnam border were, backed by tanks, fighter bombers, carried in Langson, Laichan, Hoang Leiu Son and Quang Ninh provinces on Vietnamese side of border and Chinese forces penetrated ten kilometers into Vietnamese territory.⁷

The charge de Affairs of the Vietnamese Embassy Mr.DoNgoc Delong claimed that Russia extended its support to Vietnam and Vietnam would go on fighting against Sino-Thai collusion. Even after Soviet-Vietnam collusion China did not stop its aggressiveness against Vietnam. In 1980 it occupied many districts in northern Vietnamese border areas including the provincial capital of Laokay. In Northeastern province of Langson, they occupied the districts of Chang Bing, Lapsing and Dang Lanq and the districts of Chang Ling and Ha Quang in Cao Bang province and Ding Ling in

7. Chang Pao-Min, "China and Southeast Asia - The Problem of a Perceptual Gap", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol.9, no.3, December 1987, p.184.

Northwestern Lai Chan province.⁸ Five Chinese MIG 19 jet fighters bombed ware houses near the Vietnamese port city of Hai Phong. meanwhile Soviet Union had launched an air lift of critically needed heavy weapons to Vietnam, with cargo planes believed to be refuelling in mid air.⁹

Meanwhile, Sino-Thai collusion gained strength day by day. Full fledged diplomatic links were established in all arenas. However the early 1980s saw burgeoning military cooperation between these two countries and particularly in the field of Chinese weapons transfer to Thailand. The Chinese Premier Mr.Zhao Ziyang visited Thailand in the first week of February 1980. He held talks with Thailand Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda. They appraised the situation in Kampuchea and Mr.Zhao carried argument by reiterating Chinese readiness to stand on side of Thailand. Both the governments shared identical views that the Kampuchean issue was the result of Vietnamese military invasion and must be solved with cooperation.¹⁰ By offering support directly to Thailand, Beijing strengthened the front line against

8. Chang Pao-Min , "Sino-Vietnamese Territorial Dispute", Asia-Pacific Community, vol.24, Spring 1984, p.39.

9. China Daily, 17 February 1981.

10. China Daily, 13 July 1983.

further Vietnamese military expansion, while politically enhancing Chinese influence on Cambodian issues in Thailand. The supply of arms, both through and to Thailand became the principal means by which these several strategic and political goals were met.

The relationship between Cambodia and Thailand or between Cambodia and Southeast Asia is one of mutual dependence. If one falls, the other would be in danger. Therefore, it is impossible for Thailand to stay aloof¹¹ Sino-Thai collusion vis-a-vis Vietnam for security and geo-strategic reasons during 1978-84 was often termed in diplomatic and political circles as a budding relationship. But from 1985 onwards Sino-Thai collusion proved to be a military cooperation than anything else. China offered wide range of military exports to Bangkok including artillery, munitions armoured personnel carriers, aircraft, tanks, missiles and naval vessels. The first transfer of major weapons was a grant-in-aid package in late 1985 which included heavy artillery guns, anti aircraft guns, anti tank guns and 24T-59 Main Battle Tanks (MBTs).¹² This

11. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, From Enemity to Alignment - Thailand's Evolving Relations with China (Bangkok, 1987), p.56.
12. Michael Brzoska and Thomas Ohlson, eds., Arms Production in the Third World (London, 1986), p.7.

procurement beefed up Thailand's eastern border defenses and counter attack strength against incursions from Vietnamese and Vietnamese backed forces in Cambodia and it opened the door to much wider PRC- Thailand military cooperation. In a press interview in March 1987, Thai Army Deputy Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Suchinda Kuraprayan disclosed Bangkok's intention to conclude a large arms deal with China.¹³ Two months later Thai acquired 30T-69s, 10 anti aircraft gun batteries, 3,000 rocket propelled grenades and ammunition. By the end of the year Bangkok purchased 800 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), HY-5 portable heat seeking anti-aircraft missiles and long range artillery guns. In addition, Beijing made low priced offers to Bangkok for the transfer of anti-aircraft missiles, Romeo class submarines and F-7 fighter jets. These arms trade activities proceeded logically from China's increased desire to arm Thailand against Vietnamese expansion and its interest in expanding PRC influence in Bangkok and Southeast Asia.¹⁴ PRC-Thai arms transfers complemented the growing Sino-Thai relationship marked the broad consensus on

13. Bangkok Post, 7 March 1987.

14. R.Bates Gill, "China Looks to Thailand - Exporting Arms, Exporting Influence", Asian Survey, vol.31, no.6, June 1991, p.529.

Cambodian issues, concern for Thai security, and frequent high level official exchanges over the period 1985-87.

Sino-Thai collusion vis-a-vis Vietnam strengthened further when a second major purchasing wave by Thai defense forces began in March 1988. General Chawalit reportedly approved the purchase of 23T-69 MBT, 360 APC, an anti aircraft radar guidance system and 130 mm ammunition. Later in the year, the Royal Thai Navy announced its intention to acquire Jianghu class frigates from the PRC.¹⁵ In addition Thailand sought to buy a number of missiles from China, including the HY-5 portable surface to air missile, the HQ 25 mobile surface to air missile, a thick mobile multiple rocket system, tactical surface-to-surface missiles, a ship to air missile system and air-to-air missiles. After an extremely important Sino-Thai military consultation in late 1988, the Thai military expressed an interest in acquiring a squadron of F-7 fighter jets (an upgraded PRC version of the Soviet MIG-21), three submarines, missiles, additional MBTs and more APCs.¹⁶

In addition to increased contacts through arms transfers, Beijing Bangkok relations strengthened through

15. China Daily, 4 April 1991.

16. Gill, n.4, p.530.

other military related exchanges. High ranking military officials of both countries met on a consistent basis to arrange the arms transfer to Thailand while deliberating on the strategic and political situation they faced in Southeast Asia. In 1988 major exchanges occurred in which perhaps as many as 200 students and faculty members of Thailand's Air War College and Army War College made two separate observation visits to China.¹⁷ The most significant visits to Bangkok during this period were those of the Premier Li Peng in November 1988 (his first trip overseas as China's Premier), General Chawalit visited Beijing in November 1988, and Thai Prime Minister Chatichai Churhawan travelled to China in November 1988, October 1989 and again in November 1990. Throughout these high level exchanges subjects discussed included arms transfer as well as the mutual security interests of the two countries.

In 1989 there was a strain on Sino-Thai relations vis-a-vis Vietnam after Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) brutal killing of unarmed students and demonstrations including innocent women. Strongest reaction came from major Western and industrialised nations. The USA and UK had banned all arms to Peking. At this juncture Thai was in

17. "Chinese Stockpile for Thailand Causes Concern", Pacific Defence Report, March 1989, p.34.

a dilemma whether to continue relations with China or not. Prime Minister Chatichai said that he was saddened by events in China. The Thai government's response is somewhat disappointing considering General Chatichai's professed aspirations to propel Thailand into a position of prominence in Southeast Asia. He conceived China slightly differently from his predecessor because of the changing global and regional environment and domestic factor in Thailand. When Chatichai became Prime Minister in August 1988, he conceived a rapid change in both political and economic relations at the global and regional levels that could affect the relationships of southeast Asian states. These changes included the speedy movement in US-Soviet relations with or without Afghanistan or Kampuchea. The growing prospect of the normalisation of Sino-Soviet relations with or without the solving of the Kampuchean problem; the possibility of Sino-Vietnamese rapprochement and a good prospect of reaching a political solution on the Kampuchean conflict. These developments led him to the conclusion that Kampuchea was no longer a stumbling block in the bilateral relations between China and Vietnam, China and the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union and United States. Therefore it should not be a stumbling block hindering Thailand's adjustment to the global economic restructuring either. Thus Chatichai's new direction of foreign was to enhance Thailand's security

through the strengthening of its democratic institutions and through the promotion of greater economic progress and well being.

The Premier's much publicised policy to turn Indo-China from a battle field into a trading zone had produced a profound positive impact in terms of forging closer private sector ties between Thai and neighbouring Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.¹⁸ He has a vision of Indo-China developing rapidly into a commercially strategic centre by 1991. Indo-China would be an ideal alternative market and resource supplier for the expanding Thai economy. Thailand would become a vital link as hub of this regional trade. China, which has been the Khmer Rouge's main supporter and good ally of Thailand, had diplomatically been silent on Chatichai's Indo-China initiative. The Chinese concern was clearly revealed when Deng Xiaoping called for a 'United Front' among China, Thailand and ASEAN to continue to put pressure on Vietnam. Deng told Chatichai in Beijing on 19 March 1989 that China's bargaining power was not unlimited and thus required a united front to help put pressure on Vietnam and PRK. These developments clearly reflect that Thailand was sincere enough to regional Cambodian imbroglio and maintain

18. Sura Chai Sirikrai, "That Perceptions of China and Japan", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol.12, no.3, December 1990, p.257.

cordial relations with Vietnam. By 1990 Vietnam posed no political threat to Thailand and their relations were on the brink of a new era.

Vietnam's foreign policy towards China was also changed in early 1990s. Vietnam welcomed Chinese Premier Lipeng's comments on normalisation of ties.¹⁹ Vietnam's Premier Do Mui said "it is our desire to normalise relations with China in the interests of two peoples and for the sake of regional as well as world peace." Beijing desire to establish its credentials as good neighbour were based on three factors:

- (a) Bilateral issues
- (b) Ending of civil war in Cambodia
- (c) Vietnam's decision to allow private enterprise more elbow from her revived fortunes of its million strong ethnic Chinese communists which dominated the economy in the south prior to 1979.²⁰

China and Vietnam ignored ideology and stressed on economic cooperation. Vietnam Communist Party leader and Premier visited Peking and took lead in trying to resurrect its connection with China. Shaken by the collapse of Soviet economic and political support, the Vietnamese are pursuing

19. Bangkok Post, 15 August 1990.

20. Times of India, 4 September 1991.

to develop their economy by broadening their international ties. For China, Vietnam offered an important gateway to the world through its northern part of Haiphong which renewed rail links would make a major outlet for goods from China's land locked South. For Vietnam, China could become an investor in its impoverished northern provinces as well as a valuable trading partner. The main unresolved issues between China and Vietnam are:

- (a) The dispute over 100 sq.km. of land territory
- (b) The division of economic zone around Gulf of Tonkin and
- (c) Ownership of Spratlay and Paracel islands which cover an area of 3 million sq. km. in eastern sea.

Meanwhile China made some sincere efforts to resolve Cambodian crisis along with Thailand. Li Peng voiced support for recovering the Paris International Conference to find solution to the crisis. Hectic diplomatic parleys and exchange of high delegations between China and Thailand took place. Thus Sino-Thai collusion, which formed originally to counter Vietnam's expansionism turned into economic cooperation. Thus today's China is one of stock markets, export processing zones and that of capitalist institutions. Gone are those ping pong diplomacy, little red books and all pervasive communist dogma that M.R.Kukrit Pramoj and Mr.Anand has to content with when negotiating for normalisation of relations. Gone is the need for any

subservience or high handedness now that relations have stood the test of time.

CHAPTER V
THAILAND, ASEAN AND VIETNAM

After Second World War, three major turning points are generally recognised with regard to Western bloc response to its adversary; the adoption of the 'containment policy' in the late 1940s, the turn towards 'detente' in the early 1970s and more of assertive policy in 1980s. The period of containment policy was characterised by the emergence of various regional military cooperations and collaborations practically all over the world.

Four attempts were made to form regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. One was SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) an externally inspired organization which was set up as a collective security arrangement with military understanding for preserving peace. The other three were attempts made by local indigenous powers i.e., ASA (Association of Southeast Asia), MAPHILINDO (Malaya, Philippines and Indonesia) and ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations).¹

In 1967 the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was

1. Nana S.Sutresna, ASEAN Cooperation: Problems and Prospects (Jakarta, 1985), p.98.

established by local indigenous powers of five non communist countries - Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. Brunei joined later in 1984. Despite ASEAN's avowed character as an organization for economic, social and cultural cooperation, it was evident that political and security considerations were of paramount importance in the motivation of its founding. The Bangkok Declaration of 1967 speaks of the determination of the member countries to ensure their stability and security from external interference in any form of manifestation in order to preserve their national identities in accordance with the ideas and aspirations of their peoples. There is also a reference in the Declaration regarding foreign military bases, which reads:

all foreign bases are temporary and remain only with the expressed concurrence of the countries concerned and are not intended to be used directly or indirectly to subvert the national independence and freedom of states in the area or prejudice the orderly process of their national development".²

The Bali Summit also expressed ASEAN's readiness with other countries in the region, irrespective of their ideology, political, social and economic system. This was frustrated by the Vietnamese military invasion and occupation of Kampuchea which met ASEAN's swift and strong

2. Ibid, p.99.

condemnation. The expectation that after the end of the Vietnam war, a peaceful and stable Southeast Asia would emerge was shattered by the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea. If a firm stand had not been taken by ASEAN, a sharp downward turn in life of ASEAN would have been unavoidable. ASEAN denunciation of Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea was a clear signal to the outside world that ASEAN is faithfully committed to respect the principles enshrined in the UN charter and the ten principles of Bandung.

With the Bangkok Declaration and its subsequent documents, ASEAN has formulated a set of codes of conduct on its relations among themselves and between ASEAN and outside powers. Generally speaking, ASEAN cooperation has made significant progress in the last 19 years the establishment of which was free from involvement or role of any outside power.³

ASEAN determines strategic perception of its member states. As an organisation, it contributes to peaceful resolution of conflicts. How far was ASEAN responsible for influencing the perceptions of Thailand vis-a-vis Vietnam will be analysed in this chapter.

ASEAN is an important factor in the foreign and

3. Vishal Singh, "ASEAN and Security of Southeast Asia", International Studies, vol.23, no.3, July-September 1986, p.217.

security policies of its member states because these policies, especially those related to regional issues, are to a large extent harmonised within the organization, established formally or informally. While ASEAN's original charter stressed cooperation in the economic, social and culture rather than the political and security fields, it is clear that political and security factors have played a much greater role in the organization's history and development.

Economic, social and cultural cooperation which has up to now failed to have any significant impact on the region, appears to have been little more than a facade for a forum where ASEAN's states officials harmonized their policies in more areas that mattered more to them - regional politics and security.⁴ The existence of an organization providing a mechanism for conflict resolution is considered important in order to prevent the intervention of major powers which is the post had often served only to exacerbate such conflicts.⁵ Thus ASEAN as an organisation was supposed to reinforce and ensure peace and political stability in the

4. Ooi Guat Tin, Towards a Liberal Trade Regime (Kuala Lumpur, 1986), p.5.

5. Wolfgang Stargardt, "Neutrality and Neutralization in Southeast Asia", in Bernhars Dahm and Werner Draguhn, eds., Politics, Society and Economy in ASEAN States (Wiesbaden, 1975), p.58.

region, which the member states see as prerequisites for economic growth and development.

ASEAN also serves as a vehicle for enhancing each member state's security and increasing its political clout, especially vis-a-vis military and economically more powerful international actors. By working together to forge a common approach to certain issues, the individual member states, which taken individually have very limited political and economic leverage, increase their chances of achieving their goals and objectives.⁶ This tends to become even more important as perceptions of security threats from outside ASEAN intensify as a result of increased uncertainty or international shocks.

The different member states also had some other specific motives for membership in the organisation that reflect their various strategic perceptions.⁷ However, there is a common interest in regional cooperation that springs from the interdependent nature of the Southeast Asian countries security. Internal and external security problems in one state affect the security of the

6. Werner Pfenning, "Development Through Regional Cooperation? The Example of ASEAN"

7. M.Rajendran, ASEAN's Foreign Relations: The Shift to Collective Action (Kuala Lumpur, 1985), p.17.

neighbouring states to a great degree - a situation arising not only from geographical proximity, but also from ethnic, religious, social and economic linkages between them. Indo-China and South China sea are two vital areas in which the ASEAN countries' security interests are linked with each other.⁸ As a result ASEAN unit is perceived as a goal that must be promoted and considered important in the member states policies.

The Vietnamese military action in Kampuchea led to adverse reaction from the ASEAN countries not because of their sympathy for the Khmer Rouge, but because of armed intervention in the affairs of another country. They challenged the legitimacy of the new government and campaigned massively against Vietnamese intervention. It was in this endeavour that Thailand's role as a front-line state became significant. Henceforth, Thailand tried further to thwart consolidation of the Vietnamese strength in Kampuchea. Thailand sheltered the fugitive forces of the Khmer Rouge, including Pol Pot and provided them all possible assistance to fight against the People's Republic of Kampuchea. It also provided training facilities and

8. Muthiah Alagappa, "Malaysia: From the Commonwealth Umbrella to Self Reliance" in Chin Kin Wah, ed., Defence Spending in Southeast Asia (Singapore, 197), p.183.

other strategic assistance.⁹ It became a channel to receive arms and ammunitions from China, the United States and other countries destined for the Kampuchean rebels. Thailand became a safe sanctuary for the rebels from where they would easily enter into Kampuchea to confront the Vietnamese forces and return. Prior to 1975, the American servicemen had used Thai territories for regular bombing missions to Indo-China. But after Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, Kampuchean rebels used Thai territories for guerrilla activities in Kampuchea and returned to Thai camps after these missions.

At the international level, Thailand showed most vociferous attitude against the Vietnamese action. Whether at the ASEAN or at the United Nations, the Vietnamese action was criticised. The United Nations did not accord recognition to the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Neither the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) nor the Association of the South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) recognized new government. The United States, China, Japan and the West European countries did not accord recognition in spite of the fact that the PRK was in effective control of the country. On the other hand, the Soviet Union and East European countries

9. Bernard Gwertzman, "US may Aid Rebels in Kampuchea", Times of India 12 February 1986.

recognized the government of PRK.

Kampuchean adventures posed a great dilemma for Vietnam, it probably had not envisaged that its action in Kampuchea would provoke international opposition. Moreover, it felt uncomfortable about the challenges posed by the Kampuchean rebels on Thai soil. Vietnam found it agonising to return to the pavilion. On the other hand, Thailand was seriously concerned about the Vietnamese presence next door. History in testimony to the fact that whenever Vietnam expanded its influence and control in Kampuchea, it had posed a security threat to Thailand.¹⁰

Since Vietnam invaded and occupied Kampuchea in 1978, the ASEAN had attempted to orchestrate an overwhelming correlation of political, diplomatic, military and economic forces to pressure Vietnam out of Kampuchea. The military campaigns of Vietnam during eighties dashed all diplomatic initiatives especially between Vietnam and ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand. ASEAN called on the international community to provide military aid to the Khmer resistance. It also held open the possibility of more ASEAN military aid to the resistance groups.¹¹ Similarly, Vietnam's incursion

10. V.M.Reddi, A History of the Cambodian Independence Movement, 1863-1955 (Tirupati, 1970).

11 Bangkok Post, 12 February 1985, p.1.

into Thailand's Surin province during its assault on the third resistance group, the followers of Prince Sihanouk, provoked the Thais to deploy their air power over the combat zone and to threaten retaliatory raids. During 1984-85 there were eleven Vietnamese divisions stationed on their border. As a result the Thais were in no mood to negotiate or compromise.

This breakdown in diplomacy had been accompanied by a growing military stalemate. At a relatively low cost, ASEAN had been able to pressure and contain an expansionist Vietnam. Although Vietnam poses a threat to Thailand's security, the Thais believed that over time the danger armed division as both Thai and Khmer resistance grow stronger and Vietnamese become weaker. Moreover, the prolonged conflict in Kampuchea had beneficial 'spin-offs' for ASEAN, it had provided the impetus for regional cooperation, helped gain international support for ASEAN's ideals and goals and finally promoted dialogue between ASEAN and the Western countries, particularly the United States.

The USA which supported ASEAN's position also seemed to believe that it had much to gain from a continued stalemate. Thus far, the US had able to contain the expansion of Soviet and Vietnamese power in the region without committing many resources or substantively changing its policy of very

selective involvement in a relatively low priority region.¹² Because of Kampuchean conflict, US relations with People's Republic of China and ASEAN had apparently never been closer and Washington's close relationship with ASEAN had helped lay to rest the ghost of the American war in Vietnam.

As a result of the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, the US had been able to significantly revitalize its alliance with Thailand. As a result US arms transfer to Thailand has qualitatively and quantitatively upgraded, including F-16A fighter aircrafts, ship-to-ship missiles etc. The military strength of both the countries reflected in the growing number of calls made by US Seventh Fleet units to Thai ports, and in upgrading of the annual Cobra Gold military exercises.

Thailand's collusion with USA, China and ASEAN gave confidence in its own capacity to cope with the threat that arose from Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea. In other words, the Thais believed more strongly than ever during eighties that the balance of contending forces was in their favour and that time was on their side. They perceived that Vietnam was partly weakening because of Economic burden of occupation and partly because of the strength of the Khmer

12. M.R.Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Can ASEAN Break the Stalemate?", World Policy Journal, vol.3, no.1, Winter 1985-86, p.85.

resistance groups. The Thai government also perceived that ASEAN had attained a high level of resilience and unity and that regional cooperation has developed to a point where the group could tolerate a certain level of intra-mural differences while collectively calling the time in the international arena.¹³

Bangkok believed that ASEAN gained strength and no longer regards Vietnam as a tall giant but treated it somewhat condescendingly like a misguided, wayward and exploited child.

Since 1979, ASEAN's collective position had reflected Thailand's increasingly rigid stance regarding Kampuchea, Indonesia, Malaysia, however, held less rigid positions because they perceive China as the greatest long term threat to the region. Indonesia and Malaysia take a more balanced view of the gravity of the Vietnamese threat than Thailand does. As articulated in 1980 Kuantan principle and elsewhere, Indonesia and Malaysia reject the notion that Vietnam was an intrinsically hostile state. They argued that Vietnam had legitimate security concerns and if allowed to become truly independent, had an indispensable part to play in the containment of China and in fulfilment of the

13. Paribatra, n.10, p.91.

ZOPFAN ideas.¹⁴ Conversely, Indonesia and Malaysia believed that any prolongation of the Kampuchean conflict was likely to increase the risk of armed confrontation with Vietnam, multiply the opportunities for the great powers, particularly China, to expand their influence and undercut the philosophical underpinnings of ZOPFAN. Despite their differences with Thailand, both Indonesia and Malaysia were apparently committed to the development of ASEAN as an organization. To fulfill this commitment, they recognised the need to defer to the security requirement of Thailand and to preserve and enhance the efficacy of the institutionalized process through which ASEAN's common actions were organized and articulated.

In more specific terms, this had meant throwing their support behind Thailand, especially at the critical junctures in mid 1980, mid 1984 and early 1985. When Thai Kampuchean border situation worsened; preserving a common front at any cost regardless of individual misgivings; and allowing themselves to be bound by precedents, no matter how ill advised or fruitless as evident in ASEAN's annual resolutions at the UN General Assembly. Despite intra-mural differences, ASEAN's collective policy toward the Kampuchean

14. John McBeth, "Forcing a Change", Far Eastern Economic Review, 24 January 1985, p.10.

conflict was determined by a commitment both to Thailand's security and to the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK).

ASEAN's overall objectives in the Kampuchean problem reflect in conception of regional order. Firstly, it sought to enhance Thailand's security against direct or indirect threats from Vietnam. Secondly, it sought to promote a balance of presence and interests among great powers which was perceived to entail ultimately a curtailment and reduction of Soviet and Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. Thirdly, ASEAN sought to bring about a more cooperative framework of relations with Vietnam.¹⁵

To realize these objectives, ASEAN employed a strategy which had substantively unchanged since 1950. This strategy was one which assumes political, diplomatic, military and economic dimensions and when contained three interlocking components. The first of these was political, diplomatic and economic isolation of Vietnam through the forging and maintaining of broad anti Hanoi coalitions in the international arena. The second was the application of military presence as a means of both compellence and deterrence on Vietnam without ASEAN becoming directly

15. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "The Challenge of Coexistence - ASEAN's Relations with Vietnam in 1990s", Contemporary Southeast Asia, vol.19, no.2, September 1987, p.145.

involved; this was achieved through cooperation with US and the PRC and through support of anti-Vietnamese Kampuchean resistance groups. The third component was formulation of modalities deemed necessary for negotiation and settlement with Vietnam.¹⁶

ASEAN's objective of promoting regional stability poses certain limits on ASEAN cooperation. The inclusion of military cooperation in ASEAN's official agenda had been avoided precisely because its effect was considered to be destabilizing.¹⁷ With the strained relations between Thailand and Vietnam and the ideological barriers dividing communist Indochina and ASEAN, it was feared that the establishment of an ASEAN military alliance would lead to the polarization of Southeast Asia into two opposing blocs, inviting the intervention of the major powers and resulting in greater political instability.¹⁸

16. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "Irreversible History? ASEAN, Vietnam and Polarisation of Southeast Asia", Karl D.Jackson, ed., ASEAN in the Regional and International Context (Berkeley, 1986), p.212.

17. Abdulrahim bin Thamby Chik, "International Security in SEA in 1980s", Robert Scalapino, ed., Economic, Political and Security Issues in Southeast Asia in 1980s (Berkeley, 1982).

18. J.N.Mark, Directions for Greater Defence Cooperation: ISIS ASEAN Series (Kuala Lumpur,), p.5.

Other factors account for the ASEAN countries' lukewarm attitude towards the formation of a formal military alliance. One is the lack of political institutionalization and the remaining doubts about the political stability of member countries, which could complicate relations among states if established. ASEAN governments bound by a treaty to assist each other were to be called for support by a government beset by serious domestic security challenges.¹⁹ Another factor is the lack of trust between the ASEAN states because of the existence of unresolved territorial claims, as well as unresolved ethnic and religious problems.

However, these have not hindered the ASEAN states from cooperating in the field of diplomacy and security. Since 1971 ZOPFAN (Zone of Peace, freedom and neutrality) declaration, ASEAN has openly involved itself in diplomatic cooperation among its member states. Cooperation in security related matters, such as intelligence, police operations and the development of their armed forces has been carried out bilaterally and multilaterally outside the framework of ASEAN. Thus, while avoiding the pitfalls of a formal alliance, the ASEAN countries have developed a certain level of security cooperation that could be further

19. Sheldon Simon, The ASEAN States and Regional Security (Stanford, 1982), p.43.

intensified under more favourable conditions.

These considerations highlight the ASEAN states' concern for greater security as economically and militarily weak states in a region dominated by major extra regional powers. The realization of their weakness and of the interdependent linkages of their individual security situations enhances the value of ASEAN unity in their perceptions, which is the key to understand the ASEAN states' individual and collective actions.

Since ASEAN's formation in 1967 and particularly since the Bali Summit in 1976 there have been improvements in the various areas of political cooperation. The political GNP or good neighbour policy has grown. The ASEAN states are on good terms with one another despite periods of stress and strain. Though political difficulties exist, they have not been allowed to undermine good bilateral relations and ASEAN cooperation. Nevertheless, it has often been said that the lack of progress in the economic field is the result of the lack of political will on the part of the ASEAN governments. Political will can only result from greater political cooperation, particularly in the area of political interests. If the political will is weak, it implies that much effort must be devoted to the promotion of political cooperation, both on a bilateral and regional basis.

CONCLUSION

In order to have a proper perspective of Thailand's Vietnam policy, it is necessary to briefly review its contemporary past. Since the end of the Second World War, Thailand consistently supported the United States in its efforts to contain communist movements in China and Vietnam. Thailand entered into military and economic agreements with the United States bilaterally and multilaterally and subsequently joined the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) for that endeavour. Thailand became the headquarters of the SEATO whose main preoccupation was to contain communist movements in the region. Thailand was the only country from the mainland Southeast Asia to join the American security system. It allowed the United States to develop several air and naval bases in Thailand to be used against Communist activists in Vietnam. The air bases at Udon, Ubon, Nakhon Phanom, Takli and Utapao were extensively used for operations against Vietnam and other Indo-Chinese countries from 1964 to 1975.

Thailand provided all possible assistance to the American cold warriors to contain communism in Vietnam but all those efforts proved abortive. The final outcome of the years of American exploits was its defeat in April 1975.

The Americans withdrew militarily from South Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos for good.

At the same time it is noteworthy that China, a communist country and much more powerful than Vietnam posed no threat to the governments in ASEAN region. After the visit of President Richard Nixon to China in 1972, the Chinese successfully handled their American and Southeast Asian policy. China forged cordial relations with all the six countries of the ASEAN through economic, military, and cultural exchanges and treaties. China has yet another reason to withdraw support to the Communists in the ASEAN region. All the six countries of the ASEAN have a good number of Chinese population.

Taking advantage of Thai ambitions over Kampuchea, Beijing tried to cajole and draw Thailand into a state of confrontation with Vietnam and other Indo-Chinese countries. After the overthrow of the Pol Pot gang, Beijing leaders tried hard to get Thailand to come to the former's rescue by allowing them sanctuary on Thai territory. They urged Thai authorities to open Thai border to the Pol Pot remnants and give them refuge on Thai territory. Subsequently, Kampuchean rebels were well protected in Thailand. The ASEAN as an organisation supported Thailand on its part spearheaded the 'sanctions programme' against Vietnam to pursue it economically. The entire Western world including

USA and Japan called off their commitments to Vietnam. They not only supported the 'sanctions programme' but also refused to accord recognition to the PRK government. This was viewed as the greatest success of Thailand's Vietnam policy during 1979-90.

This led to a situation where Vietnam had no option but to seek more and more aid and cooperation from the Soviet Union. In order to bring about a change in the situation in Indo-China, Chinese rulers tried to teach lessons to Vietnam. In January 1979, the Chinese forces fought the Vietnamese forces on their common frontiers. The war ended in stalemate. China took recourse to economic and diplomatic manoeuvres to check Vietnam. In 1982 China helped in the formation of a coalition government of Kampuchea in exile and offered military assistance and cooperation to them. Kampuchean rebels posed serious threat to Vietnam. Since the formation of Kampuchean People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), the armed militia of the rebels inflicted heavy blows upon the Vietnamese forces. Thailand showed sympathy to these rebels. Thus it was a diplomatic challenge for Vietnam to reach an understanding with Thailand. Vietnam made numerous attempts to forge agreements with Thailand. Vietnam offered no-war pact to Thailand. Through Kampuchea it proposed the establishment of a 'demilitarised zone' along the Kampuchean-Thai border.

However Thailand opposed all such proposals.

The entire decade of 1980s revolved around the question of security aspects of both the countries. Thailand raised the question of its security in view of the Kampuchean crisis. It was not ready to rely on the Vietnamese overtures. It rejected peace proposals of Vietnam consistently, and demanded instead the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea. Vietnam expressed its willingness to withdraw if certain conditions were fulfilled. Vietnamese withdrawal was possible if the rebels in Thailand were disarmed and security of Kampuchea was assured. Vietnam tried for a rapprochement with Thailand without losing its face in Kampuchea. It repeatedly offered Thailand the proposal of signing treaties for non-aggression and non-interference but Thai response was not positive. Thus there was no compromise between these two countries. Distrust and suspicion was the order of the day. The policy of Thailand vis-a-vis Vietnam was guided by the perception of an adversary. These countries had indulged in polemics resulting in increasing tension in their mutual relations for long. The oft-quoted Thai saying 'Like a bamboo, we bend with the wind' was not applied in relation to Vietnam.

After decades of mutual distrust and hostilities, relationship between these two countries seem to be cordial especially after the resolution of Cambodian crisis. The

international Paris Peace accord on Cambodia in 1991 and elections there restored fragile peace in Cambodia. Thailand's Vietnam policy has undergone many changes. Commerce it seems is cementing relations between cash rich, free market Thailand and its newly liberalised socialist neighbour Vietnam. Trade is being viewed as major concern in Thai-Vietnam relations. The process of business bonhomie started in late 1980s as Thailand's the then Prime Minister Chatichai announced making Vietnam as market place for Thailand's business.

But beneath this business interests, there were a minefield of sensitive issues, rooted in historical past as well as the present, that threatened to blow up anytime the newly forged bonds of friendship between these cold war rivals. For Laotians it is true threat of being swamped by what they call the 'degenerate' Thai culture, while for the Khmers the grouses range from alleged Thai support to the extremist Khmer rouge to the manipulative ways of Thai businessmen. For Vietnamese it is the fear that the Thais, jealous of Vietnam's growing economic profile, may sabotage their interests by lobbying against them in the West or by cutting off precious water supplies irrigating Vietnamese fertile Mekong delta area. For all three countries, age old land and sea border disputes with Thailand continue to be a major obstacle preventing them from fully reconciling with

each other.

In Thailand itself, despite occasional bursts of outrage by politicians at the accusations hurled at them by their neighbours, policy makers see opening up of Indochina as a gold mine of business opportunities. With billions of dollars in investment and aid expected to pour into Indochina in the next few years Thai businessmen hope to put their well housed 'capitalist skies' and their proximity to these countries to full advantage. Already Thai businessmen emerged among the five largest investors in Cambodia (\$50 million) and Laos (\$80 million) and are the 12th largest in Vietnam (\$140 million). The bulk of these investments are in the area the Thai know best - the tourism and hotel industries - while the rest are in the production of a range of consumer goods.

For energy hungry Thailand, Vietnam being attractive investment centre, is a reservoir of cheap natural resources waiting to be exploited. Cambodia and Laos, which supply cheap timber to Thai logging firms, are also potentially major suppliers of hydro electric power. In the long run, Vietnam could become an important source of natural gas, especially as a pipeline could be viably built through Laotian territory to reach Thailand. Thailand proposed, a new economic zone for sub regional economic cooperation along with Vietnam and Laos. Thai authorities are also

lobbying with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to fund a plan to build an extensive road and water ways network linking Thailand to all Indochinese countries.

Vietnam's open door policy has brought promising rewards. Since Hanoi issued a liberalized investment code in 1988, more than 500 foreign companies have signed more than \$7.5 billion worth of foreign investment projects in Vietnam. Only about \$2 billion of that money has actually been spent so far, mainly for oil exploration and light manufacturing. But the lifting of American's trade embargo is expected to spur investor confidence and result in the go ahead for many projects, such as cement factories, that have been put on hold. But all of Thailand's grand visions of becoming Indo-China's economic powerhouse seem to be coming to nought due to its clumsy approach on political issues as well as the dubious behaviour of Thai businessmen in these countries.

The reputation of Thai business has taken a beating amidst ordinary Cambodians as well because of the many shady Thai-run bars and massage parlours in Phnom Penh. Public anger against Thai businessmen has in recent months spilled over into the streets; hundreds of Cambodian shop keepers, openly supported by finance minister Sam Rainsy, demonstrated against sharp increase in the rentals charged at a Thai owned market place.

In landlocked and long isolated Laos, though trade with the Thais is a matter of dire economic necessity, the authorities are particularly worried about the negative cultural impact of increased contact. With the scheduled opening in April 1994 of the first bridge across the Mekong on the Thai-Laos border, Laotians expect a massive influx of business and tourists from Thailand. For Laotians who share a similar language, culture and religion with the Thais, at stake is their national identity. Both Thai pop music and television programmes are popular among youth in Laos, much to the dislike of the older generation which sees Thailand as being a 'cultural cesspool' with highly Westernised lifestyle marked by rampant prostitution.

Thailand and Vietnam also have serious disagreements over the sharing of the waters of the Mekong which flows through Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and into the Mekong delta in South Vietnam before entering the sea. Thai attempts in 1991 to divert water from a Mekong tributary without consulting other members of the United Nations - supported 'Mekong Committee' led to sharp objections from the Vietnamese, nearly resulting in the dissolution of the conciliatory body. Again, with even Thai businessmen making a beeline for Vietnam in search for business opportunities. Bangkok's policy makers are worried about the Vietnamese drawing away all the foreign investment coming to the

region. The addition of economic power to Vietnam's considerable military muscle, the Thais fear could lead to the former dominating the whole of Indochina. The opening up of Indochina should have been an excellent opportunity for Thailand to make up for its swing during the Vietnam war when it shamelessly profited by supporting the United States' aggression against these countries.

Time has come when efforts are needed to understand the problems and compulsions of Vietnam. If the international community could help engage Vietnam both bilaterally and multilaterally in socio-economic activities, there would be a greater possibility of developing understanding. This may reduce the revolutionary image of Vietnam.

To conclude, it can be stated that during 1978-91, Thailand's Vietnam policy was guided by the developments in Cambodia. Thailand wanted Vietnam to withdraw fully from Cambodia and wished the installation of a neutral and friendly regime there. Thailand succeeded in forcing Vietnam to withdraw and with the signing of 1991 Paris Peace Accord and UNTAC supervised elections, there exists a neutral regime which represents the voice of the people of Cambodia.

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