



Margalla Papers

Volume: 27, Number: 1 (2023)

Journal Homepage: <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site>

e-ISSN: 2789-7028

ISSN-L: 1999-2297

RESEARCH PAPER

Revisiting Thailand's Paranoia: SEATO As a Safeguard Against Vietnam Syndrome

AUTHOR(S): Tauseef Javed, Sun Jiandang and Ayisha Khurshid

Dr Tauseef Javed holds PhD degree from the School of Social History, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, China and is a Research Associate at the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR), Islamabad. Dr Sun Jiandang is a Professor in the School of Social History at the Fujian Normal University Fuzhou, China. Dr Ayisha Khurshid holds a PhD degree in English and American Studies from Karl Franzens University of Graz, Austria and is an Assistant Professor at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Balochistan Campus. The author(s) can be reached attjsatti2018@gmail.com.

KEYWORDS: SEATO, Vietnam Syndrome, Cold War, Foreign Policy, Southeast Asia.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54690/margallapapers.27.1.157>

BIBLIOGRAPHY ENTRY

Javed, Tauseef, Sun Jiandang and Ayisha Khurshid. 2023. "Revisiting Thailand's Paranoia: SEATO As a Safeguard Against Vietnam Syndrome." *Margalla Papers* 27 (1): 138-154.

ARTICLE HISTORY

- **Received:** February 13, 2023
- **Peer Reviewed:** April 29, 2023
- **Revised:** May 11, 2023
- **Accepted:** June 15, 2023

COPYRIGHT: © 2023 Tauseef Javed, Sun Jiandang and Ayisha Khurshid. For detailed information, please visit our webpage <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/copyright>.

LICENSING: This is an open-access research paper published under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and citation provided the original author(s) and source are credited.



COMPETING INTERESTS: The author(s) have declared that no competing interest exists.

DATA AVAILABILITY: All relevant data are within the paper and its supporting information files.

REVISITING THAILAND'S PARANOIA: SEATO AS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST VIETNAM SYNDROME

*Tauseef Javed, Sun Jiandang and Ayisha Khurshid**

Abstract

During the Cold War, the opposing stances of the US and USSR caused a bipolar global system that lacked a unipolar centre of power, leading to a stronger centrifugal pull. The Vietnam War made Southeast Asia a hotbed for these tensions. Following the fall of French troops in Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the US aimed to solidify its position and successfully created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) through the efforts of Secretary of State Dulles and like-minded nations. To explain the political implications, the Michael Brecher geographical framework has been chosen. This framework highlights the dominant and subordinate systems of international relations during the Cold War period and describes the operation and evolution of SEATO. By incorporating guidelines into the charter, the treaty zone became a space where signatories could resolve their issues. This reference framework helps to identify the causal determinant in the stimuli of an individual signatory. Despite being a group of countries with varied interests, the interaction between the US and Thailand during the Vietnam War showed that Thailand's skilful aggregation of marginal gains resulted from its inherent paranoia against the Vietnam syndrome. Furthermore, the study reveals that Thailand had a significant influence in shaping Washington's policy for Southeast Asia and used its gains as a launching pad to control the spread of Communism.

Keywords: SEATO, Vietnam Syndrome, Cold War, Foreign Policy, Southeast Asia.

Introduction

The foreign policies of states exhibit their standing in the comity of nations. The approaches are being adopted to achieve their national objectives based on national interests. The complex structure of international relations impels every country to get involved in foreign policy formulation. However, sometimes the interplay between nations to carry out their diplomatic strategies forms quite an exciting phenomenon. In the realm of nation-states, it is conspicuous that every country has an equal right to participate in world affairs. Still, this idea of engagement in world affairs contradicts the aforementioned similar deference for every country. In addition, it is also regarded that smaller countries have a natural affinity to change or

*Dr Tauseef Javed holds PhD degree from the School of Social History, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, China and is a Research Associate at the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR), Islamabad. Dr Sun Jiandang is a Professor in the School of Social History at the Fujian Normal University Fuzhou, China. Dr Ayisha Khurshid holds a PhD degree in English and American Studies from Karl Franzens University of Graz, Austria and is an Assistant Professor at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Balochistan Campus. The author(s) can be reached attjsattizoi8@gmail.com.

propel their foreign policy to propitiate more significant powers in the world. This general idea overshadows the correct understanding of how small countries handle foreign affairs. The engagement of big powers in various areas of the world not only inhibits their cognitive perceptions about small countries' strategic assessment in relevance to the particular area but at the same time it provides small countries of that region to use their 'art of adjustment' in foreign policy to achieve their short term and long-term objectives. The recent history of international relations in the second half of the twentieth century provides a relevant study of engagement among the nation's states. The bipolarity adversarial posture between the USSR and the US right after WWII gave birth to the Cold War era. Two big powers created the thrust to develop a shock wave to establish relations with other countries.

Southeast Asia became one of the crucial theatres of the Cold War due to the inevitable French defeat in the Indochina War. French and the US struggle for power infused a spirit of resistance among locals and led them towards the liberation movement. The nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh declared independence in 1945, which was rejected by the French, leading to the first Indochina War. In 1954, the agreement was signed at Geneva, dividing the country into two blocks; the South had the communist majority, and the US-supported group dominated the North. Such a divide became one of the reasons for the Vietnam War in later years. The US approach towards the creation of alliances during the 1950s, mainly in terms of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), gave way to frenetic throes for the regional countries, but on the other hand involvement of Thailand in this treaty provided very congenial relevance into the set time and situation for Thailand within the charged neighbourhood. By taking into consideration, Thailand's engagement and aspiration into the security pact reflect that Manila was quite well aware of her vulnerabilities in terms of security and the threat of full-scale insurgency that could trigger due to the expansion of Soviet Communism from Vietnam. However, it is quite a fact that SEATO could not be delivered what it had envisaged.

Still, the study of the foreign policy of Thailand tells that Manila and Washington remained skilfully engaged in achieving their overt and covert objectives through SEATO. This paper explores the relevance of security alliances for weak powers, not because they turned to them due to pressure from big powers but to achieve their rudimentary objectives of national interests. It also discusses the costs and benefits that Manila entailed by participating in it. Therefore, this research aims to understand how weaker countries have their share in the conflict between superpowers. This understanding is crucial as in the recent conflicts between nations, especially during the Covid pandemic, the case study of weaker states can be analysed as how they use superpowers to achieve their national interests. Moreover, the overall US regional policy is also reviewed here. It is pertinent to mention that the Cold War studies are generally concerned with examining the US and USSR's strategic manoeuvring against each other. This emphasis creates a narrow passage to understand it more. Moreover, the striking feature of Thailand's involvement in

SEATO explains the smooth trot to continue its regional standing despite unfavourable circumstances.

Washington's Approach to Southeast Asia in the Early Years

During the early years after World War II, the US policy towards Southeast Asia not only directed towards the containment of Soviet Communism but also led to promoting democracy into the postcolonial period. In pursuing these objectives, the US took a keen interest in Southeast Asian affairs. There was an attempt to develop a cordial relationship with each country, particularly the Philippines and Thailand. During the colonial era, the US view of Asia focused more on China, Japan and the Pacific. The French presence in Indochina was essential in shaping US attention to Southeast Asia. Since France attached great importance to Indochina, its policy in Vietnam was 'saving face' at the cost of US involvement in the Vietnam whirlwind. US policymakers also preferred Southeast Asia due to its potential as a distinct regional force in the coming years. The US viewed Thailand as a potential addition to its bloc against the Soviet Union.

Based on this situational evaluation, it implies the prospectus in Southeast Asia that the US undertook economic, technical and military aid programmes for Southeast Asia as one of the primary policy instruments of its global Cold War strategy against the Communist world. Accordingly, the US Congress declared that the purpose of the Mutual Security Aid of 1951, which became the principal legislative basis of the entire American foreign aid programme, would be "to maintain the security and promote the foreign policy of the United States by authorising military, economic and technical assistance to friendly countries, to strengthening the mutual security and individual and collective defences of their of the free world, to develop their resources in the interest of their security and independence and the national interests of the United States, and to facilitate effective participation by those countries in the United Nations system for collective security."¹

Truman Doctrine clearly stated that first aid was "to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minority or by outside countries."² The aid programmes for Southeast Asia were categorised as Non-Mutual Defense Assistance Programme (Non-MDAP) and Mutual Defense Assistance Programme (MDAP). The total defence support to Southeast Asia for the fiscal years 1951-55 was \$423.8 million or 28.2 per cent of the registered total non-MDAP aid for Southeast Asia.³ The National Security Council (NSC) planners were cognizant that newly independent states in the early 1950s were out of state capacity to cope with the formidable challenges of nascent states. The US assisted these countries in creating a governmental potential to run a political and administrative setup. The intelligentsia in the US had the notion that, in this way, the local communist threats would be dealt with steadily. In the initial years, this was suited well to the US policy to contain Communism. The striking feature of this US engagement was that owing to the knowledge that the nomenclature of governments tended to be authoritarian and the

legacy of traditional political culture ranges from authoritarian, patrimonial, or either hierarchical. However, the US was more concerned about its execution of a containment strategy by encircling Southeast Asia. Generally speaking, the US presence in Asia since World War II displayed its balance of power against the Soviet Union and, more specifically, in Southeast Asia. Washington was also cautious due to the domino effect in Southeast Asia. So the American behest into Vietnam War resulted in this apprehension.

US–Thai Land Relations in Early Years

The quest for further power, intrigued by the atmosphere of bipolarity, created a constant rift and competition between the US and USSR. American defence analysts had been defining foreign strategies regarding the sphere of influence, and Thailand's geographic relevance attached substantial importance to it. Meanwhile, Thailand was wrestling with unsettled hunger for power between politicians and the military. Thailand, unlike other Southeast Asian countries, was not having a colonial past, and relatively high economic prosperity favoured its political conditions despite frequent coup d' états. Thailand does not share a common border with China, which made it easier to maintain anti-Communist stature under the regime of Marshall Pibul Songgram. This anti-Communist foreign policy stance led the US near to it and motivated both countries to form a joint alliance against Communist expansion.

Under the auspices of the Melby Mission to Thailand, the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was established in October 1950. The US had been conscious of Thailand's importance as the ally against Communism on the tip of the mainland. In terms of defence support that covered economic and technical aid, Thailand received \$65,190,000 till 1954. In addition to this aid, the US has also granted (MDAP) aid to Thailand. The original purpose of the MDAP aid was to enable Thailand "to continue the process of modernising several battalion combat teams and to give training to its small but efficient air force."⁴ However, after the two Vietminh invasions of Laos in April and December 1953 and the establishment of the 'Free Thai' in China's Yunnan province in the same year, the US, alarmed by these developments, significantly increased MDAP aid. Thus, the objectives of MDAP aid changed, and for the fiscal year of 1955, the purpose of the grant was to build up Thailand's army, navy and air force units "to the point where they should be able to ward off any military incursions unless direct participation by China is involved." As a supplement to MDAP aid, \$12,200,000 of direct force support was also obligated for Thailand until 1954.⁵

Taking Thailand first as an illustration of an aid-receiving country that met severe difficulties, it may be noted that at least as early as 1954, the report to Congress on the Mutual Security Programme of December 31, 1954, related these problems to the doubling of Thailand's military budget between 1950 and 1954. The reports stated that continued "expenditures for defence purposes not only had siphoned off resources which would otherwise have gone into the country's development but also put added

strain on an economy, weakened in the last two years by declining export receipts from rice, rubber and tin."⁶

Defence Alliances and Southeast Asian Region

After the collapse of the wartime coalition, the US had morphed its approach as a torchbearer of saving Asia from Soviet Communism. The US-backed nationalist regime of Chiang Kai Shek in China in 1949 was unsuccessful. This event conveyed that Communism was not receding, which made the US more apprehensive. Another significant development in Iran in March 1951 was nationalist Premier Mohammed Mossadegh's success; tightening government grip around the Anglo-American Oil Company added more to US grievances. Washington knew Soviet political penetration and military advancement into the Persian Gulf. To avoid the complete influence of the Soviet Union in the Persian Gulf, the CIA overthrew the government of pro-Russian Mossadegh in 1953. The US concerns emanated from their paranoia about the Russian blockade in case of a war that could halt the crude oil supply chain. Meanwhile, the Soviets had also extended their influence to Afghanistan through economic aid.

As far as Europe was concerned, the Soviet expansion was confronted on the face of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Southeast Asian nations were not readily taking Soviet Communism as a significant threat to their existence. So such kind of collective security arrangement seemed impossible for Southeast Asia. The US was more ready to remain on the back foot and wanted to help France in Indochina. However, the Sino-Soviet Treaty in 1950 raised US concerns to re-evaluate its prior passive policy towards Southeast Asia. The defeat of the French in the Dien Bien Phu battle in May 1954 also added grave limitations to US efforts to avoid direct involvement in the region. It made the US determined to bring this region under its influence to protect the American and Western Powers' interests.

US Foreign Policy and Eisenhower Doctrine

The Eisenhower doctrine shaped US foreign policy after the end of the Korean War. It was aimed to assist all countries who aspired to fight against Communism. The Eisenhower Administration negotiated security or mutual defence treaties and aid agreements. These alliances were integral to US national security policy to deter Communism. Mutual defence assistance was designed to assist a nation in defending itself as an ally in the free world.⁷ The emphasis was on voluntary and bilateral cooperation. The Eisenhower doctrine symbolised the determination of the US to go to war, if necessary, to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining control of the oil-rich area of West Asia.⁸

This system of regional defence alliances was known as the 'New Look' of the Republican administration.⁹ It was based on military aid, economic assistance, and political involvement. Eisenhower maintained that the US would not be an aggressor

despite having a massive nuclear capability. Dulles expounded upon this policy, followed by a series of events that led him to use the phrase 'massive retaliation'.¹⁰

Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)

The settlement of the Indochina war resulted from the Geneva Conference of 1954. It had created a more conducive environment for the conception of 'collective security' reiterated by Secretary Dulles many times. The US pursued like-minded countries to come forward and participate in allying to contain Communism. On September 8, 1954, eight members, including the US, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Philippines, France and Pakistan, agreed to safeguard the interests of the free world by containing USSR in Vietnam.¹¹ The inclusion of Thailand into the alliance was based on vulnerabilities that could be erupted in the North of Thailand if Indochina faced more deterioration. To safeguard itself against it, the balance of power in Southeast Asia could be achieved by aligning with the US. It was also pertinent to mention that the Eisenhower administration was motivated economically, militarily and politically to help signatories apart from deterring Communism.

Output of Alliance and US Friendship

The adoption of 'collective security' in terms of SEATO ostensibly showed an accumulative response against Soviet Communism. It was explicit that at least not all signatories agreed with the containment of Communism because, in the case of Pakistan, her participation was entirely based on apprehension and vulnerabilities on borders against India and Afghanistan. Similarly, Thailand successfully gained US engagement in the region relevant to its security needs from the perspective of Thai geographical location and diplomatic struggle to play a significant role in abandoning US preference to disengage from Southeast Asia after the Korean War. Apart from the material gains in terms of economic and military aid from the US, Bangkok gathered confidence after restoring regional equilibrium. The involvement of the Soviets in Vietnam was a direct threat to Thailand. SEATO was successful in this part because it had made open or full aggression impossible against Thailand. In doing so, the status of Cambodia as a buffer state was quite helpful in maintaining it as a strategic depth between two regional enemies.

Front Line Against Communism

Thailand played a frontline in the successful execution of the US containment strategy during the Cold War through SEATO. One of the crucial functions was launched through the Committee of Security Experts (CSE), in which all the intelligence agencies of signatories biannually met in Bangkok to exchange, frame and disseminate the status of the fight against Communism. The positioning of Thailand as a country bordering Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Malaya turned it into a central base for intelligence operations conducted by the CIA. In this way, Thailand benefitted through arming and getting trained by their border police poignantly. Because

Bangkok was quite clear about the fact that it was their prime objective to deter any attempt to destabilise remote North and far southern parts of the country through the instigating Communist empathiser against the centre, it was also noted that during the 1971 Laotian crisis, Thailand from the platform of SEATO requested intervention, but that was not materialised due to France and Britain. It did not stop Thailand and the US not to go further; instead, the CIA launched its covert unilateral actions by recruiting Laotian ethnic minorities to counter the subversion. It proved the American presence as a guarantor and confidence in Thailand's security, which was the rationale behind the 'realpolitik' of Bangkok. It reflects Bangkok's proactive posture on the diplomatic front.¹²

The Geneva Accord was not fulfilled in its spirit because the former CIA Director, Charles Colby, asserted that Communists would win elections. Thailand was the best option to take it as a launching pad to counter any Communist aggression. In addition to it, small Communist groups also existed in the northern and southern parts of Thailand. These areas could be sensitised through the Malayan Communist Party. Conversely, the situation in Indochina could create a knockout effect that could have been dismantled for Bangkok. From 1955 to 1962, SEATO scheduled more than 20 military exercises even though this alliance had not possessed any dedicated military force. Apart from the intelligence-based assessment and evaluation of Communism in the Committee of Security Experts (CSE) proceedings, an exposure paper was also produced to confront it at the ideological front by creating and disseminating anti-communist literature. The harmonious result through CSE was to train intelligence agencies of Southeast Asian nations, as Britain was more at the front line to discharge this function due to her success in curbing communist subversion in Malaya. The Directorate of Intelligence (Thailand) emulated Western intelligence skills appropriately through this training.¹³

US Aid to Upgrade Security Apparatus

The US approach towards Thailand was anchored on two principles: (a) to safeguard it from outside aggression and (b) to help Thailand to create the capacity to cope with an indigenous insurgency. It was expounded by US Ambassador to Thailand Leonard Zinger in front of the Foreign Relations Committee on the Security Agreements and Commitments in Thailand. He favoured sending US troops under the auspices of SEATO to Thailand. The US had actively engaged itself with development programmes in Thailand like Mobile Development Units, Accelerated Rural Development and Community mobilisation in the remote areas of Thailand. The military assistance to Thailand from 1962 to 1968 reached \$364.8 million.¹⁴ It demonstrated the US approach towards Thailand that was gradually defined by Vietnam's policy of Washington.

Moreover, it was also observed that SEATO was consistently becoming a forum for divergent interests, especially between Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand. Given the lukewarm behaviour of signatories, the US preferred a more direct

approach towards Southeast Asia. Thailand saw this entire scenario from its level of comfortability to accommodate the interest of significant power because Bangkok was not in a position to trust Peking at that time. The US presence resulted in economic progress by mobilising local businesses, like a Thai government-owned organisation named Express Transport Organization, which aimed to provide logistics services to US-manned bases and earned a profit rate of 30 to 40 per cent; otherwise, it had to do it under 5 per cent with non-US contractors. In addition, the presence of US-manned bases triggered the formation of many hotels, townships and urban living styles that went under the direct control of the Thailand government after the withdrawal of US forces.¹⁵

Thanat-Rusk Communiqué (1962)

The Geneva Accord gave birth to the formation of SEATO in 1954 as collective security in the region. The subsequent years further aligned their interests, and the Thanat-Rusk Communiqué of March 1962 was the assurance of their commitment towards it.¹⁶ Though it was based on an already existing bilateral treaty of Amity and Commerce 1833, SEATO had played a significant role in conceiving the necessity of it because it had made it possible for Thailand to seek reassurance and reaffirmation from the US to act as a safeguard in the time of external aggression.

Ethnic Demography and Insurgency in Thailand

The regionalism of Southeast Asia is not marked on the permanent basis of language and ethnicity. There is an apparent overlapping between minorities among all countries in the region. During the Cold War, Thailand was overwhelmingly apprehensive regarding ethnic demography that might trigger insurgency due to the domino effect in Indochina. Minorities like Malays, Meos, Chinese and Vietnamese were ringing constant alarm bells for Bangkok. The following table will expound on minority numbers during SEATO years in Thailand.

Table 1: Minority Demography in Thailand

Group	Estimated Population ¹⁷	Location
Indigenous Malays	670,000	South-Malaysian Border
Hill Tribe ¹⁸		
Meo	53,031	North
Yao	16,119	North
Karen	123,380	Northwest Burmese border
Lahu	15,994	North
Lisu	9,440	North
Akha	6,442	North
Cambodian(Khmer, Kui)	230,000	East, Southwest
Mon	60,000	Central Plain-west of Bangkok
Immigrants Chinese	2,600,000	Urban Areas
Vietnamese	74,750	Northeast; Bangkok

(Source: Compiled by Authors)

The relationship between the centre and peripheral regions of ethnic minorities had been victims of distrust and apathy. Thailand primarily had been facing

an insurgency in the North, northeast and comparatively to a lesser extent in the South (Meos and Vietnamese living in the northeast of Thailand, the most impoverished region). Administrative and official negligence was rampant there. 40,000 Meo minorities inhabited north-eastern Thailand, and it was the cause of discontent for the centre because their allegiance with Hanoi had been suspected over the years. Lahu, Lisha and Akha, the Laotian extractions, crowded north. Their cultural inclination was not towards Bangkok but instead coordinated by the other side of the border. The existence of this connection across the border, Pathet Lao forces and insurgent groups in Thailand utilised this as a communication chain. Apart from cultural homogeneity around the border, geography was compounding porous insurgency across the Mekong River. The range of Phu Phan mountains parallel to the Mekong River was the best sanctuary for guerrillas indulged in cross-border activities.¹⁹ The situation in Southern Thailand was also gloomy because of distrust and destitution that prevailed among the Malays minority. These were the extraction of ethnic Muslim Malaysians. The local officials' Buddhist and Muslim ethnic Malayan misgivings triggered insurgency. The Chinese Communist Chen Ping reportedly trained the uprising.²⁰

Chinese Factor

The relevance of the Chinese factor in internal insurgency could not be negated. The infringement through the use of mass communication was significant in this regard. Tactics of framing people's minds in favour of Communism living along the border area through the clandestine radio transmitter 'Voice of People of Thailand' was the basis for this mistrust in Bangkok.²¹ There were other pointers as well that were directed towards Peking's involvement in the affairs of Thailand. The establishment of the Thai Independence Movement in 1964 aimed to overthrow the government of Thanom Kittikachorn, and in January 1965, the Chinese News agency announced the creation of the Thailand Patriotic Front with similar objectives to the prior party.²² After it, the same source broke the news that the Thai Independence Movement would merge with the Thailand Patriotic Front. This pattern of developments supported the already existing susceptibility of the Chinese role into the doldrums of Southeast Asia. The statement of Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi in January 1965 further confirmed Thailand's allegation in which he said that a national liberation war would have been started at the end of the year.²³

Frame of Reference

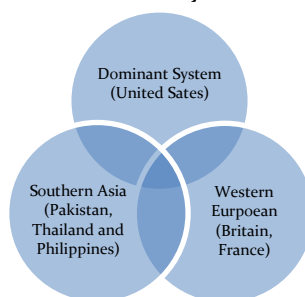
The Micahel Brecher frame of geography has been selected as a tool for a political explanation of the subject. This tool is bound to explain within the dominant and subordinate systems to conceive an overall understanding of international relations during the Cold War era.²⁴ In addition to it, it also explains the functioning and development of SEATO. The treaty area becomes the whirlpool for signatories to solve their concerns by adopting the charter's guidelines. This frame of reference identifies the causal determinant in individual signatory stimuli. This academic

standpoint does not negate the ideological root cause between the US and the Soviet Union. Still, it further compounds to identify pointers for the behaviour of regional powers. Michael Brecher's concept applies to the US and USSR as the two entities to make up the dominant system during the Cold War, whereas five subordinate systems cover different parts of the world. According to Brecher, the dominant order is a superior system that directs the functioning of the auxiliary system. The formation of structure around dominant and subordinate systems creates an environment where interaction occurs among members from both levels of the construction. The subordinate system includes Southern Asia, the Middle East, the US, West European and West Africa. The political and geographic constraints limit the inclusion of China into the subordinate system, particularly in Southern Asia.

Moreover, the Cold War era generated bipolarity in the global network, which halted China's conception as a dominant player. Though in its entirety, it cannot be ignored its presence in the world scenario, China was not looking outward frenetically to consolidate its power during the life of SEATO. Due to the limitation of the subject matter, this paper caters to analytical probing of dominant and subordinate systems (Southern Asian) in particular. Myanmar, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Nepal, South Vietnam, and North Vietnam formed the Southern Asian system.

Consideration for this paper deals mainly with the dominant and Southern Asian systems in relevance to their interaction resulting in the form of SEATO. The academic scholarship does not qualify for its fairness until the rest of the members were not considered. Still, they would remain relative in their importance while researching Thailand as an unstable atom trying to create a bond to sustain the structure of Michael Brecher's concept. For more clarity, it is essential to mention that New Zealand and Australia were not members of any subordinate system conceived by the Brecher. Still, their coordination with SEATO assures outside-system inclusion of members.

Figure 1: Dominant and Subordinate Systems of International Relations



(Source: Compiled by Authors)

In the Global system after WWII, the international order was entirely changed, and Europe went back footed due to the economic and postcolonial turmoil. The US and USSR had turned out to be prominent world decision-makers. This

relation gave birth to a bipolar system driven by an antagonist approach to leading the world. Both countries started inducing their approach to contain each other to pursue their realm of choice. Their outward approach emanated from their ideological basis. This mechanism resulted in a polarisation of the world into different blocks. Southeast Asia became the famous theatre to counter the spread of Communism. This gradual development of the political environment in Southeast Asia urged Thailand to look for the major power to come and create an equilibrium to maintain a balance of power.

Vietnam Syndrome

The scholarly attempt to unfold Thai paranoia attached to Vietnam syndrome can only be achieved by explaining them. In this paper, Vietnam syndrome reflects the 'whirlwind of war' that could take surrounding regions into it. Though Thailand is not bordering Vietnam, cross-border infiltration of Communist sympathisers in northeast Thailand, where ethnic minorities were dumping, directly threatened Bangkok. So, this chain of a network through Vietnam into Thailand via Cambodia was anticipated as the fault line to trigger insurgency in northern Thailand. The fall of French troops in Indochina in 1954 and the successive expansion of communism without any considerable power to equalise the USSR was the conception of Bangkok's paranoia against an unstable regional situation. Because the centre in Thailand was apprehensive about any situation from an eastern border that could be appreciative towards indigenous insurgency, it was apparent from the situation that Vietnam Syndrome could be responsible for it. To control the Thai paranoia attached to Vietnam syndrome, engagement between Bangkok and Washington was quite successful. Cambodia as a buffer state and the CIA's covert operation during the Laotian crisis were indicators to minimise the Bangkok paranoia.

Discussion

Thailand's diplomatic display after the post-Geneva conference in 1954 and inclusion into SEATO is still relevant today to understand the diplomatic manoeuvring played – the analytical probing into motives behind the participation of Thailand as a staunch supporter of the alliance. The approach adopted by Thailand to sway Americans was quite tactical. The execution of Problem Perception reflected two kinds of threats to Thailand: external and internal. Their further dissection revealed that the nature of these threats was intertwined. The external danger was pointed out as the direct aggression against Thailand's sovereignty could be carried out if the menace of Communism would not be addressed emanating from North Vietnam. In addition, it was concluded from this threat that the northeast and southern parts of Thailand housed different ethnic minorities, and they could be a more grievous threat to the existence of Thailand. It is appropriate to take one of the tools that would serve the purpose of a governmental investigation. So, to go further, it is pertinent that geography serves as the scientific grail from the concept of Micahel Brecher.

The constructed framework covers the series of situational crises being presented as evidence urged the study of Thailand and its subsequent usage of SEATO as a fulcrum of stability. The core area of concentration in terms of political interchanges exists outside Thailand among member countries. This paper is not intended to evaluate every State's activity in the SEATO subsystem. Instead, it is directed to examine the engagement of third-world power (Thailand) from the subordinate system to the top elite of the dominant system. Moreover, it is also essential to consider that the global network was significantly charged by bipolarity. For the discussion, a focus can now be made on the core area of SEATO. How Thailand achieved and ensure its national interests through SEATO?

Unsurprisingly, the global system embodies many alliances, grouping and pacts to serve the convergent interests of incumbent states. It is convincing that the other system and subsystems outside SEATO formed different societal environments in the global setting for conceptual purposes. It could be simplified by neglecting the other societal environment from the totality to understand the residual system that depended upon socio-economic-cultural aspects to mark the society internally and externally. By acknowledging the presence of other entities in the global system during the Cold War, it is probable to extract two aspects from it that resulted from the relationship inhibited by SEATO with them. First, SEATO encountered a competitor; second would have been its reversal of the first aspect.

The presence of Thailand in the heart of mainland Southeast Asia brought it under urgency to secure its border. Laos and Cambodia lie to the East, and the gradual expansion of Vietnamese influence through covert and overt involvement in Cambodia fanned Thailand's antipathy towards Communism. Another impetus that turned Thai intelligentsia to seek an antidote was the creation of the Thai Autonomous Group in Yunnan province.²⁵ The external environment around Thailand had also changed tremendously due to post-colonialism. The nationalism and the rise of Communism in this part resulted from the post-WWII. The newly emerged nations were coping with economic and administrative challenges. This socio-political instability was also lingering around the southern Asian subordinate system. In striking contrast, the psychological conception differed from the rest of the countries in Bangkok due to her free colonial past. This factor pushed her to engage more frivolously in the US. In this setting, from the perspective of Thailand, it had to formulate its strategy to cope with the impending threats from the unstable East. So, there was a need for strategic calculations that could solve their issues.

Thai response was based mainly on two approaches being adopted by Bangkok to input into the geostrategic matrix of the region to create a balanced array for their survival in the area. Firstly, the key to moving forward was a concept of Problem Perception which delineated subtle details of threats that might sabotage Thailand. This approach made it easier for them to categorise risks lingering around Thailand. Their civil-military apparatus gauged that this overt threat might turn into a full-fledged insurgency due to the cross-border tribalism invoked by pro-Communist

forces. This accumulative level of risks could not be handled by Thailand alone because France, the colonial master, and the stable country were also at a defeating end in Indochina. The imminent defeat of France and her passive approach to acting more vigorously was evident in her attitude to implore before the US. This lacklustre attitude of the French was gradually creating a void that could trigger a balance of power in favour of the Soviet Union and North Vietnam. This gross sum of problem perception made Bangkok anticipate how to tackle emergent security threats. It was also important to mention that the cognisance of problem perception interrupted by Bangkok was the core threat to the country's national interest.

All social scientists and international relations experts agree that national security is the core of the national interest. So was the case of Thailand as well. As mentioned earlier, national security was at risk in terms of direct aggression and through a weakening of the social fabric into areas of ethnic imbalance. To counter it, the second approach that explained the behaviour of the entity of the Southern Asian system was a strategy of aggregation of marginal gains resting on the philosophy of looking for tiny margins that fade out potential threats by repeated increment into counter skills. This strategy was most appropriate for the analytical reasoning of the diplomatic manoeuvring done by Bangkok during the fifteen years of existence of SEATO as a subsystem. If there was an interplay of the US and Thailand during the Cold War, then though Thailand was a third-world country, their colonial-free past and reliance on marginal gains reformed it into it had achieved a central position in the execution of US policies in Southeast Asia.

It is also relevant to see the US position from the dominant system in Southeast Asia. The study of post-WWII revealed that Europe was healing from the wounds of war, and Asia and Africa were mostly experiencing new nations on the world map. It was perceived that the world would no longer experience any war or oppression because the world would be more stable, and just after the creation of the UN as a competent body to maintain peace and resolve a conflict between adversaries. Soon observed, the global system was again at risk of developing induced bipolarity into the zone of the dominant system. This induction resulted in the polarisation of entire regions of the global system, refuting the assumption that the world would face enduring peace after WWII. At the same time, it presented the UN with extensive tests to maintain peace and stability.

With a breakdown of wartime collision and polarisation of the world system, the US approach witnessed a reappraisal for Southeast Asian policy by recognising Asian nationalism. In this regard, the US supported the Republic of Indonesia and Bao Dai's regime in Indochina. The US reconsideration of policy rooted in the Zhdanov line, which called for an armed uprising in colonial areas, and it had conveyed it to a Communist-sponsored Youth Conference held in February 1947 in Calcutta.²⁶ Moscow-Peking friendship of the 1950s also pushed Washington to take some serious steps to contain the spread of Communism. In response to this Sino-Soviet axis, Secretary of State Acheson delivered his famous address, 'Total Diplomacy', in which

he emphasised the need to look for situations of strength to gain support to counter the spread of Communism.²⁷ The approach of total diplomacy envisaged encompassed a multilateral approach in terms of political, economic, cultural and psychological aspects to foster a democratic way of life for like-minded people in the world. The US administration had sent missions like Griffin and Bell to survey Southeast Asian countries for their problems. American policymakers were of the view that weak economic and poor administrative setup would give an invitation to another force to come for rescue.

The rationale behind the US approach was based on the assumption that countries with weak governments and poverty directly proportional to become reception centres for Communism. The US tried to gauge the overall position of Southeast Asia, mainly through different reports to help like-minded governments deal with their internal problems. In this regard, Melby Mission to Indochina and Thailand was instrumental in announcing future aid programmes and groups for cooperation and assistance.²⁸ The US official stance reflected in the speech of Secretary of State Acheson during the presentation of the economic and technical aid programme for the fiscal year in the following words "...Poverty, disease, illiteracy and resentments against former colonial exploitations are our enemies... They represent destructive forces that the Communists exploit at every opportunity. To achieve our objective of helping people of these areas maintain independent governments friendly to us, we must understand these forces at work in Asia." The essential part of the Mutual Security Programme was designed to help the people of Asia create social and economic conditions that would encourage the growth and survival of non-Communist political institutions dedicated to fulfilling basic needs and aspirations.²⁹

This excerpt from Secretary Acheson's testimony shows the holistic approach the US intended towards Southeast Asia. The US policy towards the Far East, particularly from 1950 to 1954, was the French Reliance policy because the US tried to help France in Indochina but preferred to refrain from acting as a leading player. This phase involved interaction between the dominant system and subordinate (Western European), explaining that the top elite's concern was strengthening French presence because the US was relatively comfortable achieving its objectives through France in Southeast Asia. However, time had proved that the US aspiration to look at France as a panacea for Indochina was depleted after the Dien Bien Phu defeat. France's failure made the US seek more reliable and robust options in Southeast Asia. Under the presidency of Eisenhower, Secretary of State Dulles was more ambitious for united action against Vietminh forces. Still, there needed to be more convergence of interest among other countries from South Asia and Western Europe. France was more concerned about her face-saving because, internally, France faced political instability at the lowest ebb of the time. To make the international opinion more favourable, the analogy of a falling row of dominoes was spurred to infuse the realisation of dangerous consequences if Communism was not deterred at this stage.³⁰

This posture indicated the mood of US reappraisal in its policy towards Southeast Asia. It was important for the US to consolidate like-minded countries' support on the list's stock point. The dominant system was profoundly interested in subordinate systems of Western Europe because of Britain's interest in Southeast Asia and the South Asian system about Thailand's geographic significance in replacing France. However, Thailand was more relevant than France because France remained a foreign colonial power. Hence, her conception remained throughout the war as an oppressor in the minds of local people. In addition, the nature of bipolarity itself demanded the consent of others against Communism as a prerequisite to justify the presence of the dominant system itself. The longstanding quest to carry out the execution plan for the united response resulted in the form of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) on September 8, 1954. Dulles expressed the main objective of this alliance as "An attack upon the treaty area" would be "so united, so strong, so well placed" that a potential aggressor would realise that it "has a lot to lose more than it could hope to gain."³¹

The striking impression can be made after the Manila Charter that bipolarity pushed the world into more division, but divisibility was the quest for equilibrium. Alliances and pacts were the manifestations of this approach of creating a sphere of influence. The relevant observation was that countries in the subordinate system desperately needed support from the dominant order to maintain their grip over the masses and protect their borders because, overall, the polarisation beneath the global system had made the system volatile. Therefore, the degree of volatility saturation appeared more poignantly in conflict-inflected areas, and Southeast Asia was one of them. Thailand's position concerning the newly emerged situation after the Geneva Conference was more relevant to the matters of the region. So, the importance of Thailand in SEATO was significant in the fight against the containment of Communism.

The formation of the alliance was not the ultimate goal, but it was meant to reach the more unilateral part that the US wanted to play in Indochina. On the part of Bangkok, the tenuous support from the alliance's other members concerning the definition of the attack could have been much better. Because Thailand was the only country in the joint pact exposed to cross-border infiltration and insurgency, SEATO's other members were not ready to take it as an act of war or total aggression to be responded to. This inability to the part of the alliance had allowed Thailand to go one step further into getting assurance from the top elite for its security. Most of the scholarship available on SEATO and its role in the affairs of the Cold War was of the view that due to the difference of interest and inconsistency of the members, it needed to discharge its functions in spirit as conceived. However, this historical analysis still needs to be improved to answer the SEATO phenomenon and its demise. Because as the frame of reference in this paper talks about the constituent of the global system that was based on dominant and subordinate systems allowing fluidity of power in terms of capital, aid and technical assistance through centres like alliances, and SEATO is one example of it. So, if one argues that SEATO was a detested alliance

during the Cold War, it shows a myopic view of SEATO because SEATO served more than the US, particularly Thailand. It was a channel through which it made it possible to insulate by concentrating power into the centre of Thailand.

During Vietnam War, since the birth of SEATO, the incoming years showed that the US and Thailand intertwined so firmly into each other that the Rusk-Thant Communiqué of 1961 resulted. This final communiqué served as the certificate for the US to play more unilaterally in affairs of the Vietnam War by using Thailand bases and logistics. As a result, Bangkok emerged diplomatically strong and at receiving end. The presence of SEATO in these circumstances was not outdated, but one could say that its role was limited to serving the newly emergent and charged scenario due to the Vietnam crisis. So, it could be presented as the argument that the limited purpose of SEATO was of no use, and it was dysfunctional in practice. However, this dysfunctional nature occurred after achieving more bilateral engagement between Thailand and the US. Now the critical historical analysis delivers that the subsystem was formed to tackle the immediate threat of Communism. Still, a collective approach being adopted by the dominant system was absorbed by other entities to their regional sensitivities. This paper intends to unfold the relevance of tactical manoeuvring in a weaker power's dominant and subordinate systems of international relations during the Cold War era. The paper's conclusion provides lesson learnt which applies to any time and space for interaction of different states.

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, it has resulted that the formation of the alliance and subsequent participation of Thailand confirmed the following relationship between the global system and subsystem.

$$A_s = f(S_c, G_e)$$

The equation embodies that A_s Affinity for alliance or defence pact of individual states is a function of the S_c State's strategic culture and G_e Global environment. At the same time, strategic culture depends on country-specific understanding bound to intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The display of Thailand's diplomatic approach to SEATO was bedrock through this scientific explanation. The academic exploration of this historic phenomenon does not emphasise that the interplay between the US and Thailand was merely an output of the limited option in their respective domain to act swiftly. Instead, it gradually developed an approach to gravitate both entities from two systems. Thailand successfully safeguarded itself from the blowback of the Vietnam War – the US presence in an equation for the balance of power insulated Thailand. Still, the striking feature is that Bangkok did not go into cognitive slumber due to US presence but consistently made SEATO a rudder to deal with her Vietnam paranoia. This study also reveals that interaction among the dominant and subordinate systems provided a suitable environment for the conception of the subsystem of SEATO. The streak from this interaction expounds that Thailand was more into the power to mould the US as a top elite of the dominant system.

References

- ¹ Byunghoon Ohn. 1966. *United States and Southeast Asia, 1945-1954: The Evolution of American Policy in Southeast Asia*. University of Kentucky.
- ² Harry S. Truman. 1947. "Address before a Joint Session of Congress." *Washington DC* 12.
- ³ Byunghoon Ohn. 1966. *United States and Southeast Asia, 1945-1954: The Evolution of American Policy in Southeast Asia*. University of Kentucky.
- ⁴ "Second Report to Congress on the Mutual Security Program for Six Months Ending," 25.
- ⁵ "Report to Congress on the Mutual Security Program for the Six Months Ended," 40.
- ⁶ Thomas Carothers. 2011. *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve*. Carnegie Endowment.
- ⁷ Julius W. Pratt. 1957. "Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1954. Edited by Peter V. Curl.(New York: Harper and Brothers for the Council on Foreign Relations. 1955. Pp. Xxii, 506. 5.00.) And The United States in World Affairs, 1954. By Richard P. Stebbins and the Research Staff of the Council on Foreign Relations. 1956. Pp. Xii, 498." Oxford University Press.
- ⁸ Rao, *India, United States, and Pakistan*.
- ⁹ Rao.
- ¹⁰ Pratt, "Documents on American Foreign Relations."
- ¹¹ "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office of the Historian." n.d. Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960>.
- ¹² David McKnight. 2005. "Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion, 1956-63." *Intelligence and National Security* 20 (2): 288-303.
- ¹³ McKnight. Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion, 1956-63."
- ¹⁴ Jayakrishna Baral. 1973. "US Involvement in Thai Security." *China Report* 9 (4): 16-28.
- ¹⁵ Baral, "US Involvement in Thai Security." 23.
- ¹⁶ "Thanak-Rusk Communique."
- ¹⁷ Hugh Tinker. 1968. "Peter Kunstadter (Ed.): Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations. 2 Xiii, 486 Pp., 32 Plates;[Vii], 487-901 Pp., 15 Maps. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967. (Distributed in GB by Oxford University Press.\pounds 8.)" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 31 (2): 426-27.
- ¹⁸ Edward F. Anderson. 1986. "Ethnobotany of Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand. I. Medicinal Plants of Akha." *Economic Botany* 40 (1): 38-53.
- ¹⁹ Baral, "U.S. Involvement in Thai Security," 18.
- ²⁰ Baral, 18.
- ²¹ Baral, 18.
- ²² Baral, 19.
- ²³ Baral, 19.
- ²⁴ Jack A. Quilico. 1971. "Interaction among Some SEATO Powers: An Effect on SEATO."
- ²⁵ Anuson Chinvanho. 1992. "Thailand and the Establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, 1954." In *Thailand's Policies towards China, 1949-54*, 121-40. Springer.
- ²⁶ Dennis J. Duncanson. 1973. "South Vietnam: Detente and Reconciliation." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 49 (4): 554-66.
- ²⁷ TIMES, "Acheson Urges U.S. to Use 'Total Diplomacy' on Soviet; 'TOTAL DIPLOMACY' ASKED BY ACHESON."
- ²⁸ Stephen Lobdell Johnson. 1965. *A Study of the United States in Southeast Asia: 1950-1954*. American University.
- ²⁹ United States, and United States, eds. 1951. *Mutual Security Act of 1951: Hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and Senate Committee on Armed Services, Eighty-Second Congress, First Session, on July 26, 27, 30, 31, Aug. 1-3, 6-9, 1951*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O.
- ³⁰ John F. Melby. 1982. "Vietnam—1950." *Diplomatic History* 6 (1): 97-110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1982.tb00365.x>.
- ³¹ Roger Dingman. 1989. "John Foster Dulles and the Creation of the South-East Asia Treaty Organization in 1954." *The International History Review* 11 (3): 457-77.