

## BOOK REVIEWS

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***The National Security of Developing States: Lessons from Thailand.***  
**By Muthiah Alagappa.** Dover, Massachusetts: Auburn House Publishing Company, 1987. 274 pp.

Originally prepared as a Ph.D. dissertation at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Muthiah Alagappa's *The National Security of Developing States* has become, after research trips to Thailand and interviews with Thai policy-makers and experts in the field, a very well-researched book.

Relying on a wealth of materials on the subject and valuable interviews with policy-makers such as former Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chommanand, former Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, General Saiyuth Kerdpol, and officials of the Foreign Ministry and National Security Council, as well as the insights of recognized authorities on Thai politics, such as Professor Chai-Anan Samudavanija and M.R. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, the book gives a comprehensive and clear picture of how Thailand and its élites conceive of the problem of their national security.

Giving adequate background of Thai thinking on the question, mainly since Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932, the book, however, focuses more on the contemporary national security thinking of Thai leaders. Alagappa starts off with a theoretical examination of national security by setting up a conceptual framework that encompasses the political, social, and economic factors. The second chapter dives into Thai conceptions of national security, looking at the complex dynamics underlying the conceptions, its core values, how both its civil and military leaders view the question of internal and external threats, and their rather pragmatic answers to them. These reveal a lack of consensus over the

organizing ideology and weak political institutions which are a cause for worry for a developing country such as Thailand. There is the problem of regionalism in the Northeast and separatism in the Muslim South.

The third chapter deals separately with the external threat posed by Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea where the traditional Thai security approach has tended to lay stress on the military and geopolitical dimensions. This does not mean that Thai leaders want a military victory in Kampuchea but that the resistance forces should offer enough of a military challenge, while ASEAN seeks international sanctions against Vietnam, so that Hanoi agrees to a political solution favourable to Thailand. That solution is nothing more than the creation of a buffer state in the form of a "neutral" Kampuchea, or at least one that is not dominated by Vietnam. The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the internal threats, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and armed Muslim separatism in the South, respectively.

The threat of communism is traced from its origin, since the founding of the CPT in 1942, through its growth from 1950 to 1970, and reaching its height in the 1973–76 period when, for the first time, the ethnic Chinese CPT leadership saw a mass of ethnic Thai students fleeing the cities to join its movement. But they were only to defect back to the cities in the early 1980s when the military adopted the 66/23 and 66/25 orders giving them blanket amnesty. The CPT has not recovered since then and its threat has diminished to a minimum at present.

Muslim separatism, however, has a long history and continues to be a nagging problem for the central authority, particularly with the present resurgence of Islam. Though Thailand is a comparatively tolerant country, Buddhist officials sent from the centre to rule the southern provinces have often been ignorant of the culture and religion of a people that differ markedly from their own. Policy-makers at the centre are also guilty of the same thing. And, even with better understanding of the problem, it is not an easy one to solve since it encompasses complex religious questions that often conflict with a nation striving to forge national unity and a common identity. Recently, for example, Muslim Teachers' College students in the South staged protests demanding that their female colleagues be allowed to wear traditional Muslim dress instead of college uniforms. The protest spilled out of the campuses and Muslim communities all over the country have called on Bangkok to give in to the demand. The issue has not yet been resolved.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, summarizes the security situation facing Thailand from within and without. The external threat of the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea has been dealt with by Thailand via its

traditional approach of trying to balance the geopolitical powers. ASEAN diplomatic manoeuvrings have achieved the isolation of Vietnam, but not the withdrawal of its troops. However, Alagappa's book does not cover the recent development of Vietnam's self-professed intention to unilaterally withdraw all its troops by 1990. That prospect might present Thailand, the "frontline" state of ASEAN, with some new and difficult problems.

A "neutral" Kampuchea cannot be guaranteed. But, what is more, the Khmer resistance forces are already showing signs of breaking up, with Prince Sihanouk exploring ways of talking directly with Heng Samrin and Hanoi. If he should forsake his resistance partners, Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge, and agree to head a Kampuchean government, then what of Thailand's security concern? Prince Sihanouk is, internationally, the most recognized of the three factional leaders. Thailand would then be left with the more or less inconsequential Son Sann and, worse, the infamous Khmer Rouge which no country except China would support because of the atrocities they committed against their own people.

Internally, the communist problem has largely abated and the separatist problem is containable. However, Alagappa is right in saying that the state is vulnerable because of its weak political institutions. Parliament, in particular, lacks its own strength and instead of keeping a check on the government, the reverse is more often the case. Political parties are rent with internal conflicts of interest which stunt their development as established grass-root institutions. The military, always jealous of their powers, contributes greatly to this with its organized attempts to check the power of the political parties and blatantly interferes in the affairs of Parliament and government.

Though it is genuinely convinced that democracy and development are the answers to the long-term fight against communism and insecurity, the military prefers to "guide" democracy rather than let it take its own course. The problem, as many have pointed out, is that the Thai military does not yet have a true appreciation of what democracy is. It sees democracy principally as a tool for defeating communism.

With Thailand's ambition to become a newly industrializing country (NIC) and the fourth "tiger" of Asia, what is needed, as Alagappa points out, is a modern pluralistic society based on a participatory democratic system of government. This is the real challenge to Thai national security for the future: the building of a social and political system that can address the plurality of forces and interests prevalent in modern Thai society today.

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