

CHAPTER 5

Years of Living Dangerously: Thailand's Current Security Challenges

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This short essay examines Thailand's current security outlook. It seeks to identify a set of critical security challenges for the kingdom. It also briefly discusses the extent to which these challenges have affected the country's defence policy, its defence procurement and force structure, as well as its regional security cooperation. In this study, it identifies five major security challenges, both internal and external. They are listed in order of degree of concern, from the most critical to the least, based on my interviews with a group of policymakers in the foreign policy and defence establishments.¹ They include: first, violent conflicts among various political factions; second, terrorism and insurgency in the deep south; third, territorial disputes leading to armed clashes with Cambodia; fourth, security threats from Myanmar; and fifth, other non-traditional security (NTS) threats, such as trafficking of arms, illegal immigrants, energy security, natural disasters and infectious diseases. Yet, assessing Thailand's security situation is no longer a simple task. During the Cold War, Thailand was preoccupied with one apparently principal external threat—communism. Thailand was fearful of becoming the last domino in the advancement of communist Vietnam in mainland Southeast Asia. To contain such a threat, Thailand forged intimate ties with the United States, and later with China, while transforming itself into an anti-communist, pro-West agent. Unfortunately, this external environment opened the door for the rise of militarism in Thailand. As a result, the Thai concept of security was heavily influenced by militaristic-authoritarian ideology. But the end of the Cold War induced a significant change in the defence sector. The process of security policy-making moved from military leaders to a group of authorities, which consisted of the head of state, military leaders and civilian leaders in related fields.² They became key components of the National Security Council (NSC), an agency

¹ The interviews were conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, from 21-22 November 2011.

² Cheera Khienvichit, "How is Security Conceived by Key Decision Makers in Thailand?," *Shedden Papers* (Canberra: Ministry of Defence of Australia, 2003), p. 32. Also see, Muthiah Alagappa, "Thailand: The Elite's Shifting Conceptions of Security", edited by Panitan Wattanayagorn, *Asian Security Practice*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 443, and; *National Security Policy 1998-2001*, National Security Council of Thailand, <<http://www.nsc.go.th/english.html>>, (accessed at May 15, 2003).

within the Office of the Prime Minister.³

Since the coup of 2006 ousting the elected government of Thaksin Shinawatra, the military has returned to the political limelight and once again played a dominant role in the security policy domain. During this period, security concerns from outside the country have been perceived as secondary and are limited within the Thai neighbourhood. To the defence establishment, armed conflict with Cambodia has emerged as the most worrying external threat. Myanmar remains another source of foreign menace, as it has been for decades. These concerns have deepened partly because of lingering mutual distrust and the distortion of history in which both Myanmar and Cambodia have been painted as Thailand's historical adversaries. But at present, the primary dangers confronting Thailand are fundamentally internal, with the unrelenting domestic crisis and the insurgency in the Thai south posing the greatest threats to Thailand's national security. More intensely than at any other periods in Thai modern history, internal factors have come to determine Thailand's defence policy and its perspective of regional security cooperation. This phenomenon contradicts the conventional threat perceptions which are normally based on external threats and their implications for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The increasing diversification of sources of threats has produced a myriad of inevitable repercussions on Thailand's defence sector.

Violent Political Conflicts

The military coup of September 2006 set off the enduring political turmoil in Thailand, and was eventually played out through the so-called colour-coding of politics where defenders of the traditional elites chose yellow to represent themselves (yellow is the colour of Monday—the King's birthday), and supporters of deposed premier Thaksin wore red-shirts as a symbol of anti-establishment. The conflict involves multiple layers of competition between geographic regions of the country, economic and social classes, business and commercial rivalries, politicians and their factions as well as different models of governance. The role of the monarchy, as the

³ Established in 1959, the National Security Council is a high-level advisory organisation to a Cabinet comprising the prime minister as its president, and with various ministers and high-ranking ministry officials sitting as Council members.

key pillar of Thailand's identity, had until then been an untouchable subject. Yet, it was pulled into play by the actors involved, and that fact raised the stakes, making this standoff different from any in recent Thai political history.⁴ To intensify the conflict, opposing factions have used violence to gain political points and undermine their opponents. The red-shirts have been accused of resorting to violence in order to unseat the Abhisit Vejjajiva government (2008-present). In April 2009, the red-shirted United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) stormed into a Pattaya hotel to disrupt the ASEAN Plus Three Summit and finally forced its cancellation. The UDD then moved back to Bangkok and staged a series of violent attacks against public property on Thai New Year's day (13 April). A year later, in another attempt to force the government to dissolve the parliament and call for a fresh election, the red-shirts seized Bangkok's upscale shopping area at Rachaprasong intersection. The demonstration, which began in March 2010, ended tragically when the state authorities decided to launch a brutal crackdown, resulting in 91 people being killed and almost 2,000 injured. It was alleged that, in reacting to the crackdown with anger, the red-shirts committed arson attacks against the Central World shopping mall and other buildings in Bangkok, incidents that caused great damage to Thailand's international image.

In the aftermath of the deadly incident, the government has accused radical elements of the red-shirts of being behind a terrorist network that has sought to destabilise the Thai nation. It also accused "men in black" in the red-shirted camp, those supposedly endorsing terrorist tactics, of being responsible for the death of some soldiers. For the sake of national security, the Abhisit government declared a state of emergency from May right until the end of 2010. Since the abolition of the decree, the red-shirts have returned to Bangkok's streets, although so far this time peacefully. But there is no guarantee that future demonstrations will remain peaceful.

It is important to note that the Thai crisis has exposed the reality in which the military is highly fragmented, with a large portion of army officers aligning themselves with the traditional elites while some of the low-ranking soldiers, mostly from far-flung regions in the north and northeast of Thailand, becoming increasingly sympathetic

⁴ In my discussion with Ernest Bower, Senior Director and Director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington D.C., 22 September 2010.

toward the pro-Thaksin red-shirted movement. In a move to consolidate the corporateness of the military, Prime Minister Abhisit appointed a royalist, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, as army chief in October 2010. Prayuth is known to be an anti-Thaksin figure. He was accused of masterminding the military coup of 2006. Army insiders believe that with Prayuth as army chief, a military coup is possible if the military feels it may lose control over politics.⁵ Moreover, Abhisit also selected another royalist, Police General Wichean Potephosree, to head the police department. The appointment of the two figures at the top positions in the army and police not only helped rebuild unity in their respective organisations, but also to improve ties between the two agencies—ties that were previously strained due to differences in approaches and outlooks of national security.

Insurgency in the Deep South

Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat of the International Crisis Group recently wrote that with the current crisis in Bangkok, the southern insurgency has remained on the periphery of Thailand's consciousness and locked in a stalemate. While the number of attacks has reduced in past years, ending this conflict by military means alone is still an impossible mission. A paradigm shift is needed but it will be difficult to take any new initiatives until political stability is restored in the capital. So far, the conflict that reignited in 2004 during the Thaksin administration has claimed the lives of more than 4,400 people. According to Rungrawee, in the first 10 months of 2010, 368 deaths were recorded.⁶ Unfortunately, the killings in the restive south have gradually become normalised. The insurgents have aimed at perpetuating violence against virtually anyone—whether civilian or military authorities, whether Buddhists or Muslims—in the targeted areas. The Abhisit government, which pledged to lift the emergency decree in the three provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat when it arrived in power in late 2008, has until today failed to fulfil its promise. In fact, in October 2010, it renewed this draconian law for the 21st time. Many scholars have argued that poverty is not the real root cause of the conflict, but the political grievances long felt by the Muslim communities in the three provinces. Addressing glaring past

⁵ Wassana Nanuam, "Olive Branch for Red Shirts", *Bangkok Post*, 1 October 2010.

⁶ Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat, "Southern Insurgency Remains Locked in Stalemate", *Bangkok Post*, 12 November 2010.

injustices and recognising the distinct ethno-religious identity of the people in this region are vital to resolving the conflict.⁷

Although there has been no evidence that suggests the involvement of global terrorist networks, the crisis in the south has become a serious threat to the legitimacy of the government and more importantly to the security of the residents in the areas. This is not only a political issue, but also an intricate sociological one. The Thai state has been built on the myth of homogeneity whereby different cultures or customs are often regarded as alien, or “un-Thai”. Such a mentality has prompted the security forces to implement their hard-nosed measures, since they believe that they are dealing with threatening alien, foreign elements. For the same reason, the Thai state has refused to grant any kind of administrative autonomy to the three provinces for fear that this could lead to national disintegration.

Territorial Disputes with Cambodia

Thai-Cambodian relations have been dangerously erratic in the past few years, especially since the royalist yellow-shirted People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) embarked on politicising the case of the Preah Vihear Temple, or *Phra Wihan* in Thai. The PAD accused the Thaksin-backed Samak Sundaravej government of trading Thailand's endorsement of Cambodia's bid to have the temple listed as UNESCO's World Heritage Site for certain private interests of Thaksin. The Democrat Party, then serving as the opposition, joined the PAD in provoking a sense of nationalism among Thais and sold the idea that Thailand could lose the 4.6 square kilometres adjoining the temple complex to Cambodia because of the earlier Thai endorsement. The PAD's protests effectively raised tensions along the border and finally instigated a series of armed confrontations between the two countries' troops. One Thai and three Cambodian soldiers died in an exchange of rifle and rocket fire when their armies clashed in October 2008. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen employed heated rhetoric the day before the clash broke out, warning Thai troops to stop trespassing on Cambodian land, calling the contested territory a “life-and-death

⁷ Ibid. Also see, Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), and Marc Askew, *Conspiracy, Politics and a Disorderly Border: A Struggle to Comprehend Insurgency in Thailand's Deep South*, Policy Studies 29 (Southeast Asia), (Washington: East-West Centre, 2007).

battle zone”.⁸ Viewing the fight as one of the most serious incidents in the region in the past four decades, ASEAN offered to act as a mediator to resolve the conflict. The offer was rejected by Thailand which preferred to deal with the crisis on a bilateral basis, referring to ASEAN’s sacred principle of non-interference in internal affairs.

After the Democrat Party formed the government, Thailand’s relations with Cambodia had significantly deteriorated. Clearly, Hun Sen is not fond of the Abhisit government and was thus willing to challenge its legitimacy at the expense of worsening bilateral ties. In April 2009, the two countries’ troops clashed again, leaving two Thai and two Cambodian soldiers dead and several injured. Thailand shut Pha Mor E-Daeng cliff, and the Khao Phra Viharn National Park and its gate to the Preah Vihear temple in Si Sa Ket province. Throughout 2009, possible war between the two nations was simmering. This obliged Thai leaders to rethink their defence policy—conventional warfare has not gone out of fashion. Bilateral relations reached its lowest point in November 2009 after the two countries recalled their respective ambassadors, and the situation along their common border became extremely tense. It somehow gave the Thai military a chance to depict a deadly scenario of a possible war with Cambodia. The military, as a result, built 340 bunkers in two schools and several villages in Si Sa Ket near the site of the Preah Vihear as a sign of unease that had swept through this border town.⁹ Today, the tense situation has not yet subsided.

Threats from Myanmar

Myanmar has long served as an origin of threats to the Thai state, either in the historical context or more contemporary period, and even when the two countries enjoyed amicable relations, as seen during the Thaksin administration (2001-2006). Threats from Myanmar come in various forms, ranging from illegal immigrants, narcotic production and trafficking, ethnic insurgencies and its alleged nuclear programme. Despite viewing these threats from a national security perspective, the military also bears in mind the consequences that could impact other sectors in Thai society, particularly the socio-economic sector. At present, Thailand is home to more

⁸ “Combat Breaks out at Thai-Cambodian Border”, *USA Today*, 15 October 2008.

⁹ Marwaan Macan-Markar, “Thai-Cambodia Tension Gives Rise to Schools with Bunkers”, *IPS*, 24 November 2009 <<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=49385>> (accessed 13 February 2010).

than two million migrants from Myanmar—less than half have been legally registered. While migrant workers from Myanmar, legal or illegal, are important assets to Thailand's rapidly growing economy, they also pose threats to local communities.¹⁰ Some have engaged in the criminal underground, such as drug trafficking. In fact, there is a strong connection between migrant workers from Myanmar and narcotic activities in Thailand.

In the eyes of the Thai authorities, eliminating drugs is an uphill task. In 2000, in my interview with Kachadpai Burusapatana, Secretary-General of the NSC, he identified “drugs” as the most pertinent threat to the Thai nation.¹¹ Previously as one of the world's major producers of opium, Thailand has suffered from massive inflows of drugs from Myanmar, now in the form of methamphetamine, better known as *ya ba* (crazy pills). The situation was so problematic that Prime Minister Thaksin declared the “war on drugs” campaign in 2003 which ended tragically as more than 2,500 drug suspects were extra-judicially executed by state authorities. Today, drugs remain an immediate threat to Thailand. The Abhisit Vejjajiva government launched a similar campaign against drugs on 1 April 2009. Abhisit cited frightening new evidence that the rate of addiction was rising once again. His figures appeared to confirm the general feeling throughout the country that neither drug suppression nor treatment has been adequate. He also promised to increase border security to fight drug trafficking, but this may be difficult and ultimately prone to failure due to the porous border Thailand shares with Myanmar.¹² Coupled with the problem of drugs are the continuing armed clashes between certain ethnic minorities and the *tatmadaw* (Myanmar's army). There are a number of ethnic minorities which have refused to conclude ceasefire agreements with the Myanmar government. Some minorities, although initially consenting to the agreements, have changed their mind following the state's implementation of the Border Guard Force (BGF) program through which all ethnic armies would be incorporated under the *tatmadaw*. Ethnic minorities interpreted the programme as the state's attempt to neutralise their military strength. Skirmishes have occurred, thus creating instability along the Thai-Myanmar border

¹⁰ Thitinan Pongsudhirak, “Thailand's Security Outlook: External Trends and Internal Crises”, *Asia Pacific Countries' Security Outlook and its Implications for the Defence Sector*, The NIDS International Workshop on Asia Pacific Security, NIDS Joint Research Series No. 5 (2010), p. 86.

¹¹ Interview took place in Bangkok, Thailand, 9 March 2000.

¹² “Burma Key to War on Drugs”, *Bangkok Post*, 25 March 2009.

and bringing about other problems, including the encroachment of the *tatmadaw* into Thai territory (during hot pursuits) and the influx of refugees.

But what has really terrified Thailand most has been the rumour of Myanmar seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. Naypyidaw's close relations with Pyongyang did not help the situation. In my discussion with a foreign ministry official responsible for the nuclear issue, she confirmed that Thailand has kept a watchful eye on nuclear development in Myanmar.¹³ The obscurity of the issue has put Thailand in a difficult position. The inaccessibility of information from inside Myanmar only encourages further speculation on Myanmar's nuclearisation. More importantly, Thailand's heavy reliance on imports of gas and oil from Myanmar has prevented it from harshly criticising its neighbour. Thailand imports about one billion cubic feet of gas per day from Myanmar's offshore reserves in the Andaman Sea for power generation.¹⁴ In 2007, it was revealed that Myanmar earned US\$2.7 billion from its export of gas alone to Thailand.¹⁵ The country's dependence on gas and oil from Myanmar has left its energy sector vulnerable. The disruption of energy flows from Myanmar could devastatingly affect the Thai economy, thus revealing an inexorable linkage between the energy sector and national security. Thailand has continued to boost its economic ties with Myanmar, as was seen recently by the signing of a contract between Italian-Thai Development Public Company Limited and Myanmar Port Authority for a deep-sea port project, known as the Dawei project, with an estimated value of about US\$13 billion, and will include a Special Economic Zone, Industrial Estate, railway, roads, a refinery and a steel mill. But more Thai investments in Myanmar could prove to be an inevitable paradox for Thailand—the need to economically engage with Myanmar has narrowed its policy options toward this neighbouring country.

Non-Traditional Threats

Thailand is known by visitors for its natural beauty. Ironically, it is also known as a

¹³ Interviews (telephone and email) with Ms Pattarat Hongthong, Counsellor at the Peace, Security and Disarmament Division, Department of International Organisation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, from 6-10 August 2009.

¹⁴ "Thailand Eyes Myanmar's Natural Gas Reserves", *Indo-Burma News*, 31 July 2006 <http://www.indoburmanews.net/indian-buz-in-burma/gas/gas_3> (accessed 7 January 2011).

¹⁵ <http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/asiapacific/news/article_1398828.php/Myanmar_s_gas_exports_to_Thailand_earn_2_7_billion_dollars_in_2007> (accessed 7 January 2011).

favourite destination of various kinds of transnational criminals. In past years, Thailand has made numerous world headlines, mostly as a location where arms dealers met, passed through, or were arrested. The high-profile cases of suspected Russian arms trader Victor Bout (who was arrested in Bangkok in 2008 and extradited to the United States in late 2010 on charges of selling weapons to terrorist groups) and the seizure of an aircraft transporting more than 40 tons of North Korean weapons in 2009 reconfirmed Thailand's notorious role in the trade and smuggling of arms. Similarly, the country has become a hub for the drugs trade. Exploiting its lax law enforcement, narcotic traffickers have turned Thailand into a transit point to re-export drugs to various destinations in the world.

Meanwhile, the ongoing prevalence and spread of infectious diseases has engendered direct political and socio-economic consequences for Thailand. HIV/AIDS is still regarded as a threat since Thailand is home to the largest HIV-positive population in the region. Thailand, regarded globally as a leader in efforts to combat the problem, has run an aggressive and increasingly successful anti-AIDS public awareness campaign, resulting in a dramatic decrease in a number of new HIV infections.¹⁶ But the many high risk factors and changing disease transmission trends are set to hinder the fight against its national and international spread. Avian influenza is another significant threat and ongoing health concern in Thailand. Up to the present, Thailand, one of the world's largest poultry exporters, has experienced 25 human cases of the disease with 17 fatalities. In June 2009, the spread of Influenza A (H1N1) reached an alarming level. The Thai Ministry of Public Health confirmed that there were 518 H1N1 patients.¹⁷ A month later, H1N1 claimed the lives of 65 people in Thailand with over 8,800 local cases recorded.¹⁸ In Thailand, these infectious diseases continue to be viewed as a serious threat to both human security and economic wellbeing.

Last but not least, natural disasters have recently emerged as the most unpredictable threat to Thailand. The Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 served as a wake-up call for Thailand's security establishment in its need for preparedness to cope with natural

¹⁶ Joseph J. Hobbs, *World Regional Geography*, 6th Edition, (Belmont: Brooks/Cole, 2009), P. 346.

¹⁷ "113 New Flu Cases Raise Total to 518", *Bangkok Post*, 18 June 2009.

¹⁸ <<http://www.thaivest.com/h1n1-could-knock-2-2-percentage-points-off-economy/>> (accessed 7 January 2011).

disasters as the latest kind of non-traditional threat. The army has been urged to venture into this new humanitarian role. Recently, 28 provinces in Thailand were submerged under floodwaters after monsoon downpours and flash floods hit the country on 10 October 2010. Almost 40 lives were claimed by the deluge and approximately 2.5 million people suffered. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports issued a report on the flood impact saying that it led to a loss in tourist revenue of at least US\$1.67. The assessment did not include the costs of repairs for the damaged infrastructure which reached US\$6.7 million.¹⁹

Impact on Defence Policy

Differences in regime type and political context, to a varying degree, influence the nation's security outlook. It is normal that under a military regime, conventional threats are treated as the most serious because they allow leaders to further consolidate their grip on power. In a democratic system, a country's defence policy tends to become much broader and not so military-centric. But this rule is not set in stone, only a guide to understanding Thailand's defence policy. Since the military coup, the role of the army has been prominent in the security policy-making process with little participation from civilians. The military has taken new initiatives, particularly in redefining the faces of enemies, reinventing new threats to national security and reinvigorating its own power through defence budget augmentation. Implementing its current defence white paper (2007-2011), the security establishment's immediate tasks are to heal the deep division within Thai society, and to prepare Thai society to deal with a rise in political violence. As for its long-term strategy, protecting the dignity of the monarchical institution has been made the uncompromising top priority.²⁰ The notion of national security has been tightly bound with the legitimacy of the ruling elite. When the nation is under threat, the ruling elite's legitimacy is also at risk. They tend to equate the state of national security with that of their own security. Likewise, when faced with any challenge that could make them politically insecure, they are quick to explain it away as a threat to the security of the nation.

¹⁹ "Flood Causes \$1.67 Million in Damage to Thailand's Tourism", *Xinhua*, 25 October 2010 <<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/7175633.html>> (accessed 7 January 2011).

²⁰ *Nayobai Khwam Mangkhong Haeng Chat Phor Sor 2550-2554 (National Security Policy 2007-2011)* (Bangkok: National Security Council, 2007) <http://www.nsc.go.th/files/attach_doc/strategy_doc/PolicySecurity50.pdf> (accessed November 17, 2009).

Therefore, the military did not hesitate to launch brutal crackdowns against red-shirted demonstrators, depicted as a threat to its own power. Similarly, Thailand showed little interest in promoting a working relationship with Cambodia, but was content to adopt a military option to deal with border tensions vis-à-vis Cambodia. This was not only because the Abhisit government enjoyed firm backing from the military, but also because the military saw the benefit in taking a decisive stance in the name of defending national security even when its actions could seriously hurt bilateral ties.

From the above perspective, what are the implications on the force structure and defence procurement? First, Thailand has begun rebalancing the focus of its force structure, by paying equal attention to urban warfare (in reference to a series of violent street protests), external defence (in the case of Cambodia in particular), and serving humanitarian functions (in the case of natural disasters). There have been calls for new recruits to join the state's security forces. Meanwhile, it is clearly noticeable that the annual defence budget has increased progressively since the military coup of 2006. According to *the Asian Defence Journal*, Thailand's defence budget stood at US\$3.2 billion in 2006, 3.6 in 2007, 4.1 in 2008, 4.5 in 2009, and 5.1 in 2010.²¹ The Thai Defence Minister Prawit Wongsuwon refuted the allegation that the military was rewarded for its role in leading the crackdowns and containing the riots in May 2010 with a larger budget in the coming year.²² The *Asia Times* reported that in the 2011 fiscal budget, the military plans to modernise its force structure by purchasing assault rifles, machine guns, artillery pieces, surface-to-air missiles, trucks, engineering vehicles, armoured personnel carriers, tanks, and Blackhawk and Cobra attack helicopters. Funds have also been earmarked for upgrading and repairing old equipment, including the army's aging UH-1 Huey helicopters. Military officers claim that the purchases will be necessary to replace the outdated equipment and bring its capabilities to a level comparable with its neighbours. They also cited the renewed security threat of the Muslim insurgency in the country's southernmost regions.²³ Here, the military quickly grasped an opportunity that came with the coup and its mounting influence in politics to enlarge its defence budget.

²¹ Source: "Thai Defence Budget Allocation", *Asian Defence Journal*, 2010.

²² "No Defence 'Reward' for Red Shirt Clean-Up", *Bangkok Post*, 28 May 2010.

²³ Brian McCartan, "Thai Military Puts up Spending on Defence", *Asia Times Online*, 26 February 2010 <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LB26Ae01.html> (accessed 7 January 2011).

In the context of regional security cooperation, Thailand has insisted on promoting the ASEAN framework and other international organisations to ensure that regional peace and security is safeguarded. It has supported the work of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), as reassuring its commitment to the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ). Additionally, Thailand values its military alliance with the United States as reflected in their annual military exercise known as Cobra Gold. In 2003, Thailand was awarded a major non-NATO ally status—a move deemed to further enhance Thai-U.S. military ties. Meanwhile, the country has commenced a similar military joint exercise with China recently, as part of expanding its defence capabilities. This prompted the United States to pay greater attention to its Cobra Gold exercise so as to respond to China's growing military presence in the region. Despite its supposed commitment to regional security cooperation, however, Thailand, on numerous occasions, had rejected ASEAN's offers to mediate in its bilateral conflicts with neighbouring countries (the case of Cambodia) and its internal crises (the southern insurgency). This attitude exposes Thailand's low level of confidence in regional mechanisms and a certain political vulnerability on the part of the ruling regime. Contrary to its preferred image of a progressive member of ASEAN, Thailand has in fact upheld tightly to the traditional principle of non-interference when it comes to managing its own internal and foreign affairs.