



Mahidol University
International College

ICIR 215 Thai Foreign Policy

Course Description & Aims:

This course outlines the evolution of Thai foreign policy from the nineteenth century to the present day. It will enable students to develop their understanding of the rationale and goals behind the Thai foreign policy-making process and evaluate the success of those policies.

Students will examine and evaluate a selected case study related to Thai foreign policy. The influence of geopolitics on Thailand's foreign policy; pre-modern interstate relations and concepts in Southeast Asia and their continuing influence; Siam's relations with the Western imperial powers in the colonial period; the evolution of Thailand's foreign policy and relations during the First and Second World Wars; Thailand's foreign policy during the Cold War, especially its relations with the USA; the formulation and effects of current Thai policies regarding ASEAN, the UN, APEC, and other regional and international organizations; the evolution and impacts of current Thai bilateral relations with China, the Koreas, Japan, and India. Students will discuss the formulation, evolution and results of Thai foreign policy from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, with a particular focus on analyzing the decision-making process in a selected case study.

Lecturer: Ambassador Isorn Pokmontri

Office number: Office Hours: By appointment

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Assessment

Classroom participation	10%
Mid-term examination	20%
Group presentations	30%
Final examination	40%

Course Learning Outcomes

At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. Describe the main issues in and effects of Thai foreign policy from the nineteenth century to the present day
2. Discuss and analyze the decision-making process behind the formulation of Thai foreign policy
3. Compare and contrast the decision-making process and implementation of Thai foreign policy with those of other countries
4. Evaluate the success of Thai foreign policy in regards to a selected case study
5. Express and defend one's own ideas, while commenting on other people's opinions constructively

Topic No.	Topic
1	Introduction and Course Overview: Thailand's Geopolitical Situation and its Foreign Policy Implications
2	Pre-Modern Interstate Relations and Trade in Mainland Southeast Asia
3	Siam and Western Imperialism
4	Siam/Thailand and the World Wars
5	Thailand and the Cold War
6	Review and Mid-Term Examination
7	Thai Foreign Policy Actors and Formulation in the Post-Cold War World
8	Thai Regional Foreign Policy and Relations with ASEAN
9	Thai Bilateral Relations with the US, China and Japan
10	Thai Public Diplomacy, Nation Branding and Competitive Identity
11	Group Presentations: Case Studies on Selected Issues in Thai Foreign Policy
12	Review

Assessment Methods & Criteria

1. Classroom Participation (10%).

Students will receive between 0% and 5% for attendance, with lateness also being taken into consideration. Students will also receive between 0% and 5% for participating in class; this includes being an active member of a group during group work activities, and asking and answering questions.

2. Mid-Term Examination (20%)

The mid-term exam will be held in Week 6 and cover all the topics from Weeks 1 to 5. It consists of 3 sections. Section A (20%) is a matching exercise that tests students on the definitions of key words including people, places, concepts, events and terms. Section B (30%) consists of a number of essay questions related to the lectures and readings done in class; the students write a short essay answering one of these questions. Section C (50%) consists of a number of essay questions based on the take-home weekly reading assignments; students write an essay answering one of the questions.

3. Group Presentations (30%)

The group presentations will be conducted in Week 11. In groups of three or four, students will present on a case study on an issue or event that they have chosen in discussion with the lecturer. The case study can cover an event or agreement from the past or present. They will be expected to present the background to the issue or event, explain the aims and actions of Thai foreign policy practitioners, and evaluate their success (60%). They will then take part in a Q&A session (10%). They are also required to submit an executive summary of their presentation individually (30%).

4. Final Examination (40%)

The final examination is held in Week 13. It consists of two sections, each worth 50% of the total mark. Section A consists of a number of essay questions based on the take-home weekly reading assignments done between Weeks 7 and 12. Section B involves reading a short, previously unseen text related to one or more of the topics covered in the entire course and then writing an essay answering the related question.

Introduction

Topic description: Thailand's Geopolitical Situation and its Foreign Policy Implications. Students will be introduced to the course outline and forms of assessment. The lecturer will explain some of the key features of Thailand's geopolitical situation at the heart of mainland Southeast Asia and between India and China, along with its natural and human resources in the past and present. The students and lecturer will discuss the implications of these for the formulation of Thai foreign policy in the past, present and future.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to discuss how Thailand's geopolitical situation has affected Thai foreign policy in the past and present. They will also be able to describe the main determinants and features of Thai foreign policy.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students brainstorm the purposes of foreign policy.
- In class: While studying a topographic map of Asia, students discuss the advantages and disadvantages of Thailand's geopolitical situation and how these might have affected Thai foreign policy.
- Take-home reading: Arne Kislenko, 'Bending with the Wind: The Continuity and Flexibility of Thai Foreign Policy', *International Journal*, Vol. 57 No. 4 (August 2002), pp. 537-561.

Pre-Modern Interstate Relations and Trade in Mainland Southeast Asia

Topic description: Students will be introduced to how the interstate relations of mainland Southeast Asia were conducted before the mid-nineteenth century and the ways in which scholars have tried to describe and characterize them, particularly the concepts of the mandala state and overlord-tributary relations. The importance of international trade and the role of the Chinese, Europeans and other foreigners in the region will also be considered, with particular attention being paid to relations with the Dutch and the French during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Students and the lecturer will discuss the implications of these features and phenomena for Thai foreign policy in the past, present and future.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to describe the main features of pre-modern interstate relations of mainland Southeast Asia and the ways in which scholars have conceptualized them. They will also be able to discuss the implications of these features for Thai foreign policy in the past, present and future.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students review previous week's content by discussing reasons why foreigners came to Southeast Asia regularly and consistently over time.
- In-class reading: Selected letters from the Siamese court to the Dutch East India Company in Batavia (mid-C17th to C18th) see <https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/hartakarun/category/21/>
- In class: Students discuss how interstate relations were conducted in pre-modern Southeast Asia and their influence today.
- Take-home reading: Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation*, Ch. 4 'Sovereignty', Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994.

Siam and Western Imperialism

Topic description: Students will be introduced to the challenges Western imperialism in the nineteenth century presented to Siamese sovereignty and the response of the Siamese government. Particular attention is paid to the reasons why Siam was able to remain politically independent, even while it became a semi-colony of the Western imperial powers in fiscal, economic and juridical terms through the imposition of so-called unequal treaties such as the Bowring Treaty. Students and the lecturer will compare and contrast the semi-colonial situation of Siam with that of the Ottoman Empire and China. Students will also consider the difficulties caused by the extraterritorial privileges granted to subjects of the treaty powers.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to discuss and explain how Siam remained independent during the colonial period. They will also be able to compare and contrast the situation of Siam in the colonial period with that of other non-colonised Asian countries.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students brainstorm reasons why Siam was never formally colonized.
- In class reading: Students analyse selected correspondence between King Mongkut/Rama IV and Western diplomats (1851-1868) see M.R. Seni Pramoj & M.R. Kukrit Pramoj, *A King of Siam Speaks*, Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1987.
- In class: Students brainstorm problems caused by extraterritoriality.
- Take-home reading: Selected treaties, e.g. the 1905 Franco-Siamese Treaty and 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty, and commentary on extraterritoriality and Siamese jurisdiction, e.g. Eldon R. James, 'Jurisdiction over Foreigners in Siam', *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 16 No. 4 (October 1922), pp. 585-603.

Siam/Thailand and the World Wars

Topic description: Students will be introduced to the factors that shaped Siam/Thailand's foreign policy in the First and Second World Wars and the interwar period. Particular attention is paid to the reasons why Siam entered World War One on the side of the Allies, such as the desire to renegotiate the unequal treaties, and why Thailand entered World War Two on the side of the Japanese, such as the desire to recover the so-called 'lost territories' in French Indochina. The motivations for and significance of Siam's membership and participation in the League of Nations during the interwar period are also examined.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to explain the motivations behind Siam/Thailand's decisions to enter the First and Second World Wars. They will also be able to discuss the significance of Siam's involvement in the League of Nations.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students brainstorm reasons why Siam entered the First World War on the side of the Allies.
- In class reading: Siam's declaration of war against Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1917.
- In class: Students brainstorm reasons why Thailand entered the Second World War on the side of the Japanese.
- Take home reading: Stefan Hell, *Siam and the League of Nations: Modernisation, Sovereignty and Multilateral Diplomacy, 1920-1940*, Ch. 2 'Siam at Geneva: Attitudes, Aims, Individuals and Contributions', Bangkok: River Books, 2010.

Thailand and the Cold War

Topic description: Students will be introduced to the role Thailand played in the Cold War as an ally of the United States of America and the impact that this had on the country and its foreign policy. Particular attention will be paid to the reasons why Thailand allied itself with the US at a relatively early stage in the Cold War and the country's involvement in the Second Indochina War (the Secret War in Laos and the Vietnam War). Thailand's membership of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), its formative role in the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the reestablishment of Thailand's relations with communist China will also be considered.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to explain why Thailand allied itself with the US during the Cold War. They will also be able to evaluate the impact this alliance had on domestic politics, Thai society and Thai foreign policy. Lastly, they will be able to discuss Thailand's membership of SEATO and ASEAN, and the reestablishment of Thailand's relations with China.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students brainstorm reasons why Thailand allied itself with the US.
- In-class reading: Selected documents related to the 1947 military coup from Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thai Politics: Extracts and Documents, 1932-1957*, Vol. 1, Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1978.
- In class: Students brainstorm reasons why Thailand sought to improve relations with China.
- Take-home reading: Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958*, Pt. 2 'U.S. Military Aid and the Transformation of Thai Foreign Policy', Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

Review and Mid-Term Examination

Topic description: Review and Mid-Term Examination

Expected learning outcomes: N/A

Readings and activities:

Predicting possible topics and essay questions

Reviewing reading assignments

Thai Foreign Policy Actors and Formulation in the Post-Cold War World

Topic description: With the end of the Cold War, Thailand's external security improved immeasurably. This allowed the country to pursue foreign policy goals that went beyond securing the country's independence. From the late 1980s and the government of Chatichai Choonhavan onwards, Thailand sought to increase its regional influence and standing on the world stage through fostering trade and commercial contacts with its neighbours, on the one hand, and through promoting human rights and good governance, on the other. However, the frequent changes of government in the 1990s, combined with the fallout from the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, and the political turmoil that has engulfed the country since the mid-2000s has led to incoherency in foreign policy formulation. Moreover, governments have not been the only foreign policy actor, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military – even when not ruling the country – have continued to wield considerable influence, alongside corporate interests such as CP Group. Particular attention will be paid to the various factors that led to heightened tensions with Cambodia over the Preah Vihear/Khao Phra Viharn border temple in the late 2000s and early 2010s.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to describe the objectives of Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War World, how governments have tried to implement these goals and the problems they faced in doing so. They will be able to discuss how different internal actors and domestic politics have influenced foreign policy formulation.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students discuss the aims of Thai foreign policy in the post-Cold War World.
- In class reading: Selected speeches made by former Prime Ministers outlining their foreign policy objectives.
- In class: Students brainstorm different actors that have influence over foreign policy.
- Take-home reading: Kusuma Snitwongse, 'Thai Foreign Policy in the Global Age: Principle or Profit?', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 23 No. 2 (August 2001), pp. 189-212; and/or Gregory Vincent Raymond, *Thai Military Power: A Culture of Strategic Accommodation*, Ch. 7 'Minor External Security Crisis: Thailand-Cambodia Temple Conflict 2008-2011', Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2018.

Thai Regional Foreign Policy and Relations with ASEAN

Topic description: Following on from the previous topic, this topic examines how Thailand has attempted to play a leadership role within mainland Southeast Asia. Not only was it one of the main initiators of ASEAN in the 1960s but it has also played a key role in various regional and sub-regional cooperative initiatives and forums such as the Asia Cooperation Dialogue and the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). Indeed, under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), Thailand tried to transform itself from being a recipient of aid into being a donor to neighbouring countries. Attention will also be paid to how Thailand's relationship with ASEAN has shifted over the last fifty years, from being one of its first fully committed members to an increasing disengagement as Indonesia has adopted a leadership role within the organization and Thailand is no longer the outstanding example of democratization in Southeast Asia.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to discuss how Thailand has attempted to play a leadership role in Southeast Asia and evaluate its success in doing so. They will also be able to describe Thailand's involvement in various regional and sub-regional organizations. Lastly, they will be able to discuss Thailand's involvement in ASEAN since its foundation to the present day.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students brainstorm how Thailand might act as a leader in Southeast Asia.
- In class reading: Selected foreign policy documents on Thailand's involvement in regional and sub-regional groups.
- In class: Students discuss the purpose of ASEAN and Thailand's aims within the organization.
- Take-home reading: Pavin Chachavalpongpun, *Reinventing Thailand: Thaksin and His Foreign Policy*, Ch. 5 'A Moot Foreign Policy: Shortcomings and Oversights', Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010.

Thai Bilateral Relations with the US, China and Japan

Topic description: Since the Second World War, Thailand's most important bilateral relations have been those with the US, China and Japan. During the Cold War, the US was vital in securing Thailand's security and a close relationship with the superpower developed that has continued to this day. At the same time, Thailand sought to guarantee its security by developing relations with Communist China to limit the scope of Vietnamese ambitions in Southeast Asia. Japan, meanwhile, became Thailand's most important trading partner and investor. With the rise of China in the twenty-first century, however, Thailand's longstanding relations with the US and Japan have been disrupted as the country has sought to accommodate the interests of the new superpower and its current number one trading partner.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to describe how relations with the US, China and Japan have evolved since the Second World War. They will also be able to discuss the reasons for changes in the bilateral relations with these countries and how these changes impact upon present-day Thailand.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students brainstorm the pros and cons of Thailand's pursuit of close relations with the US, China and Japan.
- In class reading: Selected press statements and communiqués on Thailand's bilateral relations with the US, China and Japan.
- In class: Students discuss how and why bilateral relations with the US, China and Japan have changed over time.
- Take-home reading: Pongphisoot Busbarat, "Bamboo Swirling in the Wind": Thailand's Foreign Policy Imbalance between China and the United States', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 38 No. 2 (2016), pp. 233-257.

Thai Public Diplomacy, Nation Branding and Competitive Identity

Topic description: In the globalized world of the twenty-first century, most countries are acutely conscious of their international reputation. They engage in various activities and initiatives that are designed to enhance their international standing, including supporting overseas aid missions or peacekeeping in the field of public diplomacy, and investing in building up a positive national brand identity designed to attract tourists and investment. This week's topic will examine Thailand's efforts at public diplomacy and nation branding through exploring initiatives, such as the country's gastro-diplomacy in the Global Thai project launched in 2002 and ongoing attempts to amend international perceptions of the country as a sex-tourism destination.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to discuss how Thailand has engaged in public diplomacy and nation branding. They will also be able to evaluate the success of Thailand's public diplomacy and nation branding.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Students brainstorm things they associate with Thailand's brand image.
- In class reading: Selected promotional and advertising material related to tourism and gastro-diplomacy.
- In class: Students discuss how Thailand can improve its international reputation.

- Take-home reading: Krittiinee Nuttavuthisit, 'Branding Thailand: Correcting the Negative Image of Sex Tourism', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 21-30.

Group Presentations: Case Studies on Selected Issues in Thai Foreign Policy

Topic description: Students will select a particular issue or event related to Thai foreign policy over the last two hundred years, such as the signing of the Bowring Treaty in 1855, for instance, or the Preah Vihear/Khao Phra Viharn case at the International Court of Justice in the early 1960s. They

will do a case study presentation on this topic in which they outline the background to the issue or event, explain the aims and actions of Thai foreign policy practitioners, and evaluate their success in achieving their goals. Each presentation is followed by a 5-10-minute Q&A in which all students are expected to participate. See the Appendix for some recommended readings. If necessary, the presentations can also be done in the first session of Week 12.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to understand, interpret and analyze a particular case study related to Thai foreign policy.

Readings and activities:

- In class: Group presentations on a selected case study in Thai foreign policy with a Q&A.

Review

Topic description: Review

Expected learning outcomes: N/A

Readings and activities:

Predicting possible topics and essay questions

Reviewing reading assignments

Practice in-exam reading exercise