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Thailand's Geopolitical Power and Shaping of its Foreign Policy during the Third Indochina War

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Abstract

Geopolitics has become an important part of the study of international relations. Within that field of study is the concept of geopolitical power and the Rimland theory. This study utilizes the two forms of geopolitical power, land-power and sea-power, and the Rimland theory in analyzing how geopolitics affects foreign policy through the examination of Thailand's foreign policy actions during the Third Indochina War to determine what Thailand's geopolitical power was/is and to determine the connection between foreign policy and geopolitical power. This study utilized a secondary source, supported by semi-structured interviews with diplomatic officials with experience in foreign policy, to lend insight into the foreign policy actions. The study affirms that there is a connection between foreign policy and geopolitics, both negative and positive, in the construction of the national power required to conduct wider foreign policy choices. The study concluded that Thailand leaned towards being a sea-power, but could not be categorized as one, highlighting the need for a hybrid geopolitical power categorization. The implications of such are a more accurate categorization of insular countries within the Rimland theory, and supporting the explanation of the power potential and importance of these countries in geopolitics.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Sea-Power, Land-Power, Foreign Policy, Thailand, Third Indochina War*

1. Introduction

Geopolitical power is defined as the relationship between geography and other factors in the distribution of power in the world (Sprout, 1954). This is an important concept as geopolitics itself is rooted in *realpolitik* and is a sub-field of realism which deals with power and behavior. Deudney (1997) notes that the relationship between realism and geopolitics, most forms of geopolitics are actually types of realism and many insights of realism were first made by geopolitical theorists before the coining of the term *realpolitik*. Within the study of international relations, realism is broken up into four different kinds of power: hard, soft, economic and smart power. These forms of power go into constituting the abilities of the nation-state in carrying out policy. Geopolitical power proposes that these forms of power that make up national power are constructed and affected by geopolitical factors. This paper focuses on two forms of geopolitical power which are broken up as the following: sea-power and land-power.

Foreign policy is defined as the sum of a state's activities and interaction in relation to foreign states and non-state actors, with instruments comprising economic and trade policy, foreign aid, diplomacy, military action, and participation in international organizations (Eskenazi, 2015). Foreign policy therefore encompasses policy that is directed at or affects foreign entities. To understand how foreign policy is influenced by geopolitical power, one must view it in terms of grand strategy. Grand strategy is a set of guidelines that shape foreign policy and its associated instruments designed to maximize the pursuit of a national interest/goal (Eskenazi, 2015). Here, geopolitical power is viewed as that 'set of guidelines' as it constructs and impacts the instruments available for the conduction and implementation of foreign policy and national interest. Nicholas Spykman, a geopolitical theorist, viewed geography and foreign policy as interwoven elements. For him, geopolitics was a specific field of foreign policy utilizing analysis of geographical factors to formulate adequate policies for the achievement of justifiable ends; often said ends were security related. Because of this, geopolitics becomes more than just static topographical positions, but rather it refers to "areas determined on the one hand by geography and on the other

by dynamic shifts in the centers of power, and what results is that the struggle for power itself will bring certain areas into prominence, push others into oblivion, and lead to the expansion or contraction of specific areas under consideration (Spykman et al., 1944)". The general aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between foreign policy and geopolitics and to argue that foreign policy is shaped by geopolitics.

This paper aims to contribute by drawing a greater amount of attention to the usage of geopolitical power in explaining and predicting foreign policy and its application to lesser powers. It also seeks to enhance understanding of the geopolitical power of Thailand - the focus of this research paper - through a case study of its foreign policy actions during the Third Indochina War and by relating these actions to established characteristics outlined in the geopolitical power theories. Thailand occupies a central position in mainland Southeast Asia and is part of the Indo-Pacific region, which has recently regained strategic importance in the eyes of major world powers. Thailand was not chosen at random as the country of focus but due to its unique status as it is somewhat of an outlier in the grouping of Southeast Asia. The country is not a big power but rather a medium power country. Despite this, Thailand has played a major role in regional politics such as being the originator for the idea of ASEAN and the neutral mediator that allowed the first five members to cooperate and form the organization after the failure of SEATO and MAPHALINDO. Its geopolitics is unique due to being a peninsular country, being able to be affected by both landward and seaward influences. This is seen in the past as it was a major naval trading hub and in the present through government policies to interconnect landward trading routes with its neighboring countries. During the colonial era it was never colonized and acted as a geographical buffer between the colonial territories of the United Kingdom and France. During World War Two, it was not conquered and annexed by Japan unlike the rest of the European colonies in the region, and during the Cold War, it was a staging ground for supporting the operations of the United States during the Second Indochina War. By the Third Indochina War, Thailand now had to pursue foreign policy independent of a big power backing.

Geopolitics is normally focused on big power countries, and it is no different when talking about the theories applied here. This paper will attempt to use it to analyze and look at a medium power country. More importantly, this is in the context of a medium power being analyzed where it cannot bandwagon with a big power; therefore, it cannot skew analysis of independent foreign policy action as it must now act in its own capacity which is required to understand how its foreign policy behavior reflects tendencies of the two geopolitical power theories. Therefore, allowing the induction and understanding of how geopolitical power influences and constructs foreign policy and figuring out what geopolitical power Thailand adheres to. This is why this research is focused on Thailand during the Third Indochina War, as it can no longer bandwagon with a big power and have them influence their foreign policy. Doing so will also help to shed light on using theories mainly applied to big power countries and their viability in examining other powers or whether it will need adjusting. For Thailand itself, figuring out the geopolitical power it adheres to will not just help in understanding its foreign policy better, but may also allow for better formation of foreign policy by understanding their competency.

This research paper has six sections. The first section will define terms and go over relevant literature. The second section will outline the objectives of the research. The third section will explain the methods and materials used in conducting the research. The fourth section will detail the findings of the research. The fifth section will discuss the findings and relate them to the objectives of the research. The sixth section will provide a brief conclusion to the research paper.

1.1 Literature on the Theories: Sea-Power, Land-Power and Rimland Theory

Sea-power is a concept first introduced by Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, and therefore he provides much of the definition of terms under the concept. Sea-power puts emphasis on the control and utilization of water routes, both riverine and oceanic, which can produce the most geopolitical power for a nation and its development. The origins of this approach typically result from peaceful naval commerce. It has six core principles which are the following (Mahan, 1890): 1) geographical position, 2) physical conformation, 3) extent of territory, 4) number of population, 5) character of the people, and 6) character of the government.

Geographical position is quite straightforward in the requirement of having access to waterways as a means of building national power through the sea but also has some nuances. A nation with no or limited land boundaries but access to waterways may end up directing all its focus upon said waterways for development, giving it a natural inclination towards national development through sea-power and therefore an advantage in pursuing sea-power (Mahan, 1890). An example of this is the United Kingdom up to the end of the Second World

War. But at the same time, having access to waterways may not exactly translate into immediate higher potential for sea-power. An example of this is the United States, which prior to the construction of the Panama Canal, saw it divided between two oceans with no short route to reach the other, which hindered the ability for the concentration of naval forces to meet threats in force and this resulted in the dispersion of forces as the most optimal defensive strategy (Mahan, 1890). Even in modern times, these limitations still remain in moving crucial navy forces through it. The United States' Nimitz-class carrier, built in 1975 with a beam of 40.84 meters, could not initially traverse through the Panama Canal due to Panamax terms setting the maximum beam at 30.8 meters but could go through the Panama Canal after the expansion with the Neopanamax in 2016, which allowed for beams up to 51.25 meters.

Physical conformation refers to the features of the land in reference to waterways. Elements to consider include number and accessibility of bordering seas from the seaboard, depth of water, tributary rivers, and number, capacity and defensibility of ports and harbors (Mahan, 1890).

Extent of territory refers simply to the length of a nation's coastline in relation to the population number and the character of its harbors (Mahan, 1890). A long coastline but a small population results in diminished sea-power as defending that coastline requires a dispersion of forces, which can be easily defeated in detail. The character of its harbors refers to the state of the harbors and their positioning (Mahan, 1890).

Number of population does not refer to the total number of people within a nation but the number of manpower engaged in naval activities and activities that support naval activities and the number of manpower available that can be engaged in those activities (Mahan, 1890).

National character refers to the character of the people of the nation regarding activities concerning the sea, typically in regards to commerce (Mahan, 1890). This assessment comes from a historical perspective where the most powerful European nations, for instance, the English and the Dutch, had sought economic power through overseas activities both in the form of colonial establishments and trading (Mahan, 1890).

Character of government represents the role the government plays in the development of sea-power. It encompasses policy decisions related to maritime management both in peace and in war. According to Mahan (1890), during peacetime, the government should favor policies that allow for the natural growth of people's industries and tendencies to seek gain via the sea and if such spirit does not exist then the government can take it upon themselves to develop it.

In terms of behavior, sea-powers have a tendency to build a large navy and design an aggressive strategic doctrine based around their usage. This is chiefly due to the average size of a country that adopts the usage of sea-power for often they lack the one thing that land-powers have in excess: land-mass. For example, England, the Netherlands, and Japan are all sea-powers that have made a mark upon the oceans in history and were contenders for regional and even global powers despite being much smaller than their adversaries. The core issue for them in a land battle was that they had too little territory to give, and their key city centers were located close to their coastline. The only viable defensive option is to rely upon the navy, whose chief job during the defensive stage of a war is to prevent a naval invasion (Mahan, 1941). Another hallmark of typical sea-power behavior is having or acquiring forward bases for the navy, mainly to help with force projection and provide security for their sea-borne commerce (Mahan, 1941). Lastly, sea-powers often do not act alone but prefer to act in tandem with allies and often seek out allies and these allies have a pattern of being land-powers themselves. For example, the United Kingdom during the Napoleonic Wars allied with land-powers like Prussia and Russia against France. Then later, during World War One, it allied with the French to contain the German Empire.

Land-power is a concept first introduced by Halford Mackinder through his heartland theory. For Mackinder (2004), power lay in the Eurasian region rather than the sea and water routes of the world, so controlling the Eurasian heartland was key to constructing power. Another theorist, Major General Dr. Karl Haushofer, presented similar notions in regards to land-power. While most of them contend with the concept of Raum or 'room' (Linn, 1961), his intentions were nationalistic in nature, as his concern was with restoring Germany's status as a major power after World War One (Sprout, 1954). Within the five fundamental ideas of his school of thought, Haushofer, when discussing sea-power versus land-power, states that land-power centered at the heart of the 'world island' of Eurasian and Africa would prevail over sea-power nations (Linn, 1961). Therefore, a major point for land-powers is having lots of land and being very territorial over it, which translates into their behavior. Key examples of stereotypical land-powers are, unsurprisingly, those situated in Eurasia like Russia and China.

According to Dr Sarah Paine (Hudson Institute, 2018), land-powers view neighbors as dangerous, and any instability will cross over borders. But stable neighbors were not also desirable as their agendas may be contrary to the land-power's interest. The purpose of the military therefore was for protecting the ruling regime, garrisoning the empire and for border defense with very few outside expeditions. As a result, land-powers are of a more defensive disposition which shows readily in the way they fight and design their hard power resources. This also means that they start less wars than a sea-power would and when they do start a war, have little chance of winning. Clear examples of this occurring are the Russo-Japanese War, the Soviet-Afghan War and even the War in Ukraine, which has stalled for the Russians. This is of course due to their defensive disposition as it is hard to win a fight when the preparations made are for that of a defensive battle. When the offensive stalls, land-powers go back to doing what they are good at: digging in and defending, hoping to wear down their opposition. In a defensive war like the eastern front of the European theater in World War Two, it can be effective but in an offensive war like the War in Ukraine, it can be quite meaningless. When translating land-power into hard power, one finds an inherent defensive advantage as no other power relies so much on geographical positioning as do land-powers. The defensive advantage is derived from the principle of interior lines and communications lines (Mahan, 1941).

The Rimland, also called insular states, was initially introduced by Mackinder as the peripheral region of the heartland. Spykman argued that the most important region of the world was not the heartland but its peripheries or the rimland. When writing about the power dynamics of the Rimland, Spykman identifies that in East Asia, China would be the dominant power given two factors: that it is properly unified and that Japan's military power is completely destroyed. Arguably in the present this is true as China is largely unified now and Japan's military power is largely not of its own but borrowed from the United States. Furthermore, countries that had become global powers had become so through domination of rimland territories. Britain for example, despite being a small island had become a global power through its control of the Rimland. In contemporary times, the United States maintains control and influence over a vast area of the Rimland and also over a number of island chains in the Pacific which Spykman writes that any western power wanting to retain influence in East Asia, they will have to establish island bases power and such bases would likely be sufficient in contesting Chinese dominance over East Asia.

1.2 Literature Review on State's Geopolitical Power and Foreign Policy

They have already been several works in connecting a state's geopolitical power with foreign policy. This sub-section will go through a few of those works.

Parsaei et al., (2020) in their research, "Identifying Geopolitical Factors Affecting Foreign Policy," identify 56 factors which they grouped into seven categories: 1) geographic factors, 2) demographic factors, 3) economic factors, 4) political factors, 5) defense-security factors, 6) regional factors, and 7) global factors. The research highlights that among all the factors that go into the making of foreign policy, geopolitical factors are the most important, but conclude that there is not enough research into which factors matter the most in the making of foreign policy (Parsaei et al., 2020).

McInteer (1959), in "The Significance of Seapower to the United States," writes that the US is dependent both economically and militarily upon maritime transportation. The protection of sea lines of communication is a prerequisite and therefore sea-power has become an integral part of American security and survival. The fact is that sea-power allows the US to freely pursue its foreign policy, in the past piggybacking off of British sea-power before presently having to rely on its own sea-power (McInteer, 1959). The strategy of sea-power for the US is similar to the geopolitical thinking of Nicholas Spykman in that US security depended on maritime control of the Rimland. The security and safety of the United States depended upon control over her lines of communication and the avenues of approach to her borders. As a result, the reverse of the loss of control over these factors would reduce US power and its ability to carry out foreign policy (McInteer, 1959). As such, the greatest threat to the US and the pursuit of its national interests would be a Eurasian continent-based nation-state with absolute control or control through coalition of the maritime periphery (McInteer, 1959). Sea-power is the self-sustaining means by which the US can "achieve its national goals of security and prosperity" (McInteer, 1959).

Similarly, in his book, Admiral James Stavridis (2017) describes the usage of sea-power in the manner of a strategic concept or what this paper would refer to as a directed [foreign] policy. He explains it as "the ability to use sea-power to ultimately contain powerful nations that have concentrated their use of force ashore, ignoring

the sea out of lack of interest, or an inability to see the force of sea power argument, or simply because they lack the geography, character, or political will to exploit the oceans” (Stavridis, 2017).

In the sphere of nations in Southeast Asia, Alatas (2021), in “A Malaysian Perspective on Foreign Policy and Geopolitics: Rethinking West-Centric International Relations Theory,” provides a Malaysian perspective on foreign policy and geopolitics. The article describes the impact of Malaysian culture, based on historical pre-colonial texts and cultural practice, upon its foreign policy stance and views on geopolitics; namely the concept of *Kerajaan*, recognition by others of the raja-centered government, and *Nama*, prestige. *Kerajaan* is a ruling concept focused on ruler-subject as opposed to western ruler-territory foreign policy and is carried out by the ethnic Malay due to the fact that foreign policy choices are made by the ruling elite. It is the ethnic Malay that is the majority group that has consistently held political power; therefore, policy decisions made by the Malay elite are geared toward their own political survival (Alatas, 2021). Security, economic, and political choices are aimed at legitimizing the current regime and that legitimation is achieved by what can be identified and prioritized as foreign policy problems (Alatas, 2021). Pre-colonial Malaysia was already an internationally connected maritime polity with multiple trading nations and multiple diplomatic missions, as a result of its geographic position, which necessitated a more fluid concept of leadership (Alatas, 2021). For Alatas (2021), this also highlights an ability to be flexible in policy. When it comes to *Nama* and foreign policy, Alatas (2021) mentions that external engagement enhances Malaysia’s prestige, evident in its many diplomatic missions around the world, while reinforcing the economic and political benefits for the domestic elite. As a result of this understanding of Malaysia’s geopolitics being based upon the aforementioned *Kerajaan* and *Nama* in its foreign policy, Alatas (2021) explains that to view Malaysia’s behavior from a Western perspective would be wrong. For example, in regards to Sino-Malay relations, it would construe Malaysia as bandwagoning with China even though it is actually normal behavior as Malaysia has no preference to align with any power.

1.3 Thai Foreign Policy During the Indochina Wars

This sub-section will detail a selection of literature on Thai foreign policy during the Indochina Wars.

Maisrikrod (1992) highlights that Thai foreign policy had always been reactionary, like traditional assertions of bamboo diplomacy not proactive during the Cold War, but Thailand attempted to change its reactionary stance towards Indochina in the post-Cold War environment. Additionally, Buszynski (1982) provides a similar outlook to Maisrikrod in viewing that Thailand’s foreign policy is reactionary in the form of bamboo diplomacy hedging between major powers as a means of protection against security threats. Thailand had allied with the US as it was opposed to Vietnam, which was a historic enemy, but found itself in the middle of a foreign policy crisis after the US withdrew from Vietnam. Buszynski (1982) believed that Thai foreign policy was one that was developed as a means to protect Thailand by catering to the dominant regional power which was shifting during the post-Second Indochina War period.

Sirichote (1986) writes on the connection between traditional realist theory and Thai foreign policy, presenting that Thailand’s foreign policy had always been realist in nature. According to Sirichote (1986), “realism influences the foreign policy of all states” and a “realistic foreign policy must be flexible and able to adapt to changing conditions”. In Sirichote’s (1986) opinion, Thailand had a reputation for having a realistic traditional diplomacy among Asian nations and Thai foreign policy has always been determined by its realist bent and implemented through balancing major powers and leveraging them against perceived threats. This can be seen in the work by Suhrki (1971), who notes that the US was a major ally and a preferred foreign policy tactic of Thailand was to accommodate a big power. However, the US withdrawal had compounded several problems for Thailand and had created a diplomatic dilemma for them during the beginning of the 1970s. The first was economic, as Thailand faced a recession due to its continued reliance on an agricultural-heavy export economic model and its insufficient foreign reserves to weather a prolonged balance of payments deficit. The US withdrawal also created fears that the US would stop investing in Thailand, as it no longer had need of its military bases, thereby reducing the strategic significance of Thailand to the United States (Suhrki, 1971). The second was security due to the withdrawal of US forces. Additionally, nationalism in Thailand also saw a surge. This was not just due to the withdrawal of the United States from Indochina, but also because Thailand felt betrayed by the United States due to negative rhetoric from politicians in Capitol Hill which was not only just directed at the Second Indochina War but also at Thailand itself (Suhrki, 1971). The strained relationship was further compounded by US protest against Thai legislative changes to reduce favoritism towards foreign businesses which

included other countries and not just the United States alone; as one of the changes was aimed at reducing competition from Japanese investors (Suhrki, 1971).

Furthermore, the Thai government had become exasperated at the American style of diplomacy, which was found to be unpredictable, and the disclosure of a secret Thai-American pact in the senate without the consent of the Thai government were major blows to Thai sensitivity and pride (Suhrki, 1971). During that time, much of Thai foreign policy was devised by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Thanat Khoman, with little input from officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the newly reintroduced parliament (Suhrki, 1971). This is because parliamentarians regarded foreign policy as his exclusive domain and did not interfere due to lack of information and knowledge about foreign affairs (Suhrki, 1971). The Thai pursuit for regional cooperation was due to Dr. Thanat's view that ASEAN and ASPAC could become major pillars for a Pax Asiana; that rather than using military alliances, political and economic cooperation would be better for strengthening the smaller Asian countries (Suhrki, 1971). The increase in nationalism also made this move easier as it was an approach that rejected direct involvement from the West and focused on indirect involvement from major powers in the region as a countermeasure to Asian Marxist influence in Southeast Asia.

It should be noted that Dr. Thanat did not view regional cooperation as a form of neutralism as neutrality in the conflict between the free Asian nations and Asian Marxism was an impossible policy to achieve (Suhrki, 1971). Thai regional cooperation was somewhere in between Bandung neutralism and military alliances. The shift in foreign policy from being an accommodation tactic toward bigger powers to one influenced by self-reliance and regional cooperation shows a desire to be more flexible in foreign affairs, but it found itself constrained domestic issues and a lack of options on the external side (Suhrki, 1971).

Following up on the timeline of the conflict, Phonprapai (2021), in her doctoral thesis "Battlefield to Marketplace: Responses to Thailand's Major Foreign Policy Change," analyzes Thailand's foreign policy change from conflict to cooperation with communist countries during the Third Indochina War—focused mainly on the end of the conflict. The thesis falls within the field of foreign policy analysis, with a focus on leadership in the decision-making process. Phonprapai (2021) writes that "Chatichai's policy seems to go against what has been described as bamboo diplomacy in the practice of Thai foreign policy" and argues that Chatichai's decision to introduce a new policy was influenced by his judgement of the trends of events of an ever-evolving situation, combined with his own personality and experience. For Phonprapai (2021), what made Chatichai's diplomacy stand out from the past is that it caught most people by surprise and appeared to go against the general agreement on the handling of the Cambodian problem.

Phonprapai (2021) takes a similar approach to the discipline of foreign policy analysis and describes the various people and institutions that made up Chatichai's advisory, decision-making, and implementation team—as well as the operational environment of Thailand which included its economic capability, degree of democracy and the security imposed by the presence and incursions of Vietnamese troops on to Thailand. All of this formed the context for policy-making. According to Phonprapai (2021), typical bamboo diplomacy in Thai foreign policy was flexible but initiated following the footsteps of a major power, Chatichai on the other hand had moved to initiate his foreign policy independently before any major power had made a move. Chatichai believed that there was more to be gained by peaceful trading with Indochina, as opposed to sanctioning them (Phonprapai, 2021).

1.4 Addressing the Literature Gap

There has been little to no research on the application of the concepts of geopolitical power to Thailand, let alone on applying the theories to lesser powers. The literature reviewed in the above sections focused on either applying the theories to major powers or using a traditional approach of foreign policy analysis when looking at the foreign policy of Thailand. The fact of the matter is that geopolitics, itself being related to traditional realism, is often focused on nation-states that are big powers and not nation-states that are small or middle powers. The theories used in the explanation of geopolitical power in this paper also do not originate from contemporary political thought but rather from other fields. As mentioned in their relevant sections, land-power is a concept initially introduced by Halford Mackinder, who is a geographer; sea-power, within this paper, is a concept largely introduced by Admiral Alfred T. Mahan, who is a naval theorist, and his works are more prominent in military theory as opposed to political theory. Nonetheless, this paper has chosen to use these theories as a practical means of understanding the behavior of nation-states. While the methods reviewed in the literature are viable for analyzing foreign policy, this paper argues that the approach of using geopolitical power will have the advantage

of being able to predict future behavior as it identifies common behavior and strategy inherent in adherents of the specified geopolitical power theory.

2. Objectives

- 1) To examine the causal relationship between foreign policy and geopolitical power.
- 2) To explore how Thailand's geopolitical stance affected its foreign policy choices during the Third Indochina War.

3. Materials and Methods

The research of this paper was done under the qualitative research method with an inductive approach, as the research method of this paper is documentary analysis with support from semi-structure interviews to determine which geopolitical power theory has shaped Thai foreign policy through the examination of correlating patterns to each theory with the end goal of answering the research questions and objectives.

The documentary analysis was done on a secondary source written by H.E. Surapong Chaiyanam who was Ambassador to Hanoi from 1991-1992 and was a diplomatic officer to Vietnam prior to that, which gave him direct knowledge and access to Foreign Ministry archives of foreign policy and decisions during the Third Indochina War - therefore making him the best source of information on what occurred during that time from a diplomatic standpoint and the information gathered is further supported by semi-structured interviews with Thai diplomats and military officials to correlate data and provide additional data on Thailand's geopolitical power and foreign policy during that time.

The selection criteria required were: 1) a field of expertise and/or experience in international relations and related fields, 2) an occupation in diplomatic and/or related occupations, and 3) 8 or more years of experience for the purposes of ruling out junior officers. The semi-structured interviews were done with a predetermined questionnaire but additional questions were asked in relation to the specialty of the interviewee to attain additional data.

All interviewees have provided consent to their answers being used in the research but their names have been withheld from this paper and direct quotations due to reasons of privacy and permissions. As such, the interviewees have been labeled as Participant A, B, C, D, E, and F throughout the research with no relation to the numbering in the table below.

The primary method of the semi-structured interview was through the distribution of questionnaires with common questions and if deemed necessary as a result of the specialty of the interviewee, specific targeted questions were asked. This was chosen as the primary method due to the availability of the interviewees as a result of their occupations, and it was regarded as the least intrusive method. The secondary method of the interview was conducted through telecommunication and recorded through notation. The way the data from here was analyzed involved looking for correlations between the common question answers to improve validity of the answers by providing a general consensus; and then with comparison to historic events, it aimed to provide an answer to the questions. The answers provided by the targeted questions will be used to provide extra evidence in answering the research questions. There is no time frame for the study as it mainly focuses on events in the past and not the present and therefore is not an everchanging situation; but the interviews were conducted between the months of September-October 2024.

The research was framed under the understanding that the national power of a country is constructed by its geopolitical power and, as a result, foreign policy actions can be determined by geopolitical power as foreign policy choices themselves are limited by national power. As a result, the geopolitical power of a country can be seen through its geography and foreign policy actions.

Table 1 Interview Participant Information

No.	Name	Position	Affiliation
1	Undisclosed	Minister (Economic and Financial)	Undisclosed
2	Undisclosed	Former Thai Ambassador to Kenya, Egypt and Germany, Former Deputy Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3	Undisclosed	Former Thai Ambassador to the United States and United Kingdom	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4	Undisclosed	Navy Attaché	Royal Thai Navy
5	Undisclosed	Counsellor	Undisclosed
6	Undisclosed	Minister Counsellor	Undisclosed

4. Results

The ultimate aim of Thai foreign policy with regard to the Invasion of Cambodia was for the Vietnamese to withdraw their troops from Cambodia without any conditions and for the Cambodian people to self-determine without any outside interference. Thailand could not pursue an isolationist foreign policy and therefore had to pursue an independent approach and contain Vietnam on its own due to a lack of national power and powerful allies with mutual perceptions of the threat at hand, with the exception of China (Participant A and E, Personal Communication, 24 September and 14 October 2024). Thailand focused on the support of ASEAN as both a regional mechanism and international mechanism within the United Nations and pushed to internationalize the Cambodian problem. This was also done to counter Vietnamese efforts to ASEANize the problem and therefore lessen international pressure on them to withdraw from Cambodia. It was also done to counter the stances of Indonesia and Malaysia who wanted to regionalize the problem and made efforts to sign an agreement to make it *de jure* to them. However, Thailand was able to use its status as a frontline state in the conflict to get them to back down (Chaiyanam, 2017). These maneuvers, overall, helped to create a sense of ASEAN togetherness in dealing with the issue and hampering any Vietnamese efforts to divide the organization.

To this end, the organization of ASEAN was crucial to the success of Thai foreign policy. ASEAN had been established in 1967 as a result of the non-communist Southeast Asian nations realizing the impact of communism in the region although with different perceptions on the threat—the failure of SEATO in resolving security issues in the region compounded by the withdrawal of the United States, and for promoting the development of national economies and nationalism, partly due to the number of newly independent Southeast Asian nations. For Thailand itself, it was also to help protect its own sovereignty from interference by foreign powers (Participant A, Personal Communication, 9 October, 2024). Additionally, economic development would help combat domestic communism, in the same logic applied by the Marshall Plan.

ASEAN was considered a diplomatic success by Thailand following the foreign policy ideology laid out by Dr. Thanat Khoman (Participant F, Personal Communication, 23 September 2024). Thailand was too small to call on or bring in another major power falling the exit of the United States but was still regionally powerful enough to unite the non-communist members to form ASEAN—following the failures of Association of Southeast Asia, MAPHALINDO, and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (Participant C and F, Personal Communication, 23 September and 10 October 2024). The situation and the concerns during that time of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand that contributed to the decision to form ASEAN were: 1) the threat of China and the communist bloc as China was viewed as a security threat for supporting Communist insurgent groups in Southeast Asia and calling for a communist uprising to overthrow the governments in Malaysia and Thailand; 2) the formation of ASEAN allowed for stronger bargaining power against the more industrialized and developed countries. Additionally, the British and the Americans have always guaranteed the security of these countries but the British would withdraw their military forces from the region in 1967, which resulted in a power vacuum that could have been exploited by another major power; 3) the leaders of ASEAN were looking to develop their countries not just in terms of security but also economically, which

required an environment that supported that growth. ASEAN helped in providing support for domestic stability through non-interference measures; 4) ASEAN followed the Thai foreign policy style of being flexible as it provided an alternative to relying on a major power (Participant F, Personal Communication, 23 September 2024).

While the aims and purposes of the Bangkok Declaration are mainly in the fields of economic, social and cultural development; the true aims and purposes of the organization that were not stipulated were related to war, stability and regional security as ASEAN was created during a time of major regional conflicts and proxy wars (Participant F, Personal Communication, 23 September 2024). The Second Indochina War was still ongoing, and China was supporting the communist countries of Southeast Asia and had pulled Laos and Cambodia into the war. As previously stated, the ASEAN members had different perspectives on the conflict. Thailand and the Philippines supported the United States through SEATO, and the United States had effectively acted as a security umbrella for Southeast Asia. Malaysia and Singapore relied upon the Five Power Arrangements for their security as Britain, Australia and New Zealand had ground and naval forces stationed in Singapore (Participant F, Personal Communication, 23 September 2024). As a result of the security provided by western countries, ASEAN in its first few years saw little progress in any forms of cooperation.

But the end of the Second Indochina War would change things. Thailand was already aware that the United States was losing the Second Indochina War-both on the home front and on the battlefields in Vietnam. There was a power vacuum left by the US withdrawal which ASEAN could fill to deter any more foreign major power interference in the region (Participant C, Personal Communication, October 5 2024). The political changes within Thailand in 1973 (Chaiyanam, 2017) and the absence of strict adherence to US strategy against communist countries changed Thai views on security and its stance towards Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia shifted it from being focused on an ideological factor to a more geopolitical factor. This allowed Thailand to be flexible in dealing with Vietnam on all occasions.

It was on December 25, 1978 that Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia. The political landscape of regional politics would change as a result and was moreover, heavily affected by the Sino-Soviet split and Nixon's visit to China to normalize relations. China in a way had already begun to act as a counterbalance to Vietnam's power and Soviet influence in Southeast Asia (Participant F, Personal Communication, 23 September 2024). Thailand, who now shared a border with Vietnam through the Thai-Cambodian border was faced with a refugee crisis as a result of the invasion of Cambodia (Participant F, Personal Communication, 23 September 2024). The invasion of Cambodia did cement the need for ASEAN countries to have closer cooperation in all fields, which led to the first ever ASEAN summit in 1976 and the subsequent production of the Declaration of ASEAN Concord. In it was the declaration of intent of ASEAN member states to increase security ties with one another in terms of political collective security Asia (Participant F, Personal Communication, 23 September 2024).

4.1 Thai Foreign Policy during the Third Indochina War

Thailand could not pursue an isolationist foreign policy and therefore had to pursue an independent approach and contain Vietnam on its own due to a lack of national power and powerful allies with mutual perceptions of the threat at hand-with the exception of China (Participant A and E, Personal Communication, September 24 and October 14, 2024). Thailand and China would contest the Vietnamese solely on the land. In terms of Thailand and Vietnam at sea, during that time, neither considered the other's navies to be a threat (Participant A, Personal Communication, September 24, 2024). Thailand had a coastal navy with only three-blue-water capable ships that could not operate in bad weather or rough seas, nor act as helicopter bases (Participant A, Personal Communication, September 24, 2024). Thailand lacked the ability to contain Vietnam in the same manner of the United States against the Soviet Union or even the ability to apply pressure on Vietnam like the US Navy against the Confederate States of America. While there is not a lot of information on the Vietnamese navy and the Vietnamese only ever attacked with small craft like patrol torpedo boats during the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the Vietnamese army was quite large-the sixth largest in the world at that time (Participant E, Personal Communication, October 14, 2024) and possessed modern Eastern-bloc equipment (Participant A, Personal Communication, September 24, 2024).

The single most important event during the war occurred in 1981 when Vietnamese troops crossed over the Thai-Cambodian border and into Thailand, violating the territorial sovereignty of Thailand. In response, Thailand submitted a memorandum to the Vietnamese, telling them that if such an incursion were to occur again, Thailand would retaliate as such an action would be intolerable to the security of the Thai government and its

people. This was also the event that shifted Thai views on the geopolitical status of the Indochina region. They could no longer view the relations between Thailand and Vietnam as separate from the Cambodian problem—they were intertwined (Chaiyanam, 2017). Thailand also concluded that the Vietnam's aim was to achieve absolute security for itself in response to Chinese hegemony.

In the same year, Thailand endorsed an idea put forth by Singapore to support the formation of a United Front made up of the FUNCINPEC, DK, and KPNLF which led to the creation of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (Chaiyanam, 2017). The CGDK would be used to put up organized resistance to the Vietnamese (Chaiyanam, 2017). This, in combination with support from Thailand and ASEAN, reduced Vietnam to a sub-regional hegemon, incapable of solely achieving its aims through military actions (Chaiyanam, 2017).

Vietnam began to realize this from 1987 onwards and made efforts to open up talks to de-escalate the issue and resolve the Cambodian problem, beginning with the Jakarta Informal Meeting in 1988 (Chaiyanam, 2017). Following the exit of the United States from the Southeast Asian region after the end of the Second Indochina War, Thailand restored relations with the People's Republic of China and brought them along as an ally against the Vietnamese. The value of the Chinese lay in their armed forces, which had combat experience and could resist and challenge the Vietnamese Army, as well as being opposed to Soviet-styled communism (Participant A, Personal Communication, 24 September 2024).

While there was no concerted effort between Thailand and China against Vietnam (Interviewee E, Interview, 14 October 2024) Vietnam had taken the first move in suggesting the invitation of China to help resolve the Cambodian issue, acknowledging their influence in the country and their importance in a holistic solution. The fact that there was no concerted effort may have been due to Thailand's balancing act in maintaining its independence from foreign powers as well as its need for an important ally in its pursuit of its foreign policy geographically, Thailand's east had no strategic depth and no geographical barrier to slow down a Vietnamese advance.

Thailand's shift to a rapprochement began under Chatchai's premiership and the foreign policy of "Battlefields to Marketplaces". The policy provided a premise to end the conflict and measures to help those affected by the fighting recover. It provided microeconomic benefits to the household and private sector while also reducing tensions among the former belligerents (Participant B, Personal Communication, 24 September 2024).

A major point of foreign policy for Thailand during the Third Indochina War was that no military action was utilized to push and force the Vietnamese out of Vietnam. It could be pointed out that the Thai military was not strong enough to take on the very large and experienced Vietnamese army but there are several factors that also need to be outlined out also. Military action is often considered a last resort to diplomacy and impossible for Thailand to do alone. During the early 1970s the "growing rift between China and the Soviet Union presented an unprecedented opportunity for [the United States] to exploit the cracks and drive the wedge between [Russia] and [China]... Thailand also detected the shift at the early stage and was convinced that the earlier the better for it to start cultivating ties with China" (Participant C, Personal Communication, 5 October 2024) and had normalized relations with China in 1975 and China functioned as another ally against Vietnam (Participant A C D and E, Personal Communication, 20 and 24 September and 5 and 14 October 2024) but not to fill the power vacuum left after the Western withdrawal from the Southeast Asian region as China did not have the capabilities to fulfil that role (Participant C, Personal Communication, 5 October 2024).

Thailand and China would contest the Vietnamese solely on the land. In terms of Thailand and Vietnam at sea, during that time, neither consider the other's navies to be a threat (Participant A, Personal Communication, 24 September 2024). Thailand had a coastal navy with only three blue-water-capable ships that could not operate in bad weather and rough seas nor act as helicopter bases (Participant A, Personal Communication, 24 September 2024). Thailand lacked the ability to contain Vietnam in the same manner of the United States against the Soviet Union or even the ability to apply pressure on Vietnam like the US Navy against the Confederate States of America.

While there is not a lot of information on the Vietnamese navy and the Vietnamese only ever attacked with small craft like patrol torpedo boats during the Gulf of Tonkin incident; the Vietnamese army was quite large, the sixth largest in the world at that time (Participant E, Personal Communication, 14 October 2024), and possessed modern Eastern-bloc equipment (Participant A, Personal Communication, 24 September 2024). However, there was still no joint military plan developed or utilized, even though doing so could have put Vietnam in danger of a two-pronged strike. There was a major reliance on using ASEAN and the international community

through the UN to pressure the Vietnamese and buy time for a suitable solution which in a way had materialized in the Sino-Soviet split and the weakening of the Soviet Union by the late 1980s (Participant E, Personal Communication, 14 October 2024). Additionally, the nature of Thai foreign policy was not inherently aggressive and Thailand was not prone to attacking combined with a Thai domestic politics being dominated by a military who were reluctant to get involved in outside conflict especially when defending Thailand was already difficult. (Participant E, Personal Communication, 14 October 2024). All of this meant that military action against Vietnam was never a possibility.

Overall, Thailand maintained a fairly stable foreign policy against Vietnam through the entirety of the Third Indochina War one that was not drawn along ideological lines, but a pragmatic approach based on geopolitics and capabilities which allowed a flexible response to change at the end of the Third Indochina War and the Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia. In terms of geopolitical power, all of this just highlights Thailand's lack of national power in dealing with threats single-handedly, forcing Thailand to pursue a foreign policy that was more on diplomatic lines, international pressure, and alliances with foreign entities as a means of attaining borrowed power from allies. What this shows is not exactly Thailand's inability to capitalize on its geopolitical power, but rather its limited capacity to build and expand on it as a means to increase national power in the run-up to potential conflict. Thailand was left mainly with diplomatic foreign policy actions as a result. In reference to the research framework here, a lack of geopolitical power meant a reduction in possible foreign policy options.

4.2 Does Geography Constrain National Power, and in Turn, its Foreign Policy?

Geographical positioning does play a role in constraining a state's national power as it can limit access to resources or key routes. However, lack of resources could be counteracted with expansionism or trading. One of the interview participants aligned with Mahan's six principles (Participant A, Personal Communication, 24 September 2024):

1. Geographical Position: Thailand is located in a fertile region which resulted in historically no need to expand towards the sea but its position resulted in it being a trading crossroads.
2. Physical Conformation: Thailand's physical conformation gives it access to deep bays and channels with decent water depth and a large river that exits into the gulf which provides good characteristics for a port.
3. Extent of Territory: Thailand has a long coastline with a large population density due to its fertility and proximity to the river lowlands but much of the activities is focused on agriculture.
4. Number of Population: Thailand does not have an advantage here as it has few people dedicated to seaward occupations.
5. Character of the People: Thailand also does not possess the national character required for a maritime oriented society like that of Holland or England.
6. Character of the Government: The character of its government does not lend a natural and adept understanding of maritime development, which is vital in the creation of an effective navy and naval strategies.

Thailand is a country that is small with a moderate level of power to draw in regional allies, which does not act aggressively, preferring a diplomatic approach to resolving issues (Participant E, Personal Communication, 14 October 2024). In terms of determining Thailand's geopolitical power, this data shows that Thailand does not fully meet the theoretical criteria for being a full sea power. However, further analysis in later sections also reveals that this does not mean that Thailand is a land power either.

Many participants also agreed that geography has an effect in constraining the potential of national power, but that there were exceptions where countries overcame geographical limitations (Participant A B C D E and F, Personal Communication, 20-24 September and 14 October 2024). According to Participant C (Personal Communication, 5 October 2024):

“It depends. Geography could be both plus and minus. It also depends on the context and the national interests of the countries concerned at that particular point in time. Israel, Ukraine, Taiwan are good examples. All of them are prisoners of geography. But at times, each has tried its best to manipulate its surrounding geography to its advantage. Their success rates vary, depending on whether the national interests of key and major powers are similar with theirs”.

Another example was presented by Participant A (Personal Communication, 24 September 2024):

“Not always. Geography may be an important factor but it is not the sole factor. Countries that had a geological disadvantage such as Japan, which was located on the Ring of Fire, and did not have sufficient resources for both food and goods consumption was able to develop in a superpower in Asia before World War 2”.

This was done in a similar manner to other sea powers like England, which used its large and powerful navy to secure colonies and extract resources for the homeland. An action supported by Participant E in reference to overcoming geopolitical constraints as “[Navies] were often used for finding and securing external resources” (Personal Communication, 14 October 2024)—an inherently aggressive action. Furthermore, other constraints include the possibility of dangerous neighbors and less choices for development, such as Laos, which, being landlocked, had to choose to rely on China for infrastructural development through its land-linked policy. In doing so, Laos also made itself susceptible to Chinese influence. In reference to the research, while the data here does not reference Thailand directly, it does present a correlation between geography and power and, as a result, how geopolitical power is constructed. That construction influences foreign policy via the choices available to a country. As one participant summarized: a country’s power and its foreign policy “are important and inseparably related as having power means the ability to determine foreign policy and implement it effectively. Vice versa, having no power means that foreign policy would be ineffective” (Participant A, Personal Communication, 24 September 2024).

5. Discussion

A point that came up during one of the interviews was that foreign policy decisions are choices, and they are choices that are often constrained by factors such as the geography of a country. By extension, this affects its geopolitical power. Many interview participants echoed the view that geography did play a role in constraining foreign policy and resources that the state could utilize in the pursuit of national interest; essentially, it played a role in the construction of the national apparatus of power.

To answer the first question, the relationship between foreign policy and geopolitical power is that geopolitical power defines how a state’s national power is built up and therefore also ends up defining the limits of foreign policy. So, what was Thailand’s geopolitical stance during the Third Indochina War and how could be seen through its policies?

The case of Thailand’s geopolitical power is interesting. The situation in Indochina during the Third Indochina War was vastly different than during the Second Indochina War. Thailand’s stance was not wholly neutral throughout the invasion as it did take an active foreign policy against Vietnam’s political ambitions within Indochina. With no big power to rely on, Thailand had devised a more passive resistance against Vietnamese aggression in Cambodia. Unlike the Second Indochina War, Thailand would not deploy troops in direct action against Vietnam, the Third Indochina War was fought mainly on the political stage.

Therefore, let us consider the political dimensions of foreign policy in relation to the theory at hand. Thailand sought to counter the growing ambitions of a regional neighbor through two organizations, the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The decision to fight using these organizations is in line with the Clausewitzian idea that the destruction of the enemy’s forces is not necessary in enacting their defeat as Thailand’s political goal was the complete unconditional withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia and the utilization of regional and international pressure.

This brings us to the first point: Thailand is not a land power. Thailand’s behavior throughout its history has tended to be on the defensive, becoming aggressive when backed by a major power—such as during the Franco-Thai War and the Second Indochina War. Furthermore, while land powers typically have a large number of manpower to draw from, it is not strictly a requirement. Both China’s punitive invasion of Vietnam and Russia’s special operation in Ukraine did not utilize the complete mobilization of their forces. This is worth mentioning to point out that Thailand not being a land power is due more to its actions than its feature and available resources. During the Third Indochina War, Vietnam being a rival power acted in an aggressive manner that constituted a security threat, meeting the conditions for a land power to attempt a defensive action via its military, However, Thailand never utilized its armed forces to force a Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia. China, a land power,

did attempt to use its armed forces to force a Vietnamese withdrawal. Even if the argument that Thai military force was insufficient to solely force the Vietnamese out of Cambodia or that poor Cambodian road infrastructure would have been a logistical nightmare was made, the Chinese punitive invasion of Vietnam nonetheless set up the conditions for a possible joint offensive-but this was never considered. Additionally, careful planning and strategy can compensate for poor logistics.

Moreover, the previous section mentioned how smaller countries have manipulated their geography to their advantage. A good example here is Israel, which won the 1948 Arab-Israeli War by addressing their strategic deficits - most notably the deficit of manpower as “population imbalance with its five Arab neighbors, with the approximately 600,000 Jews in Israel facing a potential opposition of 40 million Arabs” (Heller, 2018), was remedied by both diplomatic and military means. Israel drove “a wedge between the Arab states” and was therefore “able to concentrate its forces in a few strategic locations to create local superiority” (Heller, 2018). So here we have a case for the argument that Thailand’s foreign policy was not influenced by land power. Land powers would have been much more aggressive in their response, not relying solely on diplomatic means to resolve their issues.

In terms of the sea power, Thailand appears to be a sea-power by traits and behavior but its national apparatus is not traditional. The sea powers discussed in this paper have a large navy that is continually developing and a willingness to use it. Thailand, first and foremost, relies upon its diplomatic corps for the pursuit of foreign policy. Looking back upon its history, this would make sense as Thailand is a coastal nation-state connected to a variety of polities, strong and weak, through sea trade for centuries. Interaction through this connection and prosperity through trade favors a peaceful and amicable foreign policy, and the maintenance of such a policy relies upon diplomacy, not military force. Military force can be a destabilizing factor in regional or even international affairs and can cause Thailand to be perceived as a threat. Looking back to previous actions in the 20th century, it was the diplomatic finesse that kept Thailand off the losing side of World War Two, and at the end of the Third Indochina War, it allowed the flexibility needed to turn an immediate enemy into a friend with the policy of “Turning Battlefields into Marketplaces,” which in a way created a situation of defeat without dishonor for the Vietnamese.

Additionally, Mahan’s six principles of sea-powers when applied to Thailand shows that Thailand falls short on meeting some of the criteria for a sea power. In terms of geopolitical power influencing foreign policy the evidence points out Thailand in actuality behaves closer to that of a sea power during the Third Indochina War. Thailand never solely relies on itself and its own power to resolve issues with other countries but rather looks for international partners that might lend support and legitimacy for its actions. During the Third Indochina War, Thailand looked to securing ASEAN support and support from the UN General Assembly in denouncing and undermining Vietnam’s diplomatic efforts to legitimize its invasion of Cambodia. Comparatively, the world’s foremost Sea Power, the United States, during the first and second Gulf War looked to the participation of its allies to legitimize its invasion of Iraq. In practice, it was Thailand utilizing the same kind of political containment, the Cold War Containment Strategy, that the United States used to deal with threats it could not actively fight a war with.

Additionally, there was the use of proxies, much like the United States during the Cold War and after. Thailand supported the creation of a United Front in Cambodia against Vietnam which bears similarities to the usage of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and Kurdish Rebels in Iraq by the United States. Ultimately, through this combination, Vietnam would cave to the pressure of the containment much like the Eastern Bloc did in the 1990s. In contrast to known tactics of land-powers, for example the Soviet Union, while they did send military aid to their allies, they also directly participated in open conventional warfare; such an example were the Soviet pilots who flew in support of Egypt against Israel under Operation Rimon 20. Most importantly, one of the major findings of the research was Participant A’s application of Mahan’s six principles to Thailand. While Thailand met the geographical qualities it fell short on the societal sides. The people lacked a natural drive for the sea as much of the population had historically been agrarian and sedentary; additionally, the character of government does not lend a natural understanding of the sea to support maritime growth. During the Third Indochina War, neither side fought at sea or used the sea to any kind of advantage. In contrast, during the Second Indochina War, the United States had complete control over the waters around Vietnam and even attempted to project force inland through river gunboats and carrier aircraft.

If Thailand is not a land power or a sea power, does this mean that the geopolitical power theories are inapplicable to medium powers? The answer would be no-not currently-as Thailand does have a geopolitical power theory it adheres to. During a discussion in one of my interviews, another option was brought up and that was the existence of a **hybrid geopolitical power** which blended aspects of both geopolitical power theories as best fits the nation and its interests. If geopolitics is rooted from realism and realism has smart power as a combination of hard and soft power, why shouldn't geopolitics have something similar through the existence of a geopolitical power that blends both land and sea? This actually fits Thailand more when considering the traits of Thailand, its foreign policy choices and status as a small-to-medium power with no grand ambition of becoming dominant. This can help explain the importance of Rimland theory that Spykman created. Insular countries have the ability to benefit from both land-based and sea-based factors, as opposed to being solely reliant on one.

Thailand's action's during the Third Indochina War show the usage of a continental ally against a threat, a sea-power behavior, and also a defensive stance, a land-power behavior, combined with a focused diplomatic effort leveraging those factors to affect an amicable end to a war. For instance, Thailand established diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1976; the United States established diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1995. Throughout the war, Thailand maintained a fairly stable foreign policy throughout the war of using collective pressure to compel the Vietnamese to withdraw from Cambodia. Therefore, to answer what Thailand's geopolitical stance was during the Third Indochina War: Thailand was a hybrid geopolitical power. This is evident in how its stable foreign policy and subsequent reasoning of the events was a combination of sea-power and land-power. This combination gave rise to a national power apparatus geared towards resolution of conflicts through diplomacy, rather than through force-which might have been possible if it solely was based around a single geopolitical power. Sea power would have necessitated force through a large and competent navy whereas land-power would have necessitated force through a large land army which could be relied upon to bulk back an offensive. But as previously stated neither of this happened and the national power of Thailand as a result of its geopolitical power only allowed for diplomatic pressure as the best tool to deal with the Vietnamese.

5.1 A Discussion on the Viability of Sea-power and Land-power for Thailand as an Option

While the previous section already answered clearly that Thailand is not a land-power or a sea-power but it should be pointed out here that as an option, Thailand could shift toward becoming a sea power as it has a rich history of sea-borne interactions and functioned as a naval trading hub in the past. While doing so does mean building a naval fleet that is not a paper deterrent, but a viable threat which would go against the general spirit of the nation, it gives Thailand the ability to utilize a navy capable of offensive blue water operations. This would increase the difficulty of a foreign power to defeat the navy in a single decisive engagement and create a prolonged battle of attrition that is unfavorable to any nation whose logistics and shipyards are not within Southeast Asia, increasing the cost of losing a ship or repairing a ship. The major advantage of doing so is that it would allow Thailand the ability to go independent instead of picking a side, as it would have the military power to back itself up in the case of a failure in diplomacy. However, it should be mentioned that going down this path seems unlikely and very difficult. Thailand's competitive advantage is in its diplomacy and while a strong military force can present a stronger backing to gunboat diplomacy, that is not a diplomatic tactic utilized by Thailand; the more common tactic seen both in this paper and in history is collective action with allies.

As for Thailand becoming a land-power, conceptually, it already shows some similarities to traditional land powers such as its use of conscription to increase the size of the army during wartime through ready reserves. While conscription in modern conflicts has called into question the efficacy of these troops, conscription does not necessarily mean lower quality troops as that is tied to training and equipment. Having volunteered for the draft, I can attest to the modern training building the required discipline needed to fight and quite lengthy at six months; but equipment quality varied from regiment to regiment. In the past during the Second Indochina War, Thailand had sent two units from the Royal Thai Army, the Queen's Cobra Regiment and the Black Panther Division, as well as a unit each from the Royal Thai Airforce and Royal Thai Navy to assist the United States in Vietnam (Ruth, 2011). These Thai units were not merely token forces sent at the request of a major ally as their operational success and performance earned them praise from both Thai and American military officials; even upon first deployment, General Westmoreland had praised their combat readiness (Ruth, 2011). This shows that Thai troops were not of poorer quality compared to the Vietnamese but rather, as gathered from the interview, the Vietnamese army was much larger, better equipped and quite experienced from constant fighting since the First Indochina

War in the 1950s against the French. Aside from this, the other quality mentioned earlier that Thailand shows similarity to land-powers in is a defensive nature; it does not seek conflict unless provoked but still prefers diplomacy to resolve issues.

However, this approach would be equally difficult to enact fully. The issue does not lie in its defensive and peaceful nature but in how it can bring about its defense. Diplomacy is fine until the adversary no longer cares to talk or does not care about pressure. The national power of a land-power in this case lies entirely in its large army and large landmass, which Thailand does not have. Geography is a constant but politically and socially, there has always been pushback against the policy of national conscription with the government promising time and time again to remove it. To build national power through land-power conscription would need to be kept and possibly expanded which would most likely not happen.

5.2 Further Discussions and Recommended Study

Now this so far has only covered Thailand but remember that most of Southeast Asia is considered to be insular countries and therefore applicable to Rimland theory. But a majority of Southeast Asian countries are similar to Thailand in terms of power. Therefore, there is a suggestion that, much like Thailand, other Southeast Asian countries also have a high potential for additional power. Much like Thailand, it may be a result of the character of government that stops them from fully exploiting their geography. Myanmar, for example, is, at the time of this writing, embroiled in internal armed conflict and has a central government unable to exert full control over its sovereign territory—a regrettable affair as Myanmar is rich in natural resources that could be exploited for economic gain and military production.

Another important point that could not be addressed in the research due to the focus on just the Third Indochina War is food security. Spykman, when writing about identifying power in geography, highlighted the positioning relative to the Equator and the Rimland countries he identifies run along the Equator. The specialty of these countries is the ability to produce food all year long, and therefore can be made to not be dependent on outside food sources for the survival of the nation. This is vitally important in times of difficulty and especially war, where food can become a critical resource.

Starving out a population is a strategy as old as time, being a component of ancient siege warfare and making appearances in pre-modern and modern warfare. General William Tecumseh Sherman's strategy against the Native Americans was to attempt to kill all the buffalo, which the Native Americans relied upon as a food source. World War One and World War Two saw Germany attempt to use unrestricted submarine warfare to starve the United Kingdom, who imported twenty-two million tons of food, accounting for half of their food supplies before the war had started (Spicer, 2004). Of course, advancements in convoy escorting tactics and technology managed to stop the Kriegsmarine from starving the United Kingdom, but they came close to achieving their objective; the initial months of the Battle of the Atlantic from July to November 1940 were called the 'happy time' by U-Boat crews, who had sunk more than 280 ships, with the resulting total tonnage of 1.5 million tons (Royal Navy Association, 2023).

Additionally, there was also the Staatssekretäre conference in 1941, where Germany formulated and planned a starvation policy against the Russian population by commandeering food and resources from Russian lands they took with no plans to provide provisions for the people of their occupied territory (Kay, 2006). The point to all of this is that insular countries have the ability to sustain themselves without outside assistance which also means that they would be able to achieve a state of autarky and gain the ability to resist being influenced by outside forces by reducing dependency; Thailand's policy of sufficiency economy does echo this concept.

The issue with hybrid powers now is that current literature does not have such a concept laid out and this paper itself was more of a study in using foreign policy to figure out the geopolitical power of an entity. Therefore, going forward I would suggest there be further study on the subject of a hybrid geopolitical power with proper codification, clear parameters and degrees of hybridization. This research only covered Thailand, and it showed a more pacifistic hybrid geopolitical power, and from personal experience, a pacifism generated from culture, history and geography, which undoubtedly has made its way into foreign policy and perceptions of power. Different countries would likely have different forms of hybridized geopolitical power and therefore approaches and choices in foreign policy; understanding these hybridizations would lead to better understanding and prediction of foreign policy actions of other countries which would allow for more effective counter action and planning. Earlier in this section, this paper mentioned that geopolitical power via geography constrained the

resources for power for a state, but hybrid powers have access to both landward resources and sea routes which could help explain their importance and potential for strength.

Additionally, a greater attention should be paid to cultural geography in the study of geopolitical power and hybrid geopolitical power. As previously mentioned, Thailand is a pacifistic nation. In its history, conflicts were sporadic and mainly occurred when land-linked neighbors of comparable power provoked them-which never gave rise to a need to obtain overseas assets to overcome their neighbors, as juxtaposed with countries like England, which were separate from their regional neighbors and enemies by a body of water which they needed to secure to protect themselves and gather oversea assets to achieve parity with their much larger continental competitors. Cultural geography would help to understand how the culture through how it was built up in reference to the locale and how it would behave in relation to other tools in the construction and implementation of foreign policy.

Furthermore, this would help in expanding on Rimland theory and its current relevance as Spykman before his death had created the theory and highlighted the importance of control over rimland countries as a means to gain dominance. A formalized hybrid-power theory would bring importance not just to why Rimland countries are powerful, but also to how they operate, which would also help in understanding their strategic value and role in regional and global affairs. It is true that during the Third Indochina War, the Vietnamese army was experienced but also had suffered massive losses during the Second Indochina War. Thailand could have played the numbers game against them; eventually, the experience would be lost to combat losses, similar to Japanese pilots against the United States during World War Two, who lost their experienced pilots as the war dragged on, and due to high casualties in all theaters of fighting, could not keep up with providing quality replacements, unlike that of the United States.

Thailand consistently chose to rely on international pressure and international organizations to put a stop to the conflict. Lastly, if this theory was formalized and made specific to certain countries like Thailand, it might provide a good model for other countries to follow considering the peaceful nature of its foreign policy. For Thailand, fully understanding itself as a hybrid power can help the development of its national power apparatus and better advance its policies; and in terms of modern policy, for example, it could leverage being a hybrid geopolitical power by focusing on becoming a regional logistical hub by linking transnational land connections to its sea connections through continuing projects like the Special Economic Zone or the planned Land-Bridge.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, Thailand is neither a land power nor sea power. Through an examination of its foreign policy actions during the Third Indochina War, Thailand's actions neither paint it fully in either category necessitating the idea of a hybrid geopolitical power which would also be useful in explaining the geopolitical power and possible foreign policy options for countries similar to Thailand's power status which tend to be overlooked when examining geopolitics and the power of small to medium powers, as current theories are focused on big powers. This would also help cement an understanding of the relationship between geopolitical power and foreign policy, as it could more readily explain the available resources to these lesser powers and the limitations of their foreign policy apparatus, and help them capitalize on the building of their national power.

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8. References

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