



The US Security Policy Towards Thailand: Evolvment and Prospect

Col., Dr. Wang Yinghui

National Defense University, China

Nov. 9, 2017 Xiamen

Scope

US's Thai Security policy

- during Cold War Period
- during Post-Cold war period
- under Asia-Pacific Rebalancing Strategy
- under Trump Administration
- Conclusion

US's Thai Security policy during Cold War Period

- Southeast Asia became a part of US containment strategy towards communism in 1950s.
- US-Thai security alliance formed under SEATO in 1954 and consolidated under Thanat-Rusk communiqué of 1962
- Thailand became the center of security operations in Southeast Asia for US
- Providing important military, intelligence, political and psychological support for the US.



US's Thai Security policy during Cold War Period

- In 1960s, the US began building military facilities in Thailand.
- Thailand became a center supporting base for US troops during Vietnam War.
 - U-Tapao Air Base became the most important transport and fueling station
 - From 1965, US troops took Thailand as the back recuperation base.
 - In 1967, Thailand began to reinforce troops to South Vietnam.
 - 50,000 U.S. troops were based on Thai in climax.

US's Thai Security policy during Cold War Period

- Post-Vietnam War:
Estranged relationship
 - Withdrawal of US troops from Thailand in 1976.
 - Thailand established diplomatic relationship with China in 1975.
 - US maintained a certain military presence in Thailand



Post-Cold War Period: strategic neglect

- US-Thai security alliance in “drift”
Withdrawal from Philippines bases in 1992
- 1997 Asian financial crisis further estranged Southeast Asia, including Thailand.



Post-Cold War Period: strategic neglect

- Thailand began to play a balance between major powers
- US and Thailand maintained defense cooperation
 - Cobra Gold exercise expanded
 - Clinton Administration increased arms sales to Thailand
 - Thailand became the major target country in Southeast Asia for US arms export

Post-Cold War Period: strategic neglect

- After 9/11: Southeast Asia became the “Second Front” for global counterterrorism.
 - Provided a opportunity for the renewal of US-Thai alliance
 - In December 2003, Thailand was designated a Major non-NATO ally (MNNA)
 - US only has the right to use the military bases in Thailand; but does not possess them

US's Thai Security Policy under “Pivot to Asia”

- Strengthen up US-Thai Alliance as part of the effort in hedging China
- 2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai–U.S. Defense Alliance
 - a upgrade US-Thai relationship after 1962
 - mutual commitment to “open access by all to shared maritime, space and cyber domains.”
 - US committed to help Thai to improved its military capacity

US's Thai Security Policy under “Pivot to Asia”

• Strained relationship after the 2014 military Coup

- Cut high-level military exchanges
- Suspend military assistance
- Thailand is expanding defense cooperation with China.
- US tried to keep most of mil-to-mil relations intact.
 - Continued Cobra Gold and CARAT exercises
 - Arms sales continued to keep interoperability



Looking forward

Under Trump

- Retreat from global leadership
- “America First”
- Insufficient interest and attention in Southeast Asia
- Supporting democracy in SEA is not a priority.



conclusion

- US's Thai Security policy serves its Asia-Pacific Strategy.
- Thailand remain an important ally
 - U.S. security treaty partner
 - co-host of Cobra Gold and 40 other exercises
 - a demonstrated partner in counterterrorism
 - and a link for America's military logistics chain into Afghanistan and the Middle East
- Both sides lack of motivation to strengthen US-Thai alliance
- US-Thai alliance remain a weak link in US alliance system
- Stronger China-Thai ties
 - Belt and Road Initiative
 - China's policy of non-interference
 - Geographical closeness
- Thailand will keep a balance between US and China