

Thailand: Fighting the “Superpower”. Understanding the Greater Global Chessboard

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Understanding the greater global chessboard Thailand’s political crisis is unfolding upon.

The history of Thailand over the past several centuries could be defined by its fending off of one European empire after the next. It is the only Southeast Asian nation that has never been colonized by a European power. This is in direct contrast to its neighbors on all sides – Myanmar and Malaysia were under the British, and Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam were under the French. Even China was carved up by Western powers.

The key to Thailand’s success was committing to a careful balancing act between projecting strength, adept geopolitical maneuvering, unwavering unity, and when necessary, making temporary concessions to preserve its greater sovereignty.



Image: Thailand’s geopolitical surroundings 1800-1900. Thailand was the only Southeast Asian country to avoid European colonization.

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“Empires” Still Exist, Still Conquer, Still Exploit

Thailand in the 1800’s, then the Kingdom of Siam, was surrounded on all sides by colonized nations. Gunboats would eventually turn up off the coast of Siam’s capital and the Kingdom made to concede to [the British 1855 Bowring Treaty](#). See how many of these “gunboat policy” imposed concessions sound like today’s “free trade” economic liberalization:

1. Siam granted extraterritoriality to British subjects.
2. British could trade freely in all seaports and reside permanently in Bangkok.
3. British could buy and rent property in Bangkok.
4. British subjects could travel freely in the interior with passes provided by the consul.
5. Import and export duties were capped at 3%, except the duty-free opium and bullion.
6. British merchants were to be allowed to buy and sell directly with individual Siamese.

While some may claim fears of a global superpower, a successor to the old British Empire, today doing something similar amounts to “conspiracy theories,” not only are such fears well founded, but ignoring them could cost a nation virtually everything.

We need only consider the outright military conquest of Iraq and America’s Paul Bremer’s (CFR) economic reformation of the decimated state. The Economist gleefully enumerated the neo-colonial “economic liberalization” of Iraq in a piece titled [“Let’s all go to the yard sale: If it all works out, Iraq will be a capitalist’s dream:”](#)

1. 100% ownership of Iraqi assets.
2. Full repatriation of profits.
3. Equal legal standing with local firms.
4. Foreign banks allowed to operate or buy into local banks.
5. Income and corporate taxes capped at 15%.
6. Universal tariffs slashed to 5%.

Iraq is a perfect modern day example of a nation overrun by brute force and made to concede to an entire restructuring of its economy, giving foreign powers access to their natural resources, markets, and population. It was absolute subjugation, both militarily and economically. It was modern day conquest.

If the US has done this to Iraq as recently as 2003, why would anyone think any other nation today is safe from a similar fate? And if not by the US today, perhaps another potential superpower like China tomorrow? Already, the same familiar lies can be heard from the US in the lead-up to war with nations like Syria and Iran. Indeed, imperialism is alive and well – and nations that choose to ignore this ancient but still thriving menace to world peace, almost guarantee that they will be next.

The Thai Establishment Knows Imperialism

The Thai establishment is not naive. They know the history of the world is not divided into neat little chapters with the institutions and motives that drove European colonization safely concluded stories behind us in the past. The institutions and motivations [that drove European colonization in centuries past have only evolved](#).

The Europeans, along with the United States, have become the new empire or

“superpower,” seeking extraterritorial opportunities with implied threats and installed proxy regimes when possible, and with overt force when necessary.

Thailand’s strategy has remained relatively the same – to remain neutral and fluid, to bend and bounce back when superpowers blow through. With Thailand’s unique and enduring indigenous institutions intact, it can protect the nation’s sovereignty even at times it must make small concessions to keep the superpowers at bay. However, with Thaksin Shinawatra, the superpowers have attempted to disfigure Thailand permanently – disabling its ability to resist, and erasing the institutions that have for centuries kept Thailand Thai.

What the Thai establishment said, during the rise of Thaksin Shinawatra, reveals the insight they have on the superpowers and what is necessary to protect against them. Though seemingly condemning Thailand’s Democrat Party for being too protective – the Sarasonteh blog reported on two revealing incidents. The first was in 2005 in describing a meeting between former US Ambassador to Thailand Ralph Boyce and former Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai. [Sarasonteh reported](#):

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2. Maintain neutrality on the world stage and cooperate only under [the authority of] United Nations resolutions.
3. Foster sovereignty [by] letting no country lease an airport or a strategic location.

Old friends don’t try to capitalize on public prejudice against one another, do they? And surely they’re not neutral toward each other.

This being the Democrats, their putatively internationalist “policy” no. 2, if taken literally, would indeed have the opposite meaning to the one intended. It would’ve ruled in participation in Iraq under UNSC Resolution 1511, while ruling out most other international cooperations (ASEAN, APEC, ASEM, you name it) as they’re not mandated by the UN.

This first example lays out the principles of neutrality and the maintenance of sovereignty in regards to barring foreign powers from using Thailand for strategic purposes. Of course, under Thaksin Shinawatra, neither of these principles would be observed – as Thaksin sent troops to aid in the US occupation of Iraq, and allowed the CIA to conduct its atrocious “rendition” program on Thai soil.

The next example involves “economic liberalization,” and the Democrat’s reaction to laws

Thaksin Shinawatra literally changed one week, to personally profit from the next, at the cost of selling Thai infrastructure to foreign investors. In a blog entry titled "[Worse than Saddam](#)," Sarasonteh reported:

Ong-art Klampaibul, spokesman of the "technocratic and progressive" Democrat Party, commented on the sale of Shin Corporation to Temasek Holdings by "nationalist and populist" Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra: (MATICHON)

"ประเทศไทยเป็นประเทศที่มีทรัพยากรธรรมชาติอันอุดมสมบูรณ์ แต่รัฐบาลทักษิณกลับนำทรัพยากรเหล่านี้ไปขายให้กับต่างชาติโดยไม่คำนึงถึงผลประโยชน์ของชาติและประชาชนคนไทย 7.3 ล้านล้านบาท เพื่อแลกกับการสูญเสียอธิปไตยทางเศรษฐกิจและวัฒนธรรมไปทั้งหมด" อดีตรัฐมนตรีช่วยว่าการกระทรวงพาณิชย์

"Dictator Saddam, though a brutal tyrant, still fought the superpower for the Iraqi motherland. But PM Thaksin is less conscionable than Saddam. For 73 billion baht to his personal pocket, the PM gave both economic and security sovereignty and communication rights entirely to foreigners," said the Democrat spokesman.

Of course, only a month earlier, Democrat Leader Abisit Vejjajiva implied that the prime minister was protecting Shin Corp by keeping foreigners out of the telecoms sector (which obviously didn't have national security dimensions at the time). So he was probably worse than Bush back then. Or something.

Indeed, it is recognized that there is a struggle between independent sovereign states and the "superpower," and that selling your nation's infrastructure out to it is detrimental to one's sovereignty. The blog is clearly maintained by someone who believes deeply in the concept of "globalization" at the expense of national sovereignty, someone perhaps not as well studied in history as Thailand's establishment to see how much "globalization" resembles old world imperialism.

The same blog would also condemn Democrat Party members [for suspecting the CIA's involvement](#) in terrorism plaguing the deep south - [violence that had seen an enduring peace until Thaksin Shinawatra came into power](#). ([more on the US's backing of Al Qaeda](#))

Uprooting Thaksin is not the End

The extensive foreign ties Thaksin Shinawatra had before coming into office, while in office, and to this very day [have been examined and reported on in detail](#). His attempts to illegally pass unpopular free trade deals, [privatize and sell off the nation's oil](#), its telecommunications infrastructure, and contribute to the West's unwarranted military aggression are among the many reasons he must be removed from power. However, the empty spot he leaves, if not filled with something cultivated for and by Thais, will only serve as a growing bed for other invasive weeds like the Thaksin regime.



Image: The Thai 1000 baht banknote. Left is one of the many dams controlling floods and producing electricity throughout the Kingdom. Center is the current King of Thailand. Right is a depiction of a local garden providing food in a self-sufficient manner under the “new theory” or “self-sufficiency economy”- [a blueprint for Thais to protect their nation](#) from the grassroots up against exploitation from both foreign interests and local despots.

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While it is wise for the Thai establishment to continue seeking neutrality and guarded tolerance of the superpower’s intrusions, it may be useful for the Thai people in general to understand the true dimensions of the threat the Kingdom faces today. A nation needs not be xenophobic to guard against foreign intrusion, but rather, well informed on identifying the differences between mutual benefits and exploitation.

Iraq is the ultimate example of what can happen to a nation unable to balance, bend, and bounce back against aggressive foreign interests. Thailand, on the other hand, illustrates no matter how well you play the game of keeping foreign aggressors outside the gates, the greatest danger remains those within who would willfully undermine your defenses and let the enemy in.

It was Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC - 43 BC) in the timeless “The Traitor is the Plague” who said:

“A nation can survive its fools, and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within. An enemy at the gates is less formidable, for he is known and carries his banner openly.

But the traitor moves amongst those within the gate freely, his sly whispers rustling through all the alleys, heard in the very halls of government itself. For the traitor appears not a traitor; he speaks in accents familiar to his victims, and he wears their face and their arguments, he appeals to the baseness that lies deep in the hearts of all men. He rots the soul of a nation, he works secretly and unknown in the night to undermine the pillars of the city, he infects the body politic so that it can no longer resist.

A murderer is less to fear. The traitor is the plague.”

How can Thailand prevent another “Thaksin” from simply taking his place? How can Thais be sure their nation is simply playing the game in the best interests of the Kingdom, and not instead selling the nation out?

For the average Thai, the only answer [is to begin building enduring, independent, and strong local institutions](#) that reduce the Kingdom’s dependency on foreign trade. Additionally, Thais must educate themselves on the true nature of [the corporate-financier interests](#) that currently constitute the “superpowers.” Understanding this and the networks they’ve created that reach from their financial capitals of Wall Street and London, and into our very backyards, allows us [to expose them and displace them with institutions](#), organizations, and economic activities that are truly in our best interests.

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