

THAI DIPLOMACY

in conversation
with

TEJ
BUNNAG

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Tej Bunnag, in an interview on 3 November 2020, with Anuson Chinvanho and Namon Yuthavong at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok.

FOREWORD

The first time I met Dr. Tej Bunnag was sometime in the middle of 1976. It was customary for scholarship students to visit the Ministry or the Department which sponsored them before leaving to study abroad. So, it was arranged for me and a fellow scholarship student to spend a day at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But forty-five years have passed and that visit is now just a fuzzy memory. I remember only that we first presented ourselves to Mr. Anand Panyarachun, who was then the Permanent Secretary, in his fourth-floor office at Saranrom Palace, the Ministry's former headquarters. I must confess that now I cannot recall our conversation at all, whatever the advice or the caution that he gave. We then split up for our next appointment. My colleague went to the Treaty and Legal Department while I was taken to the Political Department. There, I was shown into the office of the Chief of the East Asia Division and was introduced to a tall, scholarly man in his early 30s, with sharp eyes behind thick glasses. As with the meeting with the Permanent Secretary, I now remember very little of what Dr. Tej Bunnag said to me. I think he told me about the establishment of diplomatic relations between Thailand and China in 1975 and the importance of China to Thailand.

One thing I do know is that the two people I met that day are considered the *crème de la crème* among the diplomats of their respective generations. And this is proven in subsequent events. After he had left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Anand Panyarachun went on to have a highly successful career in the private sector and to be the 18th Prime Minister of Thailand. Dr. Tej Bunnag, following in his grandfather's footsteps, became Ambassador to China and the United States, Permanent Secretary, and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In 2020, when the ISC decided to consider Thai foreign policy in the 2020s as its flagship project for 2021, I thought that it would be useful also to look back at Thai diplomacy in the past. The person to discuss it that first came to mind was Dr. Tej Bunnag. With his academic background as a historian, his considerable experience and his extensive involvement in Thai diplomacy and foreign affairs over the last half century, he would be an excellent person to interview for a book on that subject. So, the planning for this book was set in motion.

Thus, I wish to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Tej Bunnag for agreeing to participate in this project and for making time from his busy schedule available to me and my team to conduct necessary interview. Our conversation took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over 11 sessions between 29 October 2020 and 5 February 2021. The conversation covered a wide range of issues concerning Thai diplomacy: its characteristics; its highlights, successes and challenges; its formulation and implementation. We also discussed Thailand's role in the world, in the context of both the League of Nations and the United Nations, and ASEAN;

Thailand's relations with the major powers and its neighbours; as well as the domestic context and its major diplomatic personalities.

At the beginning, I proposed that the interview be conducted in English. This was a little unusual, and might even be awkward, but I felt that the words should be those of Dr. Tej Bunnag. If I had to translate the text from Thai into English afterwards, I might not be able to find appropriate words or proper expressions.

I have kept the format of this book to the conversation I had with Dr. Tej Bunnag. This book is not designed to be an academic study of Thai diplomacy, nor is it a memoir. Rather, this book is an attempt to look at Thai diplomacy through the eyes of a respected diplomat. The views, the analyses and the conclusions in this book came from Dr. Tej Bunnag's extensive experiences over the years. There are certainly many personal stories and anecdotes in the book, which give it a human-interest dimension and hopefully make it enjoyable to read.

I wish to thank the ISC team who worked hard to put this book together. Special thanks go to Namon Yuthavong, a former diplomat, who undertook to record and transcribe the conversation. I hope that the readers enjoy the book as much as we do in producing it.

Anuson Chinvanno

Director,

International Studies Center

PROLOGUE

Dr. Anuson Chinvanno, Director of the International Studies Center, kindly sent his Foreword to me before I wrote my acknowledgements. It made it easier for me to acknowledge my appreciation and gratitude to him and his colleagues.

I wish to thank him for conceiving the idea to interview me in the first place. He sent me the plan of the book with its chapters together with a set of questions and said that the interview would be in English. I did not object, because I presumed that the book is intended for the international audience. I have previously lectured in Thai, and even in French, and given interview in Thai, most of which have been published, so to be interviewed in English this time would be something different. It was a bit awkward at first for two Thai to be speaking to each other in English, but we got used to it after a while.

It is well that Dr. Anuson said that this is neither an academic study nor a memoir. Nor is it very critical or even analytical. Dr. Anuson is correct in pointing out that it is a personal and anecdotal account of Thai diplomatic history, foreign policy, foreign affairs and diplomacy as seen through the eyes of a practitioner, who happens to be an amateur of Thai history. Like him, I hope that it is reasonably enjoyable.

As the reader will see, Dr. Anuson's questions were stimulating. The original questions naturally led to new ones as one set of thoughts led to another. I tried to answer them all. They were not difficult. It was not a confrontational exercise. If the questions had become controversial, I would have had to be economical with the truth.

Dr. Anuson was probably too kind. I do not remember at all his calling on me in 1976 just before I was leaving for my first post in Jakarta. If I had talked to him about the establishment of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic in 1975, it was probably because he was about to go as government scholar to England to study Chinese. I do remember his second call in 1986 when I was Deputy Permanent Secretary and Ambassador-designate to China. I took him down to the Library just as Khun Phan Wannamethee as Director-General of the Political Department had done for me as a Second Secretary in 1972. Anuson was by then a research student working on his Oxford doctoral thesis, which was published in the St. Antony's/Macmillan Series as *Thailand's Policies towards China, 1949-54* in 1992. There was a spin-off from that research in his *Brief Encounter: Sino-Thai Rapprochement after Bandung, 1955-1957*, which was published as

a study paper by the International Studies Centre, Institute of Foreign Affairs in 1991. The latter is cited in this book.

On one of my vacations from abroad, I paid a visit to Khun Phan who had become Director of the Ministry's International Studies Centre and Advisor to Minister Siddhi Savetsila. Khun Phan was full of praise for one of his assistants, Dr. Anuson Chinvanno, who had just come back from England. I thought my venerable old boss would be telling me about Anuson's academic brilliance but instead he praised him for having managed the motorcade for a recent international conference so efficiently. I must have laughed, for Khun Phan had to remind me that the efficient management of the motorcade made the conference a success because there were no complaints, all the participants were pleased and went home happily. It was a valuable lesson which I always mention in my talk to new entrants to the Ministry that administrative ability is equally important.

Minister Siddhi Savetsila had inaugurated the International Studies Centre in 1987 as a think-tank and training centre for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After the departure of Minister Siddhi Savetsila, the International Studies Centre gradually became moribund until it was revived recently. I was so pleased when the Ministry named Anuson as its Director. He has come back to where he belongs. I had been disappointed when he took early retirement after having been Ambassador in Hanoi. I had hoped that he would go on to Beijing where he would have been able to use his considerable knowledge of Chinese and Chinese history. I was pleased when he was recalled to work as Deputy Secretary-General (Political) to the Prime Minister

and even more pleased now that he is back at the International Studies Centre.

I wish to thank him most sincerely for editing this book and to thank Ms. Namon Yuthavong for taping and transcribing the interview. Arthit Prasartkul and Seksan Anantasirikiat were companions in the process. I wrote the Epilogue to round up my thoughts as a tribute to two highly respected and beloved persons, who made my career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Principal Secretary to His Majesty the King, and the Thai Red Cross Society, Khun Phan Wannamethee and Khun Arsa Sarasin.

Tej Bunnag

Secretary-General

The Thai Red Cross Society

CHAPTER

1

THAI DIPLOMACY
IN PERSPECTIVE

In your opinion, what are the characteristics of Thai diplomacy?

In one word: “flexibility”. In other words, as a small power, we cannot afford to hold rigid views on the problems of the world. At the end of the First World War, at the Congress of Versailles, Siam participated and was categorized as a “Power with limited interests”, therefore we have to be flexible in dealing with the world. This has been the character of Thai diplomacy since the middle of the 19th century or what I would call modern times. Later on, I hope to be able to divide this perspective into (1) Thailand’s relations with the great powers and (2) Thailand’s relations with its neighbours. These two are different and that is why I started modern Thai diplomacy with the middle of the 19th century.

With the first key word being “flexibility”, the second key word, in the most neutral description, would be “national interest.” This is already too vague and too general because all countries, great or small powers, look after their national interests, but of course a great power like the United States would have a different perspective of their interests than a small power like Thailand. So, what truly are our national interests? The key word here is “survival”. Survival as a free country, with a free and open market economy, and a free and open society. I think this has been the purpose of Thai diplomacy from the middle of the 19th century to the present day. This can be the starting point of our conversation.

Some academics have characterized Thai diplomacy as “bamboo diplomacy” due to its flexibility. As you mentioned the word “flexibility”, do you think this is an accurate characterization? Or is Thai diplomacy more like a “balancing act”?

With diplomacy goes the word “bending with the wind”. There is a story that the late great Prime Minister and founder of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew, in a conversation about Thai diplomacy, said that “people always say that the Thais bend with the wind, but it’s more than that. The Thais bend before the wind!” I don’t know whether this is a true story, it may be totally apocryphal, but I remember that some of our elders and betters in our Ministry were rather irritated by this remark. They thought it was a typical patronizing LKY remark about Thailand. But when I heard this story, I thought it was a great compliment!

Thai diplomacy as not just bending with the wind, it sees where the wind is blowing, and bends before the wind gets there.

One of our elders and betters —whose name I will not mention—always say we Thai diplomats are spineless with no backbone. I disagree. I still have not got the chance to discuss this with him face to face. I think that the spine is an interesting part of the human anatomy in that it is made up of many bones, not just one big bone like the shin. So, because it is made up of small bones locked together, it can bend forward, backward, left and right, and is therefore a very flexible piece of the anatomy. It is unlike the shin, which would break if it is hit hard. The whole point of Thai diplomacy is that it IS flexible and can go in many directions. That is the real meaning of “bamboo diplomacy”. I agree with the apocryphal story of Lee Kuan Yew that Thai diplomacy bends BEFORE the wind, not just WITH the wind. The difference between the two prepositions is very important, before or with. In other words, good diplomacy is pro-active and not reactive. You have to see where the wind is blowing in order to keep safe and survive in a dangerous and difficult world.

So, with this kind of awareness that the spine is made up of many bones, we can be flexible, and we can balance. I think this is very characteristic of Thai diplomacy. You can say that it is a national instinct to be flexible and to survive – to bend before the wind and to keep things in balance. It is a balancing act because you have to keep things in balance.

So, if the key is the ability to detect the direction of the wind, how did we manage to do so in the past? Is there a certain intuition or ability in our culture and our people?

Yes, I think if you look at Thai diplomacy from a historical perspective, you will see many continuing features. As I mentioned earlier, modern Thai diplomacy began in the mid-19th century, but if you go back to the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851), I would characterize his reign as the last and greatest reign of traditional Siam. The country had recovered from the devastation of the wars with Burma at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. During the reign of King Rama III, the kingdom had reached its greatest expansion. The Thai state of Siam was expanding in all directions – from the Shan State in Burma to northern Laos, with sway over one-third of modern Cambodia, and tributary states in the north of modern Malaysia. It had reached the greatest extent of old Siam.

On his death bed, King Rama III cautioned that as we had no more problems with our neighbours, especially no more worries about invasions from Burma, we had to worry about the West. We had to learn from them, so as not to become their subject. That is the great quotation of King Rama III to his ministers, and the ministers took heed. They followed his advice, and that was how they were able to accommodate the incoming Western powers. They learned technology and science from the West, and started to open the country to Western trade and to Western ways of doing things. This started with the Bowring Treaty with the British in 1855.

Siam has been a trading nation since the Ayudhya period when we traded with China, Japan, and countries of the archipelago. But the Bowring Treaty opened us to trade with the West. Marxists and Leninists would say that from 1855 onwards, when the Bowring Treaty opened trade, commercial and diplomatic relations with the West, Siam became a semi-colonial country. I find this an exaggeration. What the Bowring Treaty did was to limit Siamese sovereignty. It is true that the Bowring Treaty limited taxation on foreign goods to 3 per cent, which was a limitation on our fiscal sovereignty, and also limited our legal sovereignty, by instituting extra-territoriality, which allowed foreigners to attend the court of their own nationality. Apart from these fiscal and legal limitations, which I regard as irritants, Siam remained a sovereign state, and that was how the Kingdom was able to reform and modernize at about the same time as Meiji Japan.

That was the great difference, and the uniqueness, of Thai diplomacy in historical perspective. From 1855 onwards, Thai diplomacy was able to develop on its own, especially after the creation of the modern Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1875. It acquired a tradition and a way of doing things that made Thai diplomacy special. This tradition has lasted for more than a hundred years now, and still continues to grow. That was how Siam survived colonial imperialism during the reign of King Rama V, and later on, especially after the Second World War, that was how Thailand survived communism. There are, of course, many details of how flexible and balanced Thai diplomacy has been over the last 150 years.

These two imageries – one being the bamboo swaying in the wind and the other being Thailand conjuring a balancing act – came from some of our leading academics. Do you see them as exclusive of one another, or are they one and the same thing?

The two are one and the same thing. They are the same story. What seems to be a dichotomy is actually indivisible. Another key word is “pragmatism.” Thai diplomacy has always been very pragmatic, very practical, and very realistic. Because our leaders have been very pragmatic, practical, and realistic, they were always able to be flexible and adjustable. My grandfather¹ who was once the head of this Ministry, had a favorite expression, “muddling through”. Of course, to muddle through successfully, one has to be fairly skilled! You have to be skillful and be aware of things around you, otherwise, you would not be able to muddle through, you’d fall. I think “muddling through” successfully is another characteristic of Thai diplomacy.

As a small power, we live in a dangerous world, buffeted by strong winds, and we cannot be our own “agency”. What does “agency” mean? It means that you are master of your own destiny. If you are a great power, you can be an agent of events and of your own destiny. But a small country like us cannot be an “agent” by itself when it comes to relations with great powers. Great powers like Britain, France, or Germany in the 19th century and much of the 20th century, and the United States for the 20th century, have full agency over events. But we can only have this capacity in our relationship with neighbours, but not with great powers. I will talk about the difference in relationships between Thailand and the great powers, and Thailand and the regional powers later on.

Do you see these characteristics continuing in modern times?

Yes, I do. It will always be the same. The world has basically not changed that much. In the 19th century, we had to negotiate our way between the British and the French empires in this region of the world. Before that, of course, we had to be aware of the Middle Kingdom (China) when it was the centre of the Asian universe. All the East and Southeast Asian countries had to be cognisant of the Middle Kingdom. But from the middle of the 19th century, with the decline of Qing power, we had to beware of what they were thinking in London and Paris. After the Second World War, we had to listen to Washington.

But today, at the beginning of the 21st century, in the Indo-Pacific region once again we have to be aware of what Beijing is thinking, with Washington looming over the Pacific. Basically, at that level, it is how to manage our relations with the great powers. But we also have new players from the 1960's onwards to the present day. We have returned to the importance of our relationship with our immediate neighbours. In a way, the world never changes, and we have to be aware of our relations both with the great powers and with our neighbours.

How do you see Thai foreign policy formulated over time? Is it systematic and institution-based, or is it mainly influenced by personalities?

In modern times, another key word that I would mention is "instinct". Instinct is always very important in the formulation of foreign policy of any country. In our country in particular, because of our culture and political system, personalities are always very important. This is because our political system is

rather weak. I will come back to the importance of personalities, but now let us talk about the systematic and institutional part first.

Theoretically, even in the Thai case, foreign policy or any kind of policy should come from the policy or the political side. The inputs into its formulation can come from the Foreign Ministry and other ministries which deal with foreign affairs. Institutionally, it should then go to the National Security Council (NSC) and then to the Cabinet. The final decision on foreign policy should be made by the Prime Minister together with the Foreign Minister. That is theoretically the proper institutional way of foreign policy making.

But we know full well that it does not work that way. The formulation of Thai foreign policy is very personal, it is based on “instinct”. It is very instinctive. Some people, in the Thai setting, have it while others do not. We have been very fortunate that from the middle of 19th century to the present day, we have had people with very good foreign policy instinct. They have a feel for it, starting from King Rama III to His Majesty the late King Rama IX, they all had great foreign policy instinct. They were assisted by professionals, civil servants, career diplomats who also had the same kind of instinct. That is why we were able to survive. We survived imperialism, colonialism, communism, and hopefully will survive whatever ism that is blowing in the wind.

Recently we held a seminar on the 100th anniversary of Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan.² He was another good example of a man with outstanding instinct for foreign affairs. We have been very fortunate with our diplomatic

leaders. We have hundreds of examples of this good instinct in the implementation of Thai foreign policy during the past 150 years.

The key word here seems to be “fortunate”. Thailand has been fortunate to have diplomatic leaders with good instinct. But if we do not have people with good instinct, how would you see Thailand perform in foreign affairs?

There are two aspects to it, like muddling through. There are two ways of muddling through. Of course, you have to have good luck, but you have to be good at it, too. The dichotomy can be two sides of the same coin. In the 19th century, we had the good fortune of geography. When the West came to Southeast Asia, they reached Burma and Vietnam first. We had enough time to adjust, to reform and to modernize. That was the fortunate part. But we also worked at it. We did not blow it. Our leaders had very good instincts.

During the Cold War, it was the same thing. In East Asia, the Cold War was in fact a hot war. The first one was the Korean War, which we participated in and gained from it. Then there was the Vietnam War that was right on our border. It was fortunate that it did not spill over to our country, so we had time to develop during the time of Field Marshals Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn. We had time to adjust, just as in the 19th century. And again, we had a great leader in His Majesty King Rama IX. We turned the good fortune of geography and circumstances to our advantage by not wasting time, by developing. It was the age of development. We improved our infrastructure and modernized. We survived the Cold War.

Is that how we achieve diplomatic successes, by the ability to read the direction of the wind and through the instinct of our leaders?

Yes, and we discussed this issue at the launch of Charivat Santaputra's book on Thai foreign policy recently.³ In his book, he recounted a very interesting shift in Thai diplomacy. From the period 1932 to 1944, detecting a wind of change, Thai leaders were pro-Japan, pro-Italy, and pro-Germany – in general, pro-Axis. During that time, they were hiding behind the mask of “neutrality”.

During 1942-1944 they were not neutral. They were on the side of the Axis powers. But at the same time, another set of leaders was maintaining relations with the Allies, British and American, through the Free Thai movement. The great success of Thai diplomacy at the end of the Second World War was therefore the ability to shift ground completely. To announce the Second World War for Thailand as “null and void” was great footwork. They actually said the War was void. How could it be when in fact our leader had signed a treaty with Japan in front of the Emerald Buddha? It was now declared null and void. Some of the great powers did not buy this but as long as the greatest could, it was all right.

After the Second World War, there was a great surge in communist power in Asia with the fall of the Republic of China in 1949. Thailand became a bastion of the “Free World” against the Communist World. I think Thai foreign policy did well out of this. The dominant personality over that period was His Royal Highness Prince Wan Waithayakon, who was referred to simply as Prince Wan, my personal hero of Thai diplomacy.

Let me just recall a few successes of Prince Wan. I think he personified Thai diplomacy in each and every way. It is his long career which defines his diplomatic successes. He started off as a second secretary to the Thai delegation to the Congress of Versailles in 1919. He was the dominant “personality” until his demise. When I joined the Ministry in 1969, he was still Deputy Prime Minister. But whenever our then Foreign Minister, Dr. Thanat Khoman, was away, the Prime Minister always made him acting Foreign Minister.

Prince Wan was involved in and in charge of Thai foreign policy for over five decades, from 1919 until 1971. He was very influential. The culmination of his career was when he was Foreign Minister from 1952-1957, which was capped by his election as the 11th President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1956. On the world stage, as President of the UNGA, Prince Wan had to preside over two major international crises. The two happened at just about the same time, namely the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt over the problem of the nationalization of the Suez Canal by President Nasser, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary to put down the reformist Communist government of Imre Nagy. He had to handle both crises as President of the UNGA.

The repercussions of the Suez invasion can still be felt today. The year 1956 was a very important year in modern Middle Eastern history because it marked the end of the old Anglo-French dominance and the entrance of the United States into the Middle East. Looking back, I think the United States started off pretty well, but then it got bogged down in the

problem created by the British and the French. When the Americans went in, in 1956, it was more or less to tell the British and the French to get out and to recognize the importance of Arab nationalism as represented in those days by President Nasser of Egypt. But soon afterwards, the Americans just repeated what the British and the French had done before. They got stuck in the quagmire or the quicksand of the Middle East and have not been able to get out to this day.

The crisis in Hungary, which had not ended before the completion of his tenure at the United Nations, was different from the Middle East. As it turned out, just as the Soviet Union was falling, Hungary left the Soviet orbit and became a member of the European Union (EU), and now it is having a different problem with the EU. The conflict took a different path from the Middle East.

What was significant about Prince Wan, besides being the 11th President of the UNGA, was that he was chairman of the committee which started drafting the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), something people have largely forgotten, including in Thailand. He was actually the first chairman. UNCLOS was closed many decades later in New York under the chairmanship of Ambassador Tommy Koh, the third chairman.

We should look at how UNCLOS was launched and what the original issues were in the first few sessions, because they set the agenda for the rest of the conference. UNCLOS was chaired throughout by Southeast Asians. The first was Prince Wan, the second was Hamilton Amerasinghe, a Sri Lankan, and the third

was Tommy Koh of Singapore. So, Southeast Asians played a very important role in setting the modern Law of the Sea. This is a fact that has been forgotten. Incidentally, the original Law of the Sea written by Grotius originated with problems in the seas of Southeast Asia, around the present Indonesian archipelago when the Dutch began to establish their dominance over what became the Netherlands Indies. So, the original Law of the Sea was about problems in the South China Sea, but people have forgotten about this three centuries later, although the problem then and now have their parallels.

The greatest successes of Prince Wan occurred before his Presidency of the UNGA and they took place in 1954 and 1955. These were showcases of Thai diplomacy. In 1954, there was a meeting in Manila which resulted in the Manila Treaty, which established the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), whose headquarters is where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is today.

SEATO was part of the chain of containment of the communist world, starting with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), and then SEATO. It was a great triumph of Prince Wan that he was able to invite the signatory powers of the Manila Treaty, which included the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to locate SEATO headquarters in Bangkok. Thus, Thailand became the bastion of the struggle against communism in Southeast Asia, and we benefitted a great deal from its location in Bangkok.

After the signing of the Manila Treaty, there was a Council

meeting in Bangkok attended by foreign ministers including John Foster Dulles and Sir Anthony Eden. The meeting was held at Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, where there was no air-conditioning in those days. People could hear birds singing and sparrows chirping outside. At one stage, silence suddenly fell, like the British would say “an angel passing”, then Sir Anthony Eden said, “You see, when Prince Wan speaks, even the birds stop to listen!”

This is the kind of story I love, just like the one that Lee Kuan Yew supposedly said about Thai diplomacy bending before the wind. But this one is absolutely true. Our boss, former Permanent Secretary Phan Wannamethee⁴ was there in person and I have asked him about it. He said there really was that silent moment and Sir Anthony Eden did say that.

That was the caliber of Prince Wan that even the great British Foreign Secretary praised him for his eloquence. Sir Anthony Eden did not do so well as Prime Minister when the British invaded Egypt a year later. History does not record what Prince Wan said of him then.

During that meeting in Thailand, the Foreign Ministry assigned a liaison officer to him and they got along very well. He was full of praise for the officer, whom Prince Wan had personally chosen. That was part of the success of the meeting. It was very personal for Prince Wan to choose someone as liaison officer for Sir Anthony Eden who was well known to be difficult, and Sir Anthony Eden actually liked the man. Such things matter. It's part of the success of Thai diplomacy.

The amazing thing is that, after the Manila Treaty, there

was some deft footwork at Bandung, Indonesia. Bandung was a meeting of emerging countries convened by President Sukarno in 1955. That meeting led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The meeting chose Prince Wan, Foreign Minister of Thailand, to be its Rapporteur and to chair the drafting of the Bandung Declaration. It was, of course, a great honour for Prince Wan. But what is more interesting was how these emerging countries could choose someone who had just signed the Manila Treaty to be their Rapporteur. The Manila Treaty was a treaty of the “Free World” or the “West”, while the emerging countries were supposed to be neutral and non-aligned or inclined to the “Communist World” of the East. The so-called “Free World” saw the emerging countries, with leaders like Nehru, Nasser, and Sukarno, as left-leaning, the “other side”, so to speak, according to the United States. They were not non-aligned, but aligned to the other side. But the Rapporteur that they chose was someone from the camp of the “Free World”. So it was that Prince Wan was able to be on both sides.

Some people who have carried out research in the archives here have told me that it was the Americans who asked Prince Wan to go.⁵ I have not seen the documents myself. But it was interesting that Prince Wan was in a way working for the Americans at the Bandung Conference.

Even now, every ten years or so, they still celebrate the Bandung Conference. At the Bandung Museum, Prince Wan is featured prominently in the film that is shown. This shows the balance in Thai foreign policy that on the one hand in 1954 we

were at the Manila Conference with Western countries to contain communism and then in 1955 we were at the Bandung Conference with emerging countries in their quest for non-alignment. This was a very fine balance. It is the characteristic essence of Thai foreign policy.

Was this how we gained acceptable role in international affairs, that we were able to represent, not necessarily neutral ground, but either side of the ideological conflict at the time?

Those were the key events in 1952-1957 when Prince Wan was Foreign Minister. By 1956-1957, the government of Field Marshal Pibulsonggram was already planning for the state visits of His Majesty the late King Rama IX to the United States and Western countries. They were implemented by the subsequent government of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat. That would set the stage for our participation and contribution to the Vietnam War.

I think the story of Prince Wan's foreign ministership was that we had completely recovered our role in the world from the debacle of the Second World War. Thailand became fully established on the world stage when Prince Wan was Foreign Minister. He became the 11th President of the UNGA, but he was not the first Asian in that position. The first Southeast Asian was of course Carlos P. Romulo of the Philippines who made it to the United Nations before Prince Wan, but then Carlos P. Romulo was at San Francisco for the signing of the UN Charter. He was with General McArthur when McArthur went back to the Philippines to "liberate" the Philippines from Japan.

My point is that we were not a founding member of the

United Nations. We were not at San Francisco because we were “on the wrong side”. But we recovered very quickly and joined the United Nations in 1946. By 1956, that is within 10 years, we were President of the UNGA. These were great achievements. Then came Manila and Bandung, which established Non-Aligned Movement. But we did not join the NAM until after the collapse of the Soviet Union. We joined in 1993. We actually made it to the NAM when there was no longer a need for non-alignment, but it was a good symbolic gesture and given the current situation in the Indo-Pacific region, the movement may have to be revived.

Are there any failures or regrets you would like to mention?

I would not configure the question in such a way. Let me put it this way, circumstances limit our choice of action. Take, for instance, something close to my heart. When Nanjing fell in 1949, our Embassy moved to Guangzhou. My grandfather was Ambassador in Nanjing. He and the American Ambassador were the last to leave. They came down from Nanjing to Shanghai then went on to Yokohama by boat. Was there an opportunity then to say that the Republic of China on the mainland was no longer there, as Chiang Kai-shek had moved to Taiwan, so could we have moved our Embassy in Guangzhou up to Beijing and recognize the People’s Republic of China?

The opportunity was there, but that possibility was not considered because the circumstances were that the “Free World” continued to support the Republic of China. We went along with that. We moved our Embassy from Nanjing to Guangzhou

and then to Taipei, where it remained until we normalized relations with the People's Republic of China in 1975. This is the conundrum. Should we have recognized the People's Republic of China that had power over the whole of mainland China from 1949 or perhaps after the meeting between Prince Wan and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in Bandung in 1955. That was another opportunity we missed.

So, there were missed opportunities.

Maybe. But was there an opportunity to do something else then? Should we have recognized the People's Republic of China in 1949? When the PRC took its place on the UN Security Council in 1971, shouldn't we have normalized relations and not waited until 1975? If we were to call it "missed opportunities", then with China, there were at least 3 missed opportunities. But in the end, things turned out right. We muddled through!

What are the current challenges to Thai diplomacy?

The current challenges to Thai diplomacy and to Thai foreign policy in general are that, as I mentioned before, we are in a world where we have to deal with the relations between two great powers in the Pacific region. We are back to dealing with the Middle Kingdom, and US foreign policy with regards to China. This is the great challenge to Thai diplomacy today, how to handle the relationship between these two great powers of the Pacific.

COVID 19 has been the number one challenge. But along with it comes other opportunities. Apart from the challenge

of the China-US relations, there are also variables that are challenges that we can work on, such as, our relations with Japan and with the Republic of Korea. What is interesting to me is that the only visit of a foreign minister to Thailand in 2020 was that of the Foreign Minister of China, Wang Yi. It is symbolic in itself that China's Foreign Minister should pay a visit to Thailand whereas we had no visit from the US Secretary of State or the Japanese Foreign Minister or the Korean Foreign Minister. There is something to work on there.

Another variable at the great power level is India. Back in the 20th century, people often said the 21st century would be the Pacific century. Nowadays, there is a change. We are talking about the Indo-Pacific century. India has become a very interesting phenomenon, a rising power in Asia. There are opportunities to strengthen relations with India because, in the contemporary setting, perhaps there has been too much emphasis on China and not enough interest in India. I think there is a lot of opportunities here for Thai diplomacy. At the end of the day, or you can say at the start of the day, there are the challenges of our relations with our neighbours in Southeast Asia, which, to me, is always the real heart and the real challenge of our foreign policy: how to deal with our neighbours in Southeast Asia, in particular our immediate neighbours.

CHAPTER

2

THAILAND
AND THE WORLD

THAILAND AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Let's talk about Thailand and the world through our involvement with the League of Nations and the United Nations. How and why did we join the League of Nations?

We have to go back to Siam's participation in the First World War. After the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915, the United States and Siam joined the Allies against the Central Powers. It was not expected that Siam would participate in the First World War, and even if Siam were to participate, the question was which side it would be on. Before the First World War, Siam was leaning towards the Central Powers, especially Imperial Germany. German engineers and technicians were very popular in Siam before the First World War. They contributed

greatly to the early railways of Siam. Lots of people thought that Siam was pro-Imperial Germany. One of the most influential princes at the time, Prince Paribatra or Prince Nakorn Sawan, was German-educated.

With a lot of encouragement from the United States, and that was the real turning point, Siam sent an expeditionary force to France. That was an exercise in itself, to equip and train that expeditionary force in Siam before they were dispatched to France. No Siamese soldier had been to Europe before. The expeditionary force saw action at the very end of the First World War. A part of this force even occupied a German town after the war. Imagine the Thai army occupying German territory!

At the end of the First World War, the expeditionary force participated in the victory parades down the Champs Elysée in Paris and down The Mall in London. These were highly symbolic events, emphasizing Siam as an independent country and as a power in its own right. Since Siam joined the Allied Powers in the First World War, it was invited to the Peace Conferences in Paris. These conferences were held at the Versailles Palace, where Siam fully participated as a sovereign and independent nation. We were one of the only three Asian countries at the conferences, together with China and Japan. Siam was designated a “Power with limited interests”. It clearly defined that Siam was not a global power and did not have global interests, but only “limited” interests. It was enough for Siam.

There were 2 seats at the conference table for Siam at Versailles, whereas the Great Powers had 3 seats. The Republic of China made a big fuss that she should be given 3 seats as well.

But if you look at the record, it was very interesting that although Siam was assigned 2 seats, there were 3 Siamese delegates at the table! Apparently, the Siamese delegation just dragged up another chair and squeezed in. The Chinese made a great deal of protest at the Congress of Versailles and finally walked out. But Siam stayed from the beginning to the end.

This is also characteristic of Thai diplomacy. We can achieve results without having to make a fuss! We find practical ways of solving diplomatic problems. Powers with limited interests were assigned two seats, so one more seat was dragged into the middle, and it was noted that there were actually 3 Siamese delegates at the table. It was not a problem. We are small people!

Anyway, the “limited interests” were defined by Siam itself. The Siamese delegation was of course not interested in the division of the Middle East. But we did have our interests and that was to impress the European Powers on the need to revise and terminate what has come to be known as the “unequal treaties” that we had signed in the middle of the 19th century with them, and also with Japan and the United States. These unequal treaties limited our fiscal and judicial sovereignty. That was the limited interests of Siam at the Congress of Versailles. And they succeeded. They made contact. They had bilateral meetings. They said we must start the revision of the unequal treaties, which could wait for their final termination later on. We managed to terminate these unequal treaties after the revolution of 1932, but the start was in Versailles.

Another great achievement was that, by participating in the Peace Conferences at Versailles, Siam was present at the

creation of the League of Nations. The League of Nations very much reflected an ideal of President Woodrow Wilson that the world should have a permanent multilateral organization to take care of peaceful relationship between the Powers. The League of Nations would be permanent, which was its great difference from the Congress of Vienna. The Congress of Vienna in 1815, after the Napoleonic War, was intended to maintain peace in Europe but it did not have a permanent organization. This time, the League of Nations would have its office in Geneva.

Another point that served Siam's limited interests was that President Wilson pushed for self-determination. Of course, to the Siamese delegation, self-determination means freedom from the unequal treaties. So, from the very end of the First World War until the decade before the Second World War, that was what Siam was working on: self-determination, complete fiscal and judicial sovereignty, and equality between nations.

Like the United Nations afterwards, the League of Nations operated in exactly the same way. There were multilateral meetings, and a permanent staff was based in Geneva. To attend meetings, our delegations to the League of Nations went to Geneva from several European capitals where we had our legations - London, Paris, Berlin. In those days, they had to travel by train and it took a good deal of planning to get to meetings on time. They would stay for weeks and months in Geneva.

The Siamese delegation was well known. The leader of Siam's delegation, Prince Charoon⁶, was a colorful personality. He was British educated, and many in his delegation had been educated in England, France, and Germany. Prince Wan was also

a member of the delegation. That was where he started his career as a second secretary in the Siamese delegation. The Siamese delegation played an active role in many committees and chaired several of them. They did well and were respected. On another level, Prince Charoon became famous in Geneva for pressing the League to exercise its authority in enforcing his immunity from Swiss law enforcement and a Swiss court. He refused a speeding ticket by arguing that he was driving on a diplomatic duty.⁷ It was a precedence-setting occasion.

It is like in New York today. The police are within their rights to give us the tickets, and we are within our rights not to pay. There it stands until today. Peaceful coexistence! Prince Charoon was much admired by the diplomatic corps in Geneva for insisting on this right. He was also partially deaf and he spoke very loudly. A real character!

The significant thing, and a real achievement, is the fact that the first League of Nations' meeting held in Asia was the Bangkok International Opium Conference of 1931. This Conference produced the first international agreement to bear the name of Bangkok in the form of the Bangkok Agreement on the Suppression of Opium Smoking in the Far East of 27 November 1931⁸.

There was a paper on the opium trade in Siam by Prince Sittiporn⁹ presented at this Conference. I have reprinted it in the Journal of the Siam Society.¹⁰ Quoting from the Foreword to the book by Stefan Hell:

The Bangkok International Opium Conference of 1931 was a bonus in that it enabled the Government to mobilize resources to

make meticulous preparations both substantively and physically for the meeting.

Incidentally, during this period, Siam also hosted the League of Red Cross Societies. The Siamese Red Cross Society hosted the first meeting of the Far Eastern Red Cross Societies in Bangkok in 1922. Such a meeting is still held once every two years until today. Moreover, the 8th Congress of the Far Eastern Association of Tropical Medicine was held in Bangkok in 1930. What does this mean? It means that during the time of the League of Nations, Bangkok was already a hub for international conferences. We had the facilities and the abilities to host these meetings. The cover of Stefan Hell's book shows a photo from the Opium meeting, chaired by our Foreign Minister Prince Traidos Prabandh.¹¹ These three international meetings were impressive achievements.

The League of Nations was supposed to handle collective security, and on this issue, Siam also achieved fame, or notoriety! When Japan invaded Manchukuo in 1933, the issue was raised in the League of Nations, and Siam abstained in the voting. This was the first example of Siam/Thailand's regular abstention in the voting in the League of Nations and later on in the United Nations. Siam, of course, was condemned by the Western powers for the abstention.

In his book, Stefan Hell argued that it was done due to strict adherence to neutrality.¹² Siam was the only country to abstain, and it was exploited as pro-Japan by contemporary Japanese propaganda. It has also been interpreted as pro-Japan by some historians who read history with hindsight, whereas policy makers of the day had no idea of what was to come. The

Siamese delegation did not know that the Japanese would later invade China, which led to the massacre of Nanjing, and that events would lead to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Siamese delegation could not have possibly known that Japan was heading towards the Second World War. We should not read history with hindsight.

Regarding the invasion of Manchukuo, Stefan Hell says that it was an illustration of Thailand's neutrality. That is an interesting interpretation. But in principle, how could we say that one country invading another country is an acceptable act? In the 1980's, we did the opposite in terms of the Vietnamese "invasion" of Cambodia when we rallied the UN members to oppose it.

Circumstances changed. That would be one of the major roles Thailand played in the 1980's in the United Nations and we will discuss it later.

So, on the question of Manchukuo, you agree with Stefan Hell's conclusion that it is an example of neutrality?

It is not an example. Neutrality was the rationale. In reality, you can analyze the "vote" in another way. From 1932 onwards, Siam was actually pro-Japan, and Japan was held up as a model of a sovereign country that had successfully industrialized and become a great power from the time of the Japan-Russian war of 1905. The Siamese government from 1932 onwards was pro-Japan and saw it as a model of what Siam should do to regain full fiscal and judicial sovereignty and go on to develop as an economic and political power.

When Japan invaded Manchukuo, I think Siam did not mind, given the situation on the ground in China itself, which was broken up into areas held by warlords. Manchukuo was the ancestral home of the Qing dynasty. But the dynasty had been overthrown in 1911. Although I do not have the reference, I think the instruction from Bangkok to Geneva was very vague. The delegation in Geneva would have asked Bangkok on how to vote, and I heard that Bangkok gave a mysterious and cryptic instruction, referring to one of Aesop's fables!

Can we say that the abstention served our interest at the time?

Yes, it served our interest at the time. I think that was the point. That vote was highly significant in that it declared our independence from Western domination, especially the British and the French. From then on, we abstained a lot and it did not make us popular with the Western powers. That vote set the tone for Thai multilateral diplomacy to the effect that we will not take side when it is not in our national interest. That is the key.

Siam went on to vote for sanctions against Italy over its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. She again abstained from voting to condemn Japan's action in China in 1937. Siam voted for the expulsion of the Soviet Union in 1939, and in that vote, those who abstained were, interestingly, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria, China, and Switzerland. With reference to Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria, and even China, the proximity and the reality of Soviet power were obvious factors for consideration.

So, two abstentions on the condemnation of Japan in 1933 and 1937. But we voted to condemn the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia). You may raise the question of consistency, and I may counter with the argument of circumstances. Actually in 1935, Siam was pro-Italy, but the arguments that led Siam to vote for sanctions against Italy were that Siam was voting against imperialism and colonialism. But then, that was what the Japanese were doing in Manchukuo also. So, again, call it double standards if you like, but it depends on circumstances.

Maybe it is not so much a double standard but rather no standard. Would you say that we consider each event on a case-by-case basis, depending on our relations with that particular country, political and economic, and also distance?

I described Thai diplomacy as being flexible, but to outsiders, looking objectively, another word could be “opportunistic”. It depends on your point of view. Anyway, in discussing “Thailand and the World” and “Thailand and the League of Nations”, the point is that Thailand participated fully as a member of the League of Nations, and was recognized both for the permanent work of the League and on collective security. Siam built up its diplomatic expertise by holding international meetings in Bangkok. We had to make decisions on collective security, which provided precedence on why we abstained. It served our national interest which were limited anyway, according to the Europeans.

We also had an international civil servant who served in the League of Nations secretariat in Geneva. Mr. Mani Sanasen¹³ worked for the League of Nations from 1925 and continued to

work for the United Nations. He passed away only in 1978 and was a living legend in Geneva.

So, we did as well as we could have done, and that is why we had the expertise to work in the United Nations and SEATO. Mr. Somboon Palasathien, the second Permanent Secretary I served under, had been a member of the Thai delegations. He attended the 19th and 20th General Assembly of the League of Nations from London. That was how we built up our base and background in international diplomacy, starting from 1919. It was a valuable learning experience to have been at the League of Nations in Geneva.

Overall, how did our membership of the League of Nations serve our national interest?

Firstly, it puts Siam on the international map as one of the only three Asian countries in the League of Nations – Siam, Japan, and China. In the end, China walked out. Ultimately, Japan walked out as well. So, we were the only Asian nation in the League of Nations from the beginning to the end.

Secondly, we fully participated in the work of the League of Nations. In the General Assembly, in its regular work, our diplomats, like Prince Wan, chaired some of the committees. It was a great learning experience. While we were a member of the League of Nations, we hosted 3 international meetings in Bangkok. All these things set us well up for our later membership of the United Nations. We had diplomats who had accumulated experience from working with the League of Nations.

THAILAND AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Thailand was a founding member of the League of Nations but not an original member of the United Nations. We were not at San Francisco to sign the Charter. How and why did that come about? Why was it necessary for us to become a member of the new organization?

It was absolutely necessary for us to become a member of the United Nations because we had been a founding member of the League of Nations. We had to be in New York to reclaim our seat as an independent and sovereign nation, and we made it in 1946. We were not too late, even though we were not there in San Francisco. We managed to get to New York. Of course, we had to do something to get there, one of which was to recognize the Soviet Union. There are some controversies on this subject whether we had already recognized the Soviet Union. Professor Noranit Setabutr had found documents to prove that we had actually recognized the Soviet Union before 1946. So, the recognition of the Soviet Union might not have been a *quid pro quo* for our membership of the United Nations. There might have been other factors such as the reparation to the British and the French for our participation in the Second World War. I have a feeling that the final decision to admit Thailand was taken, under the leadership of the United States, because by 1946 the Cold War had already set in. The Cold War between the so-called Free World and the Socialist Bloc was probably the deciding factor.

We soon did well in New York because we had the experience and the leadership, especially after 1952 when Prince Wan became Foreign Minister. He was a well-known and

recognized diplomat from the time of the Congress of Versailles in 1919 and had chaired committees in the League of Nations. He was elected the 11th President of the UNGA in 1956, which was when he had to preside over major international crises - the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, the first so-called Arab-Israeli war, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

Previously, I mentioned the meeting at Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall with Sir Anthony Eden's remarks about the birds stopped chirping when Prince Wan spoke. There is another good story from New York. At a UN meeting on disarmament, chaired by Prince Wan, representatives of the Western powers and the Soviet Union were engaging in a rather fierce debate. The Soviet Union was represented by Andrei Vyshinsky, who was a notorious hardliner and very close to Stalin, probably because they were both Georgians. Vyshinsky suddenly said "You see, the Chairman agrees with me. He's smiling." Prince Wan shot back, saying "The Representative of the Soviet Union should be careful. I am always smiling." It was a famous repartee, well-known in the United Nations at the time and legendary in our own service. We should all be proud of him. He was very urbane, very smooth. This is the true style of Thai diplomacy. To me, this was one of the great moments in Thai diplomacy at the United Nations.

Can you recount your own experience in the United Nations? The United Nations celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2020. Looking back, what major roles has Thailand played in the United Nations?

I would still go back to Prince Wan's Presidency of the UN General Assembly. He performed brilliantly. He really presided over the UNGA, where his presence was truly felt. He was a real international statesman, admired the world over for his wisdom and urbanity.

What are the other highlights after 1956? They came roughly together, but I think the first highlight lies in our actions after Vietnam's "invasion" of Cambodia in 1979. There was a direct confrontation, in the context of the Cold War, between the Free World and the Socialist Bloc, which was not so united as we now know. The Socialist Bloc, led by the Soviet Union, sided with Vietnam and its occupation of Cambodia, which we now, within the ASEAN context, call the "liberation" of Cambodia. The Free World opposed the Vietnamese action. The Socialist Bloc, well before this, had already split between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, which sided with ASEAN.

So, every year, at the General Assembly, there was a draft resolution and ASEAN, led by Thailand and Singapore, had to "kill" that resolution. We had to rally the votes of African, Latin American and other nations in the world. And we managed to do it, year after year. It was hard work. The "killer amendment" always defeated the resolution. Books have been written about it. We participated fully in this action.

This eventually forced Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia and forced Cambodia to unite and hold general elections under UN tutelage. This led to the Paris International Conference on Cambodia of 1991. All these stemmed from our actions in the United Nations against the Vietnamese

“occupation” of Cambodia. Eventually Cambodia joined ASEAN in 1999. To me, the Paris International Conference on Cambodia in 1991 ended the so-called Vietnam War or the Third Indochina War. The first one ended in 1954, after Dien Bien Phu. The second ended in 1975. The third ended in 1991. After 1991, all the Southeast Asian nations became fully independent sovereign nations, except Timor Leste. By 1991, Southeast Asia was cleared of the wars that had started after the Second World War.

Another highlight was Thailand’s membership of the Security Council. In 1985-1986, for the first and, so far, the only time, we became a member of the Security Council. This was an interesting exercise, as it was still during the Cold War. The Socialist Bloc had supported Mongolia, and the United States supported Thailand. It was a very close election, 5 rounds, and we just managed to scrape in.

It was an unforgettable experience for those of us who were assigned to lobby. I was sent to East Africa to lobby Kenya, Tanzania and all the way down to Malawi. Then from Malawi, I flew to London and lobbied some other East African countries that I had not been able to lobby in their capitals. Then from London, the team joined up in New York, working with our Permanent Representative, Mom Luang Birabongs Kasemsri¹⁴, for 3 more weeks. I left to return home before the vote. I still keep all my notes. It was a great experience.

Would you like to share some more anecdotes concerning our campaign for election to the Security Council?

I think the Ministry was given a budget of only 4 million baht to lobby the world. The joke at the time was that it was far less than a Thai politician would spend in an election. People said that a politician had to spend about 14 million baht in an election campaign for a seat in the Thai National Assembly. We were given 4 million baht to campaign in the whole world!

I was assigned countries in East Africa because they are Anglophone. Dr. Arun Panupong¹⁵ was assigned West Africa which is Francophone. There were other colleagues assigned to lobby countries in Central America, and South America. It was great fun for me. The trip started with a Thai International flight to Athens, where, at the time, we did not have an embassy. It was not an auspicious start because when I arrived in Athens, there was a strike at the airport and there were no porters. The Ministry had sent with me a box of documents to give to all those countries in East Africa about our policy towards Cambodia.

So, at Athens airport, the luggage did not come off the plane because of the strike. I had to wait for a long time. I was already composing in my mind a cable to Bangkok “Mission aborted. Luggage did not arrive. No box of documents. Returning to Bangkok.” But finally, my luggage and this heavy box of documents came off the plane. Then the next problem. I had to get into town. Without porters, I had to lug my briefcase, my luggage, and this heavy box, around the airport, not knowing where to go and no one to help me. The Ministry just sent me on my own. I was in despair!

Finally, I managed to get a taxi into town. Luckily, the taxis were not on strike. I stayed at the Holiday Inn, but the connecting flight would leave early in the morning at a very inconvenient time. I just had enough time to rest a little bit, paid the hotel bill and went back to the airport. Again, no porters. The taxi could not get near the terminal because of the strike so it parked across the highway. I had to take my luggage across the highway, leaving the box and the briefcase on the other side, ran back, and got the rest of my stuff. Luckily, no one had taken it. I had to carry all these to the Olympic Airways counter to catch a flight to Nairobi, which was my first destination.

It was better in Nairobi as we had an embassy there. With great relief, our ambassador, Mr. Ukrit Durayaprama, was waiting for me when I arrived. I was delighted to see him, but also exhausted. It was dawn, but the ambassador said “We’ll check you in at the Hilton. You have to freshen up and come down straight away. It is the best time of the day to see the animals.” He took me to the Kenya National Park. So, I spent the first few hours of my first visit to Nairobi with the lions, giraffes, and hippopotamus!

I had a couple of very good days in Nairobi, having one long session at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kenya telling them why they should vote for Thailand and not Mongolia, that we were standing for the freedom and independence and sovereignty of Cambodia. It was a very interesting trip, as I had never been to Africa before.

From Nairobi, I went on to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. That was fascinating. They had just had lots of political problems.

They had just burned down the Central Bank. The Ministry, or whoever, had booked for me a hotel by the harbour. This hotel had no glass in its windows and therefore no air-conditioning. I remember vividly the breakfast, a full English breakfast with burnt English sausages, in a strange hotel with no glass in the windows!

I then went on to Rwanda and Burundi, former Belgian colonies, so they spoke French. In Rwanda, they just had their civil war between the Hutu and the Tutsi. I stayed at Hotel Rwanda that was later featured in a Hollywood film.

On the day I left for Burundi, I went to the airport and looked around for my plane. But there was no plane, apart from one single engine plane parked on the tarmac. I asked the liaison officer “*Ou sont les autres passagers?*” He looked at me and said “*Vous êtes le seul passager.*” That was the only time in my life so far that I was the only passenger on an international flight, but this plane could only take about 2-3 passengers anyway. So, there I was in this plane, sitting behind the pilot, with my luggage in the back, flying off to Burundi. It flew so low I could see the people doing their cooking and washing. It was beautiful. A private tour by a private plane.

I arrived in Burundi in late afternoon and was taken to a hotel by the lake. My liaison officer then told me that the Minister was ready to see me. So, we went straightaway to the Ministry. After introducing myself, the Minister turned to his Director-General and asked, “Have you told the Thai community that they have an ambassador here?” Thai community? Yes, in the middle of Africa, there was a Thai community. The official

said he hadn't, and the Minister said "Well, tell them! Tell them, they have an ambassador here."

The next morning, half of the Thai community was at the hotel to greet me. They were Thai technicians working at a bottle factory of ASEA Brown Boveri (ABB).¹⁶ They were making beer bottles in Burundi, and the technicians were Thai. These Thai people, about 11 of them, had taken their wives and children with them. So, there were about 20 or 30 Thai people in total. They said they would like to look after me, and they did. I kept in touch with them for years afterwards, when they came back to Thailand after the end of their contract.

Another delightful thing that happened in Burundi was that the UN representative there was a Laotian. He was hosting a dinner at his house and he invited me. He said "I'm having a dinner at my house and the diplomatic corps will be there including the Dean, the Soviet Ambassador. And we are going to roast a pig." I had nothing to do that night, so I said I would be delighted to go. When I arrived, he made me the guest of honour. I had to keep whispering to him to please take care of the Dean, the Soviet Ambassador. But he said "Never mind! We speak the same language, and you are here as a visitor so I will look after you. The Soviet Ambassador is here anyway as the Dean. We see each other all the time. So, today I am looking after you especially." He had a lovely house with the garden down to the lake. He roasted the whole pig. In the middle of Africa. It was surreal! A delightful experience.

It was also in Burundi that the American Ambassador hosted me a dinner on another night. I had to stay there for

several nights because there were not that many flights in and out. It turned out that the American Ambassador had been the Consul in Hue, Vietnam, during the Tet Offensive. So, we had a terrific conversation on how he survived during that time, hiding in Hue, running from one place to another.

From Rwanda and Burundi, I went on to Malawi where I met the great President Hastings Banda. He belonged to the generation of African leaders that won independence from the British, starting with Nkrumah of Ghana. All of them were heroes of the African independence movement from the time that I was a student, but most of them overstayed and had to be removed afterwards.

But when I went there, Hastings Banda was still in full power. He was in Blantyre, the commercial capital, as opposed to the political capital, Lilongwe. Beautiful cool weather. When I called on him to lobby, he said, "Tomorrow I'm having one of my political rallies, would you like to join?" And I went as a guest of Hastings Banda to a political rally where all the tribes of Malawi gathered. It was very colorful. Each tribe came out, the ladies danced, and sometimes Banda went down to dance with them. Luckily, he didn't invite me to join! It was a very long day but great fun.

Then I caught a British Airways flight from Malawi to London to do more lobbying there, and from London to New York to do some more lobbying for 3 weeks.

From your experience of lobbying for Thailand for the seat on the Security Council with these African countries, how would you describe their response?

Although they were not familiar with Thailand, I think most of the East African countries voted for us in the end. I think they saw the Cambodian situation through their own perspective of struggling against occupation. That was my line: illegal occupation. They were sympathetic. I am not so sure about the Francophone countries. They were more radical than the Anglophone countries.

In the end, did the vote split along ideological line?

Basically, of course, it was the Cold War that split along ideological line between the Free World and the Socialist Bloc. Mongolia also lobbied, fully aided by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries also had influence in Africa and elsewhere because they had also given a lot of assistance.

Anyway, it was a good experience for me personally to have done that trip. I had not had any multilateral experience before then. That is why after my posting as ambassador in Beijing, I asked to be posted in Geneva. We all need to have some multilateral experience in our career, either in New York or Geneva, New York being more intense in political/security work, of course.

What major role did Thailand play as a member of the United Nations? It is clear from the beginning that Thailand wanted to be a

good member and to have an active role within the organization, as it did in the League of Nations. One area where Thailand has been commended by other members as well as by the Secretariat is its involvement in the UN peacekeeping operations. We have sent troops, police officers, and other personnel to far flung corners of the world. Does it boost our profile within the United Nations?

Our first involvement in UN collective security took place in 1950 when we joined the United Nations in Korea. We were one of the first countries to pledge troops to the United Nations in the Korean War. We sent troops and they fought valiantly to the point that the US army called them “little tigers.” Again, as our previous participation in the First World War, it earned us a place at the multilateral table. The Korean War ended only with a truce. Until today there is still no peace treaty. In a way, we are still at war but only symbolically. There is still a Thai flag contingent at Panmunjom.

Before the Thai contribution was reduced to be just a flag contingent at Panmunjom, we had been supplying the United Nations with an air contingent based in Japan, which flew supplies to UN troops manning the 38th parallel in the Korean peninsula. This continued into the 1970’s. The Republic of Korea (ROK) fully recognizes the Thai role in the Korean War. There is a monument to the Thai participation in both Seoul and Washington, D.C.

After the war, Thailand participated in the rebuilding of the ROK, notably the waterworks in Seoul, which remain the foundation of the waterworks in Seoul today. We had done a lot for the ROK, which has stood us in good stead in the

relations between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Republic of Korea. That was the real start of Thailand's participation in UN collective security.

Since then, we have continued to do our part. Right now, in 2021, there are still Thai troops in South Sudan. But after Korea, the most important Thai participation in UN collective security was our participation in Timor-Leste, where General Boonsang Niampradit¹⁷ commanded the UNTAET¹⁸ Peacekeeping Force.

Again, as in the case of Korea, the Thai role in Timor-Leste was, and is still highly appreciated by its government and people. So, in order to be a good citizen of the world, participation in peacekeeping operations is important. You walk the talk, not just saying that we are good citizen of the world, but we actually participate in keeping world peace. I'm sure we will continue to do so, to the extent possible.

Another good example is our involvement in Cambodia after the Paris Agreement that settled the Third Indochina War. We sent troops there not just to keep peace but also to help rebuild the infrastructure. Would you agree that the major hallmark of Thailand's involvement in peacekeeping is not only to keep peace but also to assist in development.

There is also another dimension in the case of Cambodia. It was our activities with regards to Cambodian refugees. After the Vietnamese invasion or rather liberation of Cambodia, hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees poured into Thailand. At first, the Government's policy was to push them back because it did not want the refugees to be a "pull factor" for the Vietnamese army to pursue them into Thai territory, "hot

pursuit” in military parlance. But, of course, to push back refugees is contrary to international humanitarian law. We did this for a while, but eventually we opened our borders to Cambodians who became refugees. So, the United Nations and UN members came in to assist Thailand in looking after them.

By the end of the 1980’s and early 1990’s, there were hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees. After the Paris International Conference on Cambodia (PICC) when peace returned to Cambodia, our role was to arrange for the repatriation of Cambodian refugees back to their homeland. The official figure at the time was about 360,000 people, but in reality, there were many more. We carried out the repatriation efficiently and smoothly and within a reasonable amount of time. We did it in close cooperation with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, then under the great Japanese administrator, Madame Sadako Ogata. One of her assistants was a Brazilian, Sérgio Vieira de Mello, an outstanding international civil servant who later died in Baghdad. We worked very closely with them when I was Ambassador in Geneva.

In Geneva parlance, because so many UN organizations are based in Geneva, the Permanent Missions’ work used to be divided into “baskets”. The repatriation of refugees would fall into the humanitarian basket, which is the basket of work I enjoyed the most. It was the most positive and most constructive and useful. Thailand was a member of UNHCR Executive Committee from 1990 when I arrived, and for many years afterwards.

Thailand has a long experience in dealing with a variety of refugee groups from its neighbouring countries. Apart from the Cambodian refugees, there were the Vietnamese “boat people”, the Hmongs, and the Myanmar displaced persons. Do you see humanitarianism as a major tradition in Thai diplomacy? How does Thailand’s involvement in humanitarian affairs fit in with its foreign policies?

We have a lot of experience in dealing with refugees because of our location. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, we had refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and they all had to be taken care of. That is why we worked very closely with not just UNHCR but also the International Organization on Migration (IOM). They both have regional offices in Bangkok and work to get refugees relocated to and resettled in third countries.

We also had to set up camps for displaced persons coming over the border from Myanmar. The camps are still there. We are still taking care of them, whatever their true nationality may be. The situation on the Thai-Myanmar border where these camps are is rather quiet but work to resettle these people is still going on.

Under international humanitarian law, we have to be responsible for refugees. It is not so much Thai diplomacy or foreign policy that is involved, but rather its duty. There are certain duties that we have to discharge if we were to be good citizen of the world. Because of our geographical situation, we have to look after refugees to the extent possible, with the assistance of the United Nations and the international community.

There were criticisms of the Thai government's dealing with the Hmong when it decided to return them to Lao PDR because it wanted to be on good terms with a neighbouring country. This was contrary to the norm of abiding by international duty. How would you explain this dichotomy?

This is a very good question. Here is the interface between moral responsibility and political reality. In this case of the Hmong, it is where foreign policy, diplomatic skills and moral responsibility clashed. You have to make a policy decision. I think the Ministry, in cooperation with the security agencies of the government, had weighed the factors involved carefully. We had to be careful that we did not send back to the “country of origin” people who might face the death sentence or incarceration for their political beliefs.

At the end of the day, we have to weigh these factors carefully and not just have a blanket repatriation of refugees. There should be due process before mass repatriation. This applies to all sensitive races whether the Hmong or the Uighur.

Why was the work in the humanitarian basket the most satisfying to you personally?

It was indeed the most satisfying. I will give an example. When I was Chairman of the Asian Group, we had to prepare for the Human Rights Summit in Vienna¹⁹, which was a very good experience. The final preparatory session was held at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok. For the Summit, I was elected a Vice-Chairman, having been Chairman of the Asian Group in Geneva. What was

significant was that the Summit in Vienna extended the coverage of human rights further from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after the Second World War.

It took 40-50 years after the Second World War for human rights to expand to include such rights as the right to development. It was a progressive step forward. New definitions of human rights came out of that Summit in Vienna. I am proud to have participated in it. A successor ambassador in Geneva has also been Chairman of the Asian Group, and became President of the Human Rights Council in 2010-2011. Ambassador Sihasak Phuangketkeow later became Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs and remains active in multilateral diplomacy.

On the issue of human rights, can Thailand play an active role in the UN framework?

The role of Thailand in human rights is an interesting one. We certainly subscribe to the principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as we also subscribe to the final summit declaration in Vienna. But there are limitations. There is always a dilemma, or dichotomy, between the word ‘universal’ and ‘local/domestic’. There are lots of double standards practiced by both Western and Eastern countries, depending on local circumstances. There is always a debate on human rights about its universality.

I believe basic human rights are shared by all the great religions of the world. But there are local circumstances that open human rights to interpretation and application. And again, as I said, double standards exist in all countries. This is where

foreign policy and diplomacy come in to weigh how much and how closely one complies with the written Universal Declaration. The key word is compliance—how do we comply when it may not be in our national interest or not possible or practical under local circumstances.

Take the death sentence, for example. It can be argued under universal human rights that it is wrong to take another person's life even though that person might have taken someone else's life. This depends on the local law of each country. The United States and Japan still have the death sentence, and so do we. How does this violate international human rights?

If working with the humanitarian basket was the most satisfying, what was the least satisfying?

I would not frame it in that manner, as it was all important in a way. In Geneva, there are many meetings of great variety every day, and there is a need to prioritize. I always prioritized humanitarian affairs, for practical reasons. When I assumed duty in Geneva in 1990, there were still hundreds of thousands of refugees in Thailand, so the work was already cut out for me. Thailand was also Vice-Chairman of the UNHCR Executive Committee. The other priority was the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which took a lot of my time.

In Geneva, we were already discussing climate change back in 1990 because the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) was based there. Then it was not as prominent an issue as today. The World Health Organization (WHO) is another important international organization in Geneva with its annual

meeting, the World Health Assembly, which we have to prepare and attend. World health is very important because diseases and virus cross frontiers and every country has always to be alert. Patents is another very important area. To a power of however limited interest, everything is important. We have to follow every matter closely in Geneva and each day was full and long.

That is what makes Geneva so interesting. Some meetings of the Security Council are held in Geneva. When I was there, we had Security Council meetings on the situation in Iraq. So, there is a political and security dimension in Geneva as well, but of course not to the same extent as in New York. There is a full range of matters of international interests in Geneva for Thailand.

THAILAND AND THE GATT AND THE WTO

What was Thailand's involvement in the GATT and the World Trade Organization (WTO)?

When I arrived in Geneva in 1990, I was Ambassador Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva, and I presented my credentials to the head of United Nations Offices (UNO). But I was also Permanent Representative to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It was one of the organizations created at Bretton Woods along with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The World Bank and the IMF are based in Washington, D.C., but the GATT was based in Geneva. These three Bretton

Woods organizations were very important to the world after the Second World War. In 1944, when the powers that were fighting the Axis met at Bretton Woods, the discussions went around the fact that one of the factors that had led to the Second World War was the problem of international trade and the world economy. They had to find ways to resolve problems of international trade and the world economy peacefully in order to prevent such an event as the Great Depression from recurring.

With the GATT, they found a way to resolve problems of international trade peacefully. One of the factors that had led to the Pacific War during the Second World War was the rivalry between Japan and the United States and other Western powers for the Asian market—whether China or Southeast Asia. One of the clashes was about Japanese goods going into the Philippines. The first Director-General of the GATT was an American, Eric Wyndham White.

When I arrived in Geneva in 1990, it was at the tail-end of the Uruguay Round. There have been these big rounds to resolve problems in international trade and to open it up. The Uruguay Round had been going round and round for almost 10 years before I arrived. It had started at the seaside resort town of Punta del Este in Uruguay. Just before the meeting in Punta del Este, Thailand had joined the GATT in 1982. The Ministry had an absolutely brilliant Director-General of the Economic Department, Mr. Danai Dulalumpa, who was one of the most outstanding civil servants of his generation. He had been at the Office of the National Economics and Social Development Board and then transferred to the Ministry of Commerce. He

had retired early, but our Permanent Secretary, Arsa Sarasin,²⁰ persuaded him to return and work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I had asked to be posted in Geneva. As the Ambassador there was due to retire, I told Foreign Minister Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila²¹ that I had no multilateral experience, which is a great lack. The Foreign Minister kindly agreed to my request not knowing what I had gotten myself into.

From Beijing I came back to Bangkok and asked for a briefing from the chief negotiator for the Uruguay Round at the Ministry of Commerce, Mr. Karun Kittisatabhorn, who later became Permanent Secretary for Commerce. He kindly came to Saranrom Palace to give me a long and detailed briefing on the Uruguay Round and the GATT. I did not understand a word! It was not the first time in my life that I did not understand a word of what I was about to be responsible for. Like my work on China, I had to educate myself and do a lot of homework. I went to Geneva and was thrown in at the deep end of the Uruguay Round. Within two weeks of my arrival, there was a ministerial conference supposedly to close the Round in Brussels. We went there for several weeks. The weather was awful and we had an equally miserable time because the conference was a complete failure. There were demonstrations by Belgian and French farmers that had to be driven away by Belgian mounted police. They had to use tear gas and the mounted police had to charge the farmers. The negotiations then went back to Geneva for several more years. It was very exhausting.

In my early years in Geneva, there were still all-night

meetings. The meetings would go on and on. Soon I could tell who had more experience because, by about 5-6 pm in the evening, they would bring out their sandwiches and apples! For those with less experience, we did not have anything to eat and could only look on in hunger and envy when they started to bite their apples and eat their sandwiches. By about 8 in the evening, the Chair would say we could have a break and meet again at around 9. I would rush home for dinner and one of my colleagues would come and fetch me again close to 9 pm. The meetings often went on for the rest of the night until 4 or 5 in the morning. I was once locked out of the house because they were all so sound asleep that they did not hear the bell. I am glad that not long after that miserable event, the Staff Union announced that they would no longer provide interpreters for any meeting after 7 pm. With no interpreters, the meeting could not proceed. I was all for it.

The Uruguay Round was very tiring. I am sure the Doha Round that is still going on is equally tiring. The negotiations were highly technical. They were about nitty-gritty things like how many eggs and apples could be traded in the world or how many AA or AAA batteries could be exported by Thailand to the United States. It was very tiring to master the number of batteries we were exporting to the rest of the world. I did not even know that we were exporting batteries to the United States! Anyway, it was a good learning experience.

Thailand was actually recognized as one of the major trading countries of the world. The advantage was that only major trading countries of the world had the privilege of attending meetings with the Secretary-General of the GATT in

his inner sanctum called the Green Room. We had lots of meetings in the Green Room under the Chairmanship of the then Secretary-General, Arthur Dunkel, a Swiss national who was a wise, benign and firm international civil servant. Dunkel means dark, but we were meeting in the Green Room! Dunkel later fell out with the Americans and was replaced by an Irishman, Peter Sutherland, who eventually managed to close the Uruguay Round to the extent possible.

The final ministerial meetings took place in Marrakesh. The GATT Secretariat chartered a plane to take all the ambassadors to Marrakesh, and in the hold of the plane, there were 40 tons of documents! The minister who signed on Thailand's behalf was Supachai Panitchpakdi.²² What a lot of people did not realize was that the close of the Uruguay Round was achieved by leaving many important matters unresolved. Afterwards, they had to restart multilateral trade negotiations in Doha, which is still running today, under very different international economic circumstances. With the Uruguay Round, the issue was always about liberalization of world trade. After we closed it in Marrakesh, the international economic scene changed entirely, but that is another story.

When I got back to Geneva and wrote the report of the meeting in Marrakesh, one of my recommendations to the Ministry was that there should be a permanent mission of Thailand to the World Trade Organization, the new organization that was created in Marrakesh. My argument was that international trade negotiations were so detailed and time consuming, and there was already so much work at the Permanent Mission to the United

Nations in Geneva, we could not effectively cope with the work of the WTO as well. When I was Ambassador in Geneva, I had only one desk officer at the Mission working on international trade issues, the Uruguay Round, and the GATT. Although I was well supported by a few very capable officers from the Ministry of Commerce, that was not enough. Apart from the negotiations in the Uruguay Round, the regular day-to-day work of the GATT was continuous. The government agreed with my recommendation to have a separate permanent mission to the WTO, and it was established in 1995. The first Ambassador, who had to be taken out of yet another retirement, was Danai Dulalumpa. He was chosen because he had the experience of having worked at both the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

That was how in Geneva we came to have 2 Ambassadors Permanent Representatives: one to UNO and one to WTO. But in creating the Permanent Mission to the WTO, a few officers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also assigned to that Mission because international trade is also international affairs. This was a new experience for Thai civil servants working abroad, where one of the deputies of the Permanent Representative to the WTO would be a person from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I had known Ambassador Danai from his time at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When I was Deputy Permanent Secretary under Permanent Secretary Arsa Sarasin, I was also responsible for the Department of International Economic Affairs. When Ambassador Danai went to Geneva, they were building up the WTO. One of the committees that was being set up was the Agriculture Committee. We had meetings among

the ASEAN and Asian representatives, and we thought that Ambassador Danai should run to become the first Chairman of the Agriculture Committee of the WTO.

Ambassador Danai agreed and asked me to be his “campaign manager”. We won I think against India. And he became a very popular chairman. Agriculture was one of the most difficult matters in international trade negotiations. It always held up everything because there was so much at stake. Everyone - the Europeans, the Americans, the Japanese subsidize their farmers. So many people are involved and agricultural commodities are so important to our daily lives -rice, sugar, et cetera, you name them.

When the Doha Round, at one moment, was stuck on the issue of sugar, the Director-General, the Frenchman Pascal Lamy, a very brainy technocrat, came to see the then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. The Prime Minister had been very well briefed on the world sugar trade by the Ministry of Commerce. I was at the meeting as Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary with Foreign Minister Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai²³, along with a lot of people from the Ministry of Commerce. We were there just to listen, but having had the experience from the Uruguay Round, I knew more or less what they were talking about. Pascal Lamy’s meeting with Prime Minister Thaksin that day was one of the best sessions in international trade diplomacy. Pascal Lamy was so impressed with the Prime Minister that he said “We need more people like you to come to negotiate in Geneva”. I was proud that a Prime Minister of Thailand was on top of his brief and that he could have a real exchange of

views with Pascal Lamy, probably one of the most brilliant international civil servants ever.

Could you share some of your other experiences in Geneva?

The one great thing about the GATT and the Uruguay Round was that it was a great learning experience. For lack of multilateral experience at the time, I used to get upset with the negotiations over apples, batteries, or whatever that were being negotiated at the time. The Ambassador of the European Union to the GATT was a fascinating Frenchman. His name was Paul Trần Văn-Thinh. He spoke perfect English and beautiful French. He was a Vietnamese refugee who had been in one of the refugee camps in Thailand. I do not know how he ended up there, but former Permanent Secretary Arsa Sarasin got him out of the camp and on to Paris. Paul Trần Văn-Thinh was very grateful to him and to the Thai government for rescuing him. I think he had been a French civil servant before the Vietnam War, but I do not know how they came to know each other.

Anyway, one day in Geneva, Paul Trần Văn-Thinh saw that I was suffering and pulled me aside. What he said next was a game-changer for me. He said “Don’t take it personally. We are just negotiating on behalf of our countries.” It was one of the breakthrough moments in my career. When he told me not to take the negotiations in the Uruguay Round and the GATT personally, I became a much better diplomat. I briefed myself on the issues, negotiated objectively, and did not put personal emotions into it. It was really a life-changer.

Another one of my life-changing moments in Geneva

came from the New Zealand Ambassador. When I first arrived, it was late autumn, soon to become winter. The weather was really grim always with low grey clouds. Before the real winter set in, it was either cold rain or sleet. Geneva was a miserable place. With the grind of the Uruguay Round and the GATT, together with all the other boring work at the United Nations, I was getting depressed and grey, like the weather. Luckily, one of the first Ambassadors I called on was the New Zealand Ambassador. His Mission was in the same building and his first posting in the mid 1960s was Bangkok. His name is Tim Hannah, a wiry New Zealander with a crew cut. He had been a boxing half-blue at Cambridge. He also had to spend a lot of time with the Uruguay Round negotiations because New Zealand was an agricultural country. He saw me getting greyer and more depressed by the day. One day he phoned up and invited me to go down for coffee, adding he had something to say to me. My heart dropped as I thought not another agricultural matter surely but I accepted his invitation and went down to see him right away. Once I got to his office, Tim said that I was looking more and more miserable every day and that Geneva must be getting to me, especially with the weather. Then he told me what he did every morning when he got to the office. He looked at the *Journal Officiel* of the United Nations and the GATT to see what was going on that day. He then asked himself “what shall I neglect today?”, got out a pen and crossed them out and did not go to those meetings, sending a deputy or someone else instead.

This was my other game-changer! From then on, every morning, I got out my pen and crossed out meetings. It was an-

other life-changing moment. I was very grateful to Tim Hannah and his words “what shall I neglect today?” and have been recommending this daily course of action to my friends ever since.

After that first winter in Geneva, beautiful spring came. I spent the next five very happy years in Geneva, thanks to Tim Hannah’s advice. Also, in that first winter, my daughter was always sick with a cold. Our Swiss doctor told us how easy it was to deal with this by just going above the clouds and the sun will help. She said that there are no Swiss left in the city at the weekend, as they all go up the mountains, and if we do this, we won’t have to come to see her so often. We followed her advice, and that was another life-changing moment. We would try to go up the mountains every weekend in winter, walked around in the sunshine and came down feeling much better.

One observation about the work in Geneva is that it is very technical and that is why it is heavy and slow going. A lot of negotiations get bogged down in details because they are too technical. Is this true?

Absolutely! If you spend a whole afternoon talking about AA or AAA batteries against apples and eggs, it is very technical, time consuming and soul destroying! If you do this regularly, it can be very depressing. That is just one basket. At the beginning, the GATT and the Uruguay Round took up most of my time and most of my nights as well.

One good thing for me about the GATT meetings and the Green Room was that I got to know my counterparts very well, having spent so much time together. I kept up friendship with several of them for years afterwards. They were very useful to my

career. When I went to Windsor, Ontario, for the Organization of American States meeting, there were familiar faces - the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs used to be the Ambassador to the GATT, and the leader of the Uruguayan delegation was also a former colleague from Geneva. I have kept in touch with Tim Hannah to this day.

Regarding the other two Bretton Woods Organizations, the World Bank and the IMF in Washington, D.C., when you were Ambassador to the United States, did you have to get involved in their work?

No, the Ministry of Finance has a full team there to deal with them.

In conclusion, how do you see Thailand's role in the various organizations of the UN system? How does it fit in with Thailand's foreign policy today?

Geneva was my only multilateral posting, and it was a great learning experience, especially the Uruguay Round, the creation of the WTO, the humanitarian affairs, the repatriation of refugees and the matters of human rights. I have no New York experience whatsoever. My only other multilateral experience was when I was in Paris, being the Permanent Representative to UNESCO as well.

What I would like to say in conclusion is that Thai foreign policy and Thai diplomacy does not involve itself enough in multilateral work. I think the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Thai government as a whole, have always concentrated on bilateral diplomacy. I do not think we pull our weight in

international diplomacy. We should be more active in both New York and Geneva.

Thai career diplomats who work well in multilateral diplomacy can only do it up to a certain extent, if they do not have the interest and the backup of Headquarters. That is to say, Headquarters must also be equally interested in multilateral diplomacy if our diplomats were to flourish in this area. I could say from reading Stefan Hell's book on the Siamese participation in the League of Nations, that Siam was more involved in multilateral diplomacy back then than Thailand is in multilateral diplomacy today. If true, it is a pity. I just do not think we are active enough in multilateral diplomacy.

The reason is because, as a nation, we are not that interested in the rest of the world as much as we should be. We are rather inward looking. I do not think we are active enough even in our bilateral diplomacy with our immediate neighbours. Maybe we are only active in areas or issues of our immediate interest. But there have been individuals in our system who have risen above this inward-looking tendency. Prince Wan, for instance, was an internationalist. In more recent times, we had someone like Dr. Surin Pitsuwan²⁴ as an internationalist, that is someone who thinks about the world, world problems and world issues. We do not have enough of this outlook. It is hard to push the majority of our colleagues to have this internationalist outlook, including me as I am much more interested in relations with our immediate neighbours.

CHAPTER

3

ASEAN: FROM ASSOCIATION
TO COMMUNITY

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) started off as an association, and now it has become a community. Could you share your thoughts on the establishment of ASEAN in 1967? What were the geo-political or geo-economic considerations that led to the formation of ASEAN?

The year 1967 was a very important year. The establishment of ASEAN was a game changer, and probably the most important achievement of the then Foreign Minister Dr. Thanat Khoman. The year 1965 was a key year for Southeast Asia. Without the events of 1965, there would not have been ASEAN in 1967. The most important event in the region in 1965 was the failed coup on 30 September in Jakarta, otherwise known by the acronym “Gestapu”. It is a very controversial event, and no one really knows even today what actually happened. But the main result

was the overthrow of President Sukarno. Although he lasted a little while longer until March 1966, basically he lost all power to General Suharto. This ended the *konfrontasi* or confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia. And it removed from Southeast Asia a radical nationalist who had veered to the left.

With the decline and final removal of President Sukarno from power and the end of *konfrontasi*, the shape of politics in Southeast Asia changed. Also, in 1965, there was another significant event, which was Singapore leaving Malaysia. We had a new political entity under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, who was very dynamic and forward looking. There was a sea change in the politics of Southeast Asia.

The year 1965 also saw the escalation of the war in Vietnam, with the full engagement of US forces. And in August 1965, the Communist Party of Thailand declared an armed insurrection. The combination of these events provided impetus to the diplomacy and policy of Dr. Thanat Khoman. Before 1965, he had already been trying to form regional cooperation between Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines under the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA). He was also encouraging other countries in Southeast Asia to form regional organizations such as Maphilindo between Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia, but the sparks did not fly due to the politics of the time. But from October 1965 onwards, all the political factors aligned, and I emphasize the word “political factors”, for the Southeast Asian countries to come together.

I always emphasize the political and diplomatic side of ASEAN rather than its future functions, namely economic,

social and cultural cooperation. Without political cooperation, you cannot have functional cooperation. Dr. Thanat Khoman presented himself and Thailand as the bridge to resolve the problems of *konfrontasi*. The meetings between Malaysia and Indonesia were held in Bangkok. The Malaysian side was headed by Ghazali Shafie, and the Indonesian side by Adam Malik. Dr. Thanat Khoman was the convener, the chair, the facilitator who brought the two sides together.

Once *konfrontasi* was resolved, it opened up the possibilities to bring about the regional organization that Dr. Thanat had envisaged. Meetings were held at the level of senior officials from late 1966 through to August 1967 to form ASEAN. On the Thai side, the senior official was Dr. Sompong Sucharitkul²⁵, one of our most brilliant diplomats of that time. Then there were ministerial meetings, up until the final preparatory meeting in Bang Saen. Eventually, the Bangkok Declaration was signed at Saranrom Palace, the former home of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangkok.

The Bangkok Declaration is an interesting document. There is a linkage to an earlier era, about 12 years earlier. If you read it carefully, you will find traces of and inspirations from the Bandung Declaration of 1955. Nothing happens in a vacuum. There is always precedence. For the Bangkok Declaration, you can find its precedence in the Bandung Declaration. Non-interference in one another's affairs, for example. There is a lot of the "Pancasila" principles in the Bangkok Declaration. This, of course, came from Adam Malik. The acronym, ASEAN, also came from him because the Indonesians were adept with

acronyms. The foundation of ASEAN was an act of political will, led and inspired by Dr. Thanat Khoman, who made it possible.

Thailand was the lead country in 1967 because domestically it was stable and peaceful. It had a foreign minister who was fully backed by the prime minister. The formation of ASEAN marked the coming together of the 5 original members²⁶ to build a mechanism for the resolution of political problems in Southeast Asia. In order to back this up, to give further substance to this political cooperation, they also introduced the elements of economic, social and cultural cooperation. But fundamentally, ASEAN is a political organization. And that's how it grew from 1967 until today, as a mechanism for political cooperation.

If ASEAN was founded as a political organization to resolve conflicts in the region, why is there the usual criticism that it has not been able to, and often sweep them under the carpet?

But without ASEAN, these conflicts would have been worse. Sweeping things under the carpet can be useful. It is like putting things away in a drawer. There is another possibly apocryphal story concerning what General Franco supposedly said about Spanish politics, that if you put a problem away in a drawer for long enough, it would either resolve itself or the persons involved would have died and the problems would disappear. This is applicable to domestic problems in each of the ASEAN countries and also to problems between them. The principle of non-interference is a valuable one. Either the problems would resolve themselves, or you try to resolve them in private through quiet diplomacy.

And there are many problems in ASEAN: Thailand's border problems with immediate neighbours; problems between other countries in the region, between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Timor-Leste; border problems between Cambodia and Vietnam, etc. These problems take time to resolve, and they can be resolved quietly and peacefully outside the ASEAN framework. But ASEAN is there keeping these countries together. The question leads on to an interesting thought, the other great success of ASEAN.

After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, and after all the conflicts and tensions between the original ASEAN countries and the Indochina countries, Lao People's Democratic Republic or Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia applied to join ASEAN. Vietnam has just concluded a very successful chairmanship of ASEAN in 2020, and has become a very valuable, constructive, and positive member of ASEAN. Going back to the political side, ASEAN can resolve the tensions from the Vietnam War.

Before that, when Brunei regained full sovereignty from the British, Thailand was instrumental in drawing Brunei into ASEAN. I think it was very well done. So, now there are 10 members of ASEAN, with possibly an 11 when Timor-Leste eventually joins.

This does not mean that ASEAN did not have problems. It did have lots of problems among the members, but interestingly enough, it held together in the 2 phases – pre and post 1975, and is still together now. From time to time, Thailand has been able to take the lead as it did in 1967 in integrating ASEAN politically.

When we had Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, another brilliant minister, he initiated the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as the first and only forum at the time which discussed political and security issues in East Asia. It was a Thai initiative. Before that, when Anand Panyarachun was Prime Minister, he initiated the ASEAN Free Trade Area or AFTA. So, after 1967, there have been other moments when Thailand took the initiatives.

In the 1990's, the Indochina countries applied to join the ASEAN family. Do you think the expansion was a natural development in regional integration in Southeast Asia?

Certainly. It was envisioned in the Bangkok Declaration already. One of the clauses says that it would be open to other nations of Southeast Asia as well. Cambodia was the last country to join in 1999. I think the ASEAN spirit of community continues not only to widen but to deepen. At the beginning, in 1967, only the foreign ministries of ASEAN countries were involved in ASEAN cooperation. But later on, other ministries came to play more active role in ASEAN, notably the ministries of commerce/trade. Now almost all the ministries of ASEAN countries are involved. Another institution, namely the parliament, also became part of ASEAN cooperation.

Nevertheless, there has never been the thought of integration similar to the European Union (EU). ASEAN started about 15 years after the EU, if we count it from the start of the European Coal and Steel Community. But their founding fathers always had their vision on the total integration of Europe, hence the Euro. They started with the Coal and Steel Community,

went on to the European Economic Community, and finally the European Union. Their aim has always been European integration, but ASEAN never set foot on that path. It has stayed on the path of step-by-step cooperation.

Lee Kuan Yew used to chide ASEAN countries for the lack of intra-ASEAN trade, which used to be around 12 per cent when intra-European trade was already at 60 per cent. Even now, intra-ASEAN trade is still only around 25 per cent. Our economic cooperation or integration is very slow. But the slow-paced ASEAN economic cooperation or integration has its benefits. Since it is based on the comfort zone of each country, no country feels that it is being taken advantage of by another. This comfort zone is very important. But it is not static, it continues to widen and deepen over time.

How much of the differences in political system, level of economic development, cultures and religions, within the ASEAN member countries contribute to this need for comfort zones and a slow-paced cooperation or integration of ASEAN?

All the factors mentioned play a part. There are negative factors that obstruct and slow down cooperation. For ASEAN cooperation, one always has to go for the lowest common denominator. This also has led to a “sub-division” of ASEAN. It is a sub-division between mainland and archipelagic ASEAN. That is why we have this concept of CLMV, namely Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. Sometimes we talk of CLMVT, that is CLMV plus T for Thailand. Thailand plays a major role in CLMV cooperation. Vietnam is also playing a bigger role

that will help increase cooperation on mainland ASEAN. When Thaksin Shinawatra was Prime Minister, Thailand also initiated ACMECS²⁷, which is another sub-division of ASEAN, but complementary. Between mainland and maritime ASEAN, there will continue to be some differences. The important thing is to ensure that the cooperative framework which holds the region together is continuously strengthened.

It is often said that the next stage in ASEAN development after its foundation in 1967 started from the Bali Summit in 1976. What is your view on the Summit?

The Bali Summit was the beginning of the second stage of ASEAN development. It was held in Bali under the chairmanship of President Suharto. By 1976, Indonesia had fully recovered from the events in 1965. It finally took its rightful place in ASEAN as the biggest economy of Southeast Asia. It is interesting that it is the biggest economy but also one with the lowest GDP per capita, the highest being Singapore from 1967 until today. The second biggest economy in Southeast Asia is Thailand. Indonesia is a huge country. From West to East, it is wider than the United States.

The background to the Bali Summit in 1976 was the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, with the fall of Vientiane, Phnom Penh and Saigon to Communist forces, as predicted by subscribers to the Domino Theory. Some people said there was an atmosphere of panic in Southeast Asia, which I did not feel. Some of our political leaders might have felt it, I did not. This led to the call for the first ASEAN Summit.

Between 1967 and 1975, cooperation among the ASEAN countries was very slow due to political problems between ASEAN countries. Although *konfrontasi* between Indonesia and Malaysia had ended, there were still left-over problems that had to be resolved. There were problems arising from Singapore leaving Malaysia. There was another terrible event. In the wake of *konfrontasi*, the Indonesians had sent commandos to attack the Singaporean presidential palace. They nearly got there. They were captured only 200 meters from the Istana in Singapore. These commandos were sentenced to death, and it revived confrontation between the two countries. The other problem was between Malaysia and the Philippines over the state of Sabah, when a member of the ruling family of Sabah who was living in the Philippines claimed that he was the rightful ruler of Sabah, and that Sabah should be part of the Philippines.

Thai Foreign Minister, Dr. Thanat Khoman, had to talk to his colleagues in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Manila to calm things down. Between 1967-1976, just keeping ASEAN together was a difficult political undertaking.

By late 1975, political leaders of ASEAN countries felt the need to come together. From late 1975 to the beginning of 1976, officials were preparing for the Bali Summit. Indonesia played the leading role in drafting the Bali Declaration. The key word of the Declaration is “resilience” or “ketahanan” in Bahasa Indonesia. A major outcome of the Bali Summit was the agreement on the Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN).

In 1976, I had finished my work on China as Chief of the East Asia Division and was instructed to join the Senior

Officials' Meeting (SOM) preparing for the first Summit in Bali. The Indonesian Foreign Ministry drafted the Declaration. We got stuck on the first substantive paragraph which read "Each member state resolves to eliminate threats posed by subversion to its stability, thus strengthening national and ASEAN resilience." Reading between the lines, that subversion means the Communist insurgency. By August 1965, the Communist Party of Thailand, for example, had launched its armed insurgency against the government, and that was the common threat, but we had a problem with the concept of "resilience" in the second phrase when we had to find a Thai word for it. It became a source of amusement in our Ministry among those who attended the SOMs. Apart from Permanent Secretary Phan Wannamethee, who led the team, the others were Arsa Sarasin, Nitya Pibulsonggram²⁸, and myself. We did not really know how to translate it into Thai. The Indonesians had tried to explain the concept in Bahasa. They said "ketahanan" means something that is flexible or stretchable, elastic perhaps. It can be something solid and hard, but soft and malleable at the same time. So, someone facetiously suggested we should perhaps translate it as ปลั่งดั่งตัง (Palang Dengdueng - "bouncing power"), but that really would not have gone down well at the National Security Council or the Cabinet. Ultimately it was our boss, Phan Wannamethee, who settled on the word พละพหุ (Palanuphap - literally "physical power"), which does not actually convey the same meaning as "ketahanan", a word probably having the same linguistic roots as the Thai word หนา (thonthan), meaning something like durability or the inner strength to endure. Anyway, it was the key

word that ASEAN adopted in 1976, that we have to be resilient in the face of the Communist triumphs in Indochina. The second paragraph went on to the proposal of ZOPFAN.

The Declaration laid out the framework for ASEAN cooperation and the improvement of ASEAN machinery, such as meetings of the heads of government of member states. The Declaration also contains substantive paragraphs on economic cooperation. It truly laid the foundation for the modern ASEAN in every field. Furthermore, in section (f) of the Plan of Action, on the improvement of the ASEAN machinery, the Summit established the ASEAN Secretariat. Equally important, during the Summit, the leaders signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), covering the settlement of intra-regional disputes by peaceful means.

I was there throughout. It was another great learning experience because I had never worked on Southeast Asian affairs before. We went to the Summit in Bali by a special plane, led by Prime Minister Kukrit Promoj. The Foreign Minister was Chatichai Choonhavan. By February 1976, Anand Panyarachun had returned from Washington, D.C., to become Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs. By that time, the Permanent Secretary had already decided that I should be posted to Jakarta to work specifically on ASEAN and the establishment of the ASEAN Secretariat.

This was the second game-changing moment in my career. China was the first. On the plane back to Bangkok from Bali, Permanent Secretary Anand requested that the plane stop in Jakarta to drop off Ambassador Talerngchai Chartprasert,

our Ambassador to Indonesia, and myself so that I would get to know the city before actually being posted there.

In July 1976, I took up my posting in Jakarta. I was there from the day the ASEAN Secretariat opened its door. I participated in the drafting of the first financial regulations of the ASEAN Secretariat, which I lifted from the financial regulations of SEATO that I hid under the table because it would not have been the right thing for ASEAN to copy.

The ASEAN Secretariat, unlike the EU Commission, was kept deliberately small. One of the first officials was a man called Adul Pinsuwan, who was a close friend of Arsa Sarasin. He was formerly with the Thai Air Force but had resigned to work in the private sector before joining the ASEAN Secretariat, where he stayed for many years. He was the first administrative officer in the Secretariat and held it together. We had a senior official, Dr. Sermsak Penchati, who had been a doctor at Chulalongkorn Hospital. He was responsible for Social and Cultural Affairs. There were very few people in the Secretariat. The first Secretary-General was an Indonesian, General Sudarsono, who had been Ambassador of Indonesia to Thailand. He had been a distinguished commander of one of the elite regiments of the Indonesian army, the Diponegoro. He later fell out with President Suharto and was put in jail.

I was First Secretary at the Thai Embassy in Jakarta from 1976-1979. As the ASEAN desk officer, I worked closely with the ASEAN Department of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the ASEAN Secretariat. At that time, the Director-General of the ASEAN Department was a man called

Ambassador Umaryadi. Here is another small world! He came from a very distinguished family, which had bought 2 of the 3 villas that the Prince of Nakorn Sawan had lived in exile in Bandung. One villa remained in the Prince's family. The villas had a fantastic view overlooking Bandung, and Ambassador Umaryadi's family had turned one of the villas into what we would call today a wedding events venue. It was actually an ice-cream parlour. The party of the bride and groom would come up to have photos taken there with the whole of Bandung below as the spectacular background.

I had a great posting from 1976-1979 in Jakarta, and that is why I very much support the Ministry's policy that young officials should get their first posting in an ASEAN capital. As I keep telling newly-recruited officials, the heart and the soul of our foreign policy is in ASEAN where we have to resolve the real problems of the day, not in New York or Washington, Brussels or Geneva, not even in Beijing or Tokyo. I was very glad and eternally grateful that Permanent Secretary Anand sent me to Jakarta. I became a wholehearted "ASEANista" and "Southeast Asianist", advocating for ASEAN and Southeast Asian cooperation ever since.

At the Bali Summit, the leaders signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). What is the Treaty's significance?

The significance of TAC and ZOPFAN is that they open ASEAN to the outside world. As ASEAN's first treaty, the TAC reaffirms the "legal existence" of ASEAN because before the TAC, ASEAN was cooperating under a declaration only. Now it became

a treaty organization, and this treaty organization proposed a ZOPFAN. From that time onwards, it was ASEAN's aim for Southeast Asia to be recognized as a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality by outside powers. Outside powers can become dialogue partners of ASEAN, but we would not consider them a full partner until they adhere to the ZOPFAN as well. It was a political commitment whether they recognize ZOPFAN or not. Most of the powers with which we have had a dialogue partnership have now signed on to the ZOPFAN.

The point is that the Bali Summit turned ASEAN into a treaty organization and declared Southeast Asia to be a ZOPFAN.

After the Bali Summit, the problems in Indochina then occupied much of ASEAN's times from 1978 to 1991. How do you see ASEAN developed during this period?

Again, it was politics that led to this next phase. When Vietnam invaded Cambodia in order to "liberate" it from the Khmer Rouge, in 1978, the ASEAN leaders were very concerned. They were concerned especially for Thailand because the Domino Theory was still dominant in the political thinking of many leaders of the world and of Southeast Asia. But as I mentioned before, I never had such concern because I thought we were strong enough to withstand any threat from Vietnam.

By 1978, Prime Minister Kukrit Pramoj had left office, but he was still writing on a daily basis in his newspaper Siamrath. When he saw this panic, he said that he did not worry about the Vietnamese threat because their tanks would get stuck in the Bangkok traffic. He also said the people seemed to be interested

in other things, not the Vietnamese threat. A lot of Thai people at the time were glued to television watching a Chinese martial arts series called *The Reincarnated*. I completely agreed with him. What was happening in the series had priority over what was happening in Cambodia!

At that time, the end of 1978, I was still in Jakarta. The first ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on the situation in Cambodia took place there. The Thai delegation was led by Ambassador Arun Panupong. It was the first time ASEAN countries joined together to consider its reaction to the Vietnamese invasion. It was going to be followed up by a ministerial meeting in Thailand.

Thailand was tasked with drafting the ministerial statement. The draft was done by Singapore and Thailand, by me and Tony Siddique. We drafted what became the first ASEAN statement on the Vietnamese invasion. This was presented to the first ASEAN ministerial meeting on the Vietnamese action in Cambodia, which was held in Pattaya. By that time, we had a brand-new foreign minister, Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila. The meeting adopted the statement which became the ASEAN position on that matter for the years to come. It provided the basis for the “killer amendment” for the resolution proposed by the other side at the UN General Assembly. After that meeting, I was recalled from Jakarta to be the director of a division in the ASEAN Department.

ASEAN’s reaction to the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia was the glue that kept ASEAN together, that maintained ASEAN solidarity in face of the Vietnamese

intervention right until Vietnam withdrew from Cambodia and there was a government in Cambodia following the UN-supervised general elections. ASEAN stayed firm. It proved to be resilient. The Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia and the return of Prince Sihanouk paved the way for the Paris International Conference on Cambodia. Then in the 1990s, the three countries of Indochina eventually joined ASEAN.

While this political crisis provided the political glue that held ASEAN together, would you say that united actions taken by ASEAN helped to raise its standing in the international community?

Surely, especially in New York. Our Missions had to work together very closely. We lobbied together, especially Singapore and Thailand. We were the axis that held ASEAN together. Internally ASEAN might not always be so united, but it was always united during the General Assembly to counter the resolution proposed by the other side. From October to December, we were fully united on our counter resolution work in New York. For the rest of the year, ASEAN was arguing all the time about how to deal with the situation in Cambodia.

Indonesia was always trying to find a compromise, but Singapore and Thailand, supported by the Philippines and Brunei, always stood firm that there would be no solution unless and until there was total Vietnamese withdrawal. Malaysia was leaning more towards Indonesia. This made the ASEAN Ministerial Meetings (AMM) very interesting to observe the interaction between the Ministers. Thailand's Foreign Minister, Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila was always rock firm on this issue. He

was fully supported by Singapore Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam. There was a very good working relationship between Singapore and Thailand. We were the axis that finally forced Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia.

This was also the main reason why Thailand sought election to the Security Council. In the lobbying for the seat, one of our selling points was how firmly we had stood for the principles in the UN Charter when considering the situation in Cambodia.

In ASEAN or Asian politics, personalities are always an important factor. In those days, especially during the 1980s, most ASEAN governments were quite stable and had long-serving Foreign Ministers. Do you see this as an asset?

For Thailand, it was a great asset that throughout this period we had Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila as our Foreign Minister. He was as hard and firm as a rock. He was highly respected for his principled stand. One of my best friends, John de Fonblanque, whom I knew from Cambridge, was at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). I once wrote to him asking what the British FCO thought of our Foreign Minister, who was of English descent. My friend said that they thought of him as a man of integrity.

The British Foreign Secretary, Christopher Pym, who was from a very old and distinguished English political family dating back to the early 17th century, thought of him as such. I think that was real recognition, that we had a Foreign Minister who was thought of as a man of integrity. This means a lot. It

means this is a man whom you can trust. His word is his bond, and he can always be relied on to stay the course.

Of course, personalities are important. Throughout this time, we had a great Singaporean Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam. We also had a succession of colourful personalities. For Indonesia, by that time, Adam Malik, who had been Foreign Minister for many years, had become Vice President. For the Philippines, there was Carlos P. Romulo who was a steady supporter of the cause of the Free World. He was a great and humorous speaker, who kept meetings calm and amused. For Malaysia, there was “King Ghaz”, Ghazali Shafie, another great character.

I stayed at the ASEAN Department from 1980 to 1983 when I became Ambassador attached to the Ministry and then Deputy Permanent Secretary before going off to Beijing to continue on this work directly with Prince Sihanouk, leading up to the Paris International Conference on Cambodia.

In this context, did the situation in Cambodia increase China's role in the region?

Because of the split between China and the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union supporting the Vietnamese, it was almost automatic that China would support ASEAN and Thailand. And China did support ASEAN and Thailand in particular, in every way, physically as well as diplomatically. Physically, the Chinese invaded Vietnam, in the so-called “the war to teach Vietnam a lesson”. This helped Thailand a lot because Vietnam had to keep the bulk of its army in the north to defend its territory.

The United States at that time was still suffering from the so-called Vietnam syndrome, and was not supporting us very much. Following Vietnamese “hot pursuit” into Thailand, it was the Chinese who supplied the Thai army with both equipment and ammunition. From that period this close relationship between Thailand and China grew, and it continues to this day.

Towards the end of the 1980s, Thailand shifted its policy after General Chatichai Choonhavan, the former Foreign Minister, was elected Prime Minister. He wanted to “turn the battlefield into a marketplace”, and he did it somewhat abruptly.

I was Ambassador in Beijing at the time, and I had a difficult time explaining to the Chinese that we had changed our policy, that we would now prefer a less confrontational approach to the problem. We also had a change of Foreign Minister in 1990. It was an interesting exercise for an ambassador and a career diplomat. For the first few years I was in Beijing, I had advocated one policy, but with a change of government, I had to advocate another.

I remember going to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs one day to meet the Vice-Minister in charge of Southeast Asia. He was in rather a bad mood. He said “One thing is being said by your Prime Minister in Bangkok. Another thing is being said by your Army Commander in Tokyo. And you are here today saying something else to me. So, who do you represent?” I was quite nervous and told him “I am the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand, so when I come to see you, I am speaking on behalf of the Kingdom of Thailand.”

I had to say this, as a matter of principle. But in reality, of course, it was quite different. By that time Air Chief Marshal Siddhi was really out on a limb. He was not representing the mainstream of government policy, and not long afterwards, he was no longer Foreign Minister.

Do you think ASEAN's growth from the original 5 to the current 10 is a result of the natural desire for the full integration of Southeast Asia?

That ASEAN should include all the countries of Southeast Asia was already envisaged in the Bangkok Declaration. But it was held up by the Vietnam War. But after that ended in 1975 with Vietnam unified and Laos and Cambodia turned socialist, further troubles surfaced with the struggle for mastery among the Indochina countries themselves. By the end of 1978, Vietnam invaded or rather liberated Cambodia. This was a dangerous new escalation of confrontation in Southeast Asia, pitting Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR against the other countries of Southeast Asia with Thailand in the frontline. In the battles between the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese army, there were hot pursuits well into Thai territory.

During 1979-1991, ASEAN was preoccupied with the political and security aspects of the Vietnamese-Cambodian problem. Until this was resolved with the change in Thailand's policy by the Chatichai Choonhavan government, ASEAN remained the original 5 with the addition of Brunei. When the Paris International Conference on Cambodia concluded, thus ending the war in Cambodia, it brought to an end what I call the Third Indochina War.

For the first time since the middle of the 19th century, Southeast Asia was free of Western countries. It opened possibilities for the former Indochina countries to join ASEAN. In the 1990s, all of them did join, with Cambodia being the last in 1999. From 1999, we have had an ASEAN of 10 countries, covering more or less the whole of Southeast Asia, except the contiguous countries, namely Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. Timor-Leste has expressed its wish to join ASEAN, but Papua New Guinea, although it has enjoyed observer status in ASEAN since 1976, belongs more to the Pacific.

Even as ASEAN is considering the admission of Timor-Leste, ASEAN itself has grown exponentially, from 6 to 10 members, making the membership even more varied than ever before. For the first time in ASEAN, we have two socialist states, Vietnam and Lao PDR. In my opinion, this expansion has been a great boon.

My personal working experience with Vietnam has been all positive. Vietnam has become an excellent member of ASEAN in every sector. This is because Vietnam won the war and has no complex. In a way, Vietnam had prepared herself for the post-Vietnam War period very well. The generation of officials who are running Vietnam today continued with their education during the war and they have a very positive attitude towards ASEAN and the world in general. Vietnam has become a very valuable member of ASEAN, participating fully in all ASEAN activities. It has already provided one ASEAN Secretary-General, who used to be its Permanent Representative in Geneva at the end of my time there.

As I said earlier, ASEAN is a political organization. As such, we have to have all the members of Southeast Asia within to fully utilize ASEAN as the mechanism for the resolution of disputes, both serious and slight. We must continue to build up ASEAN as a loose political organization, but at the same time expand and deepen its economic, social, and cultural cooperation.

From that beginning of a loose political organization, ASEAN has taken a big step in adopting the ASEAN Charter and heading towards the ASEAN Community. Is this a natural progression?

In the long run, what we have achieved is to build the superstructure for political cooperation. We have also built the superstructure for economic, social, and cultural cooperation in order to sustain ASEAN. Nevertheless, it will take a while yet before we see the result. What we have to do is to build ASEAN consciousness from the grass root. All ASEAN countries must work at this together, from kindergartens to universities. There is so much to do. I notice that the Foreign Ministry has a programme to teach ASEAN at schools in the provinces. This is good. Everyone must be aware of ASEAN from youth upwards.

I am personally involved in a project to bring schools at the border of Thailand and Cambodia to work together on archaeological projects. This project brings Cambodian children to work at archaeological sites in Thailand and Thai children to do the same in Cambodia.

Why is this important? This is to break down national barriers. National borders in Southeast Asia were created in the second half of the 19th century by the colonial powers and we

need to break them down in order to build an ASEAN identity. It will take a long time, but it can be done. The Europeans have done it. They started earlier than ASEAN, so we have to work at it. Apart from ASEAN itself, another organization that works on this is the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). In this context, former Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya²⁹ had suggested a project on writing Southeast Asian history together. It is a long-term project but it should be done to break down nationalist barriers which have done so much damage to bilateral relations in Southeast Asia. It is something I passionately advocate, the re-writing of Southeast Asian history based on facts and without nationalistic points of view.

Can ASEAN consciousness be achieved?

It can be if we work at it. ASEAN consciousness can be achieved in the same way that European consciousness exists, Brexit apart! What does ASEAN consciousness mean? It means people can be rooted in their own culture, be it Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Myanmar, Indonesian, Malaysian, Filipino or Thai, yet keep their patriotic consciousness, while a new Southeast Asian consciousness and identity, which is ASEAN, take hold. It is being done, but it will take time. It is not enough just to have the ASEAN flag with no sense of belonging. I believe in ASEAN. I have faith in it. I advocate it. It will be done, however long it takes.

How could we breathe life into the ASEAN symbols, such as the flag, the Charter, the anthem?

Symbols and symbolism are important. You have to have them, but you have to have substance as well. As I said, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew used to chide ASEAN for the low level of intra-ASEAN trade. It is not enough to say that we have the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). We must deepen and widen our cooperation in every sector - political, security, economic, commercial, social, and cultural.

To go back to the Bali Summit of 1976, after which I was sent to be ASEAN desk officer at the Embassy in Jakarta. The ASEAN Secretariat had just opened its door. Among the few people working there, two were Thai. We thought the building Indonesia had built for the ASEAN Secretariat was enormous, and there were so few people in it! There were even office suites for each member country on the top floor. But as years passed, this huge building became too small. Now we have a new building while the old one next door has been given over to ASEAN non-governmental organizations.

The ASEAN Secretariat has grown and become the hub for ASEAN cooperation. We used to have many ASEAN meetings in different countries, but nowadays lots of meetings take place in Jakarta. Member countries have Permanent Missions and Permanent Representatives to ASEAN in Jakarta. Lots of initiatives are made in Jakarta at the ASEAN Secretariat. Things have changed from ASEAN being driven by Ministries of Foreign Affairs to all Ministries being involved in ASEAN cooperation. The ASEAN Secretariat is now a real player in initiating

ASEAN cooperation. We should be proud that the man who really started this process was Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, our former Minister of Foreign Affairs. He really put ASEAN on the map. He pushed the ASEAN Secretariat to be where it is today. We should be very proud of his tenure as ASEAN Secretary-General.

In order to develop the ASEAN consciousness, it has been suggested that people in ASEAN countries need to be connected to one another. This is thought to be one of the reasons why ASEAN countries put a lot of efforts into building infrastructural connectivity, be it road, rail, sea or air links, as well as social and cultural connectivity. Are these efforts yielding desirable results?

Connectivity is a relatively new concept in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian countries had been isolated from each other during the colonial period. We have to thank the other international organizations in the region, notably the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Bangkok-based ESCAP, for initiating physical connectivity between the countries of Southeast Asia. They have been pushing for increased connectivity for decades. The idea is to connect South Asia and the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and the Pacific so that goods can move seamlessly between India and Vietnam, and beyond. In order to do this, one has to improve the infrastructure.

Last year I went to a meeting in Danang. Some members of the delegation told me that they had not been to Danang for 14 years when they had travelled by road from Khon Kaen, Thailand. There were no bridges and they had to cross the

Mekong River and other rivers in Lao PDR and Vietnam by ferries. The trip took a couple of days. This time you can drive easily from Khon Kaen to Danang, which is now more developed than Chiang Mai or Phuket. The airport is bigger, and the queues are longer. This is amazing. It took less than one generation to see this development, and to see this convenient connection with Thailand. This is to Thailand's East and in the future, it will be the same to Thailand's West from Tak to Yangon.

On 1 October 2001, my first day as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I attended a meeting on connectivity chaired by the Minister. There was a lot of maps all around detailing the road network from Danang to Yangon and beyond. It was a completely new aspect of work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs!

Later on, I went to Mae Sot many times. On the Thai side, there was a highway of 6 to 8 lanes, but on the other side the road had only 1 lane! The town opposite Mae Sot is Myawaddy. From Myawaddy to the next town called Hpa-An, there was only one lane. One day the traffic would go one way from Mae Sot to Myawaddy and to Hpa-An, and on alternate days the traffic would return from Hpa-An to Myawaddy and to Mae Sot. Cars and trucks had to travel in one direction and there was no room for overtaking. What we had to do was to cooperate with the government in Yangon to build a two-lane road, which is now in place. You can now go back and forth everyday between Mae Sot and Hpa-An. So, road networks are very important if you want to have economic cooperation.

Also do not forget that once upon a time there were no bridges across the Mekong River between Thailand and Lao PDR. Now there are already 5-6 bridges, which make life so much easier for the people who live on the border of both countries. There is now a real physical connection. Sooner or later there will also be a high-speed train that connects the Northeast of Thailand to Lao PDR and to southern China. We are making great progress.

What about the connectivity between the continental and maritime ASEAN? It is not so easy to connect Vientiane to Jakarta or Manila.

I was, of course, talking about the East-West Economic Corridor. What we have to talk about as well is the North-South Corridor. It is possible. The road network is there. High-speed trains will follow. Eventually, one should be able to travel from Kunming, China, or Hanoi, Vietnam, via Vientiane, Lao PDR, down to Bangkok and then to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and then to Singapore. Singapore will be the hub to connect mainland Southeast Asia to the archipelago. Another linkage is the Mekong River from southern China through Thailand and Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam. But the connectivity between the mainland and Indonesia and the Philippines will always be either by air or by sea.

How do you see the ASEAN integration? Should we move in the same direction as the Europeans? Or should we do something different?

We need to do something different. We must not follow the EU model of integration. ASEAN has always been a loose political organization and should continue to be so.

The Europeans have always aimed for complete integration, and now there are signs that they are failing. On the political level, the United Kingdom has left the EU. There are problems also with Poland and Hungary. I must repeat, on the political level, we must not take their path to integration. The political differences in Southeast Asia are more profound than in Europe. Not only that we are politically different, but we are also different socially, culturally, and religiously.

On the economic side, it is the same. The European Union has gone for monetary integration by the creation of the Euro. It does not work. It has caused so many problems to some members as they are economically less developed or more fragile than the original members. We have seen this in the case of Greece or even Spain and Portugal. A common currency is out of the question for ASEAN, both for practical and for ideological reasons. By having a common currency, it means that you are abdicating economic sovereignty, which would be unacceptable to most ASEAN states. A sovereign state must have complete control of its economic policy. It cannot do so if it cedes control of its currency. That is why the British never joined the Euro. The Greeks did and suffered enormously. Most of the European economy have suffered from the Euro Zone. Economic integration in the EU model is out of the question for ASEAN.

But it doesn't mean we should not continue to deepen and widen free trade within ASEAN. By doing so, we would become more of a common market. That should be the aim of ASEAN economic cooperation, a real common market. It would make better sense for us. At the same time, we should continue

to deepen and widen social and cultural cooperation in order to build ASEAN consciousness and identity.

How do you see the future of ASEAN?

The future of ASEAN lies in member states continuing to work together politically. By working together politically, we would have greater weight in the world. An initiative from our former Foreign Minister, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, was very important: the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). It is the only forum that addresses political and security concerns for the whole of Asia, from South to Northeast Asia. It is a forum that people can come from all over the world to discuss the state of the world in Asia. It is a very valuable institution, and we should continue to work at promoting it.

There are some key phrases. People always say ASEAN should be in the driver's seat. Another phrase is ASEAN centrality. ASEAN centrality is not an empty word. It means that ASEAN is central to the ASEAN countries. That is its real meaning. We must use ASEAN for our benefits and interests. Because our benefits and interests are global, it is imperative that the ARF is held each year in an ASEAN country, so that we are at the centre of the radar screen of the great powers, if only during that meeting, at least the concentration is on us.

There is a view that “ASEAN in the driver’s seat” means it is simply a driver and has no control over the direction or destination because that depends on the passengers. What do you think of this view?

I don’t think it matters as long as we are the driver. The passengers can say whatever they want, as long as we are on the same journey, going towards the same destination. I know that some of the passengers are very big, but the role of the driver is to keep driving in the direction that we want.

It is interesting that the question is raised in this way. In recent years, President Trump did not attend the East Asia Summit, maybe perhaps he did once. ASEAN was not on the radar screen of the United States during the Trump presidency. On the other hand, China has been very present. The Americans inevitably lost some influence. Their loss is other people’s gain. We will see whether Biden will come back. I look forward to greater participation in the affairs of Southeast Asia by the United States.

CHAPTER

4

THAILAND AND
THE MAJOR POWERS

THAILAND AND THE UNITED STATES

As a former Ambassador to Washington, D.C., how do you see Thailand's relations with the United States?

Thailand did not feature highly in the thinking of the Trump administration. I think President Trump was hardly aware of Thailand, of who we are and what sort of relations we have had in the past. Washington was preoccupied with other matters during his time in the White House. I hope that things will improve during the Biden administration.

Having said that, the relations between Thailand and the United States is a very old one, dating back to 1833. It has been a very good and important one to our country. That was because the United States was not a colonial power as far as Siam was

concerned. There are so many instances of the United States' positive contributions to us from the 19th century to the present day. For example, one of the reasons why the Thai medical profession is so developed and advanced today is thanks to the American missionaries who were also doctors in the 19th century. Dan Beach Bradley and all the others founded the modern Thai medical profession.

Apart from medicine, the American missionaries also brought printing presses. They founded the modern Thai publishing industry. Modern Thai journalism also has American roots. Many Thai publications can be traced back to American missionaries. Alexander Macdonald, the owner of the Bangkok Post, which started publication after the Second World War, was an American.

In the 20th century, the United States played an important role in getting Siam to participate in the First World War after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. By participating in the First World War on the winning side, Siam was able to join the Peace Conferences at Versailles. And thanks to President Wilson and his doctrine of self-determination, the United States became the first country to amend the so-called unequal treaties between Siam and Western countries.

At the end of the Second World War, again, thanks to the United States, Siam was not punished for her role in the Second World War as severely as was sought by the British and the French. Later on, Thailand participated in the Korean War, in which the United States led the UN forces against the forces of North Korea. What did that mean? It means that in the

aftermath of the Korean war in 1953, we could sign the Manila Treaty in 1954 and the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) came to be based in Bangkok. Thailand became a full treaty ally of the United States, and it brought great benefits to the country. We should remember this and be grateful to the role of the United States in Thailand, which has always been positive and supportive of Thai independence and sovereignty during the period of imperialism, colonialism and the Cold War.

The Cold War was actually hot in Asia. There were two wars in Asia, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Thanks to the United States, Thailand survived the Cold War with many benefits. During the Vietnam War of 1965-1975, people used to joke that Thailand was the biggest aircraft carrier of the United States, as there were 5 or 6 huge American airbases in Thailand. From these bases, a lot of economic benefits came to Thailand.

The break in this time-line came in 1975 with the end of the Vietnam War. The United States suffered from the so-called Vietnam syndrome. It seemed as if the United States did not want to have anything to do with Southeast Asia or Thailand anymore. During the last phase of the Indochina War, the United States was largely absent from the war in Cambodia. It was China which came in to fill the vacuum.

The United States is a great power and recovered soon enough from the Vietnam syndrome, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States, for a while, seemed to be the sole superpower in the world. As the sole superpower, whatever commitments elsewhere, the United States had to look East, Southeast Asia included. During the Vietnam War,

1965-1975, the US Embassy in Bangkok was its biggest in the world, about the same size as the one in Cairo, and it is still very big today.

To bring us up to date, even though Thailand had not featured highly on the radar screen of President Trump, I believe that the relationship between Thailand and the United States will be closer during the Biden presidency.

Many people often say that the United States and Thailand have a “special relationship”? What is your view?

I do not like the term ‘special’. Since the 19th and throughout most of the 20th century, it was a close relationship. In Southeast Asia, we cannot really say that our relations with the United States are as close as the relations between the United States and the Philippines. Their relationship was more than close, it was truly special. Ours were not that special. Nevertheless, as the relationship was close, we should nurture it, while maintaining our dignity and independence.

Our foreign policy and diplomacy have always been balanced, and that is a natural state of affairs. In the 19th century, we tried to balance our relations between the British and the French, and at the same time we developed relations with other European powers – Germany and Russia. We maintained relations with all the other European nations as well – Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, et cetera. That is the natural state of Thai diplomacy and it should always be so.

We are already into the third decade of the 21st century. Now more than ever, we need the United States to balance the

relationship with China. It is interesting that from the middle of the 19th century when we stopped sending tributes to Beijing, China has been rather absent, even though it has always been the “Middle Kingdom”. But during the past 10-20 years, China has become the “Middle Kingdom” once again for Southeast Asia. Its weight has become so great that we need a counterweight. And the only counterweight that can be found in this part of the world, in the South China Sea and the Pacific, is the United States, with which we have had a very long and friendly relationship. This relationship is very useful, indeed vital, to us. But we are a small country, and the United States is a very big country. From time to time, we have hardly featured in the worldview of Washington, and we have to keep ourselves on their radar.

But we alone cannot keep ourselves on their radar screen. To have ASEAN is a great help because from one small blip on their radar, with ASEAN’s 10 countries we become a bigger blip. We must maintain both ASEAN and ourselves on the radar screen of the United States.

Do you think that the size of this ‘blip’ depends on the interest of each administration? That is to say, for some administrations, we may have been a big blip, and for others, we may have been a small blip?

We have friends in Washington, D.C., and have always had very good relations with the State Department. Many State Department officials have served in Bangkok, going well back before the Vietnam War. One of the duties of the Thai Ambassador in Washington, D.C., is to maintain these contacts so that these friends would speak up for us in the corridors of power.

We have to maintain good relations, not only with just the State Department, but also the National Security Council, the Pentagon and the Congress. In Washington, D.C., the set-up is open and accessible. If you are energetic enough you can get through to the American administration quite easily.

It is often said that in the United States, because of their system of government, their policy-making process and bureaucracy are complex and confusing. Is that what you experienced?

Ultimately, it is the same as in any country. That is to say, the conduct of international relations is a complicated process. In the case of the United States, the Senate has a lot of input in foreign policy making. This is not just individual Senators or Congressmen, but also their staffers. Staffers play a very important role. As far as foreign policy is concerned, Senators and their staffers are very influential. One spends a lot of time up on the Hill, as they say, seeing both Senators and their staffers. As I said, they are open and easy to get in touch.

As far as diplomats are concerned, they also have easy access to the State Department, as well as other Departments in Washington, D.C. There is also another factor working in Washington, D.C. All the think-tanks are very influential and they are manned by former politicians, diplomats, and academics. I enjoyed my interactions with these think-tanks, it was very stimulating.

Many people have mentioned that US-Thai relations are comprehensive. One area that helps to foster this comprehensiveness is education,

as a large number of the Thai élite have studied in the United States. Do you agree with this view?

Our educational links with the United States are very important. American education is excellent. American universities are plentiful and varied. This is a great help to Thai students going to the United States. You can find Thai students at Stanford, one of the most difficult universities in the world to get into and at all the Ivy League universities on the East Coast, from Harvard and Yale, Princeton and Cornell, and so on. Thai students have benefitted so much from their education in the United States. The leading Thai Studies Center in the world is at Cornell University, from where many leading Thai historians have graduated.

During the time of Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat, the so-called age of development in recent Thai history, the US government made available lots of scholarships for Thai civil servants to go to study in the United States, especially at Indiana University. During that period, we had a lot of graduates from Indiana University in every field from agriculture to even art history. This educational relationship is mutually beneficial. One of the best historians on Thailand in modern times is an American professor from Cornell, David K. Wyatt. It is thanks to him that we have the best comprehensive history of Thailand. He was also the supervisor of my own thesis.

Another special link between the United States and Thailand is in the field of medicine, where the US contribution had been absolutely critical. From the very beginning, the Rockefeller Foundation has been involved with medical

education in Thailand through Siriraj Hospital. Modern Thai medical development is built on that. It is one the most advanced in the world. His Majesty King Bhumibol's father had studied medicine at Harvard while his mother studied nursing at Simmons College in Boston where He was born. So, the relationship is very close.

Apart from education and medicine, the military is another area where there has been very close cooperation with the United States. How do you see this relationship today?

Military relations came in the aftermath of the Korean War. During the Cold War, Thailand depended on the United States for military support. As a result, we obtained a lot of American military equipment. Our military personnel became used to using American equipment. The Air Force got their fighters from the United States. The Navy got their frigates from the United States. The Army got their tanks and armored personnel carriers from the United States. They used the American guns, rifles and artillery and so on. It was only recently, in the late 1980s, that we began to diversify.

It was only when I was Ambassador in Beijing (1986-1990) that we started to buy Chinese tanks and armored personnel carriers and started building some warships in Shanghai. It is necessary that we diversify the source of our military equipment, but I think most people would say that US military equipment is still best. But then Chinese military equipment is much less expensive, and more affordable.

THAILAND AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

As someone who was personally involved in the negotiations to establish diplomatic relations between Thailand and the People's Republic of China in 1975, are you satisfied with the development in Sino-Thai relations in the last 45 years?

Our relations have developed by leaps and bounds. Looking at trade statistics alone, China is now our biggest trading partner, and this has gone from almost zero in 1973. Before 1973, there was Revolutionary Order Number 53 which prohibited trade between Thailand and Mainland China. Although there was some indirect trade with China via Hong Kong and elsewhere, there had been no direct trade until Revolutionary Order Number 53 was revoked, which was for practical reasons. In October 1973, as war broke out, the Middle Eastern countries stopped exporting petroleum. Our stock of petrol was rapidly drying up.

The Government at the time, headed by Prime Minister Sanya Thammasak, revoked the Revolutionary Order Number 53 so that we could trade directly with China, specifically so that we could buy petroleum from the People's Republic of China. This took place in late 1973, after the visit to Saudi Arabia by Chatichai Choonhavan, then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, failed to break the non-export of petroleum. After a week of negotiations, Chairman Mao Zedong himself gave permission for China to export 30,000 tonnes of crude oil to Thailand at a friendship price. That opened the new era of direct trade between Thailand and China. From then, the Chinese have become our

biggest trading partner, and it has been very beneficial to the Thai economy.

During the past 4 years, there is a new element in this equation, namely where does Thailand stand in the trade conflict between China and the United States? The conflict itself has many dimensions. I think we should take the stand that we abide by international trade law and that we support the WTO. Everything should be negotiated at the WTO, objectively and calmly without unilateral actions that harm peaceful international relations.

How do you see our political and security relations?

The topic that people concentrate on in Southeast Asia is the South China Sea, but this is not a new area of contention. Whether it is the Republic of China or the People's Republic of China, we would have the same problem. People talk about the 9-dash line of the People's Republic of China, but the Republic of China based in Taiwan had an 11-dash line, which is even more than those of the People's Republic's.

On the way back from that historic trip to China at the end of the first week of July 1975, when the plane was flying over the disputed area, the Paracels and the Spratlys, everybody got up from their seats to take a look at these tiny islands in the South China Sea. The problem is not new and as there are several claimants, the claims should be settled bilaterally and peacefully under international law. Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines, should negotiate with China over each country's territorial claims. While these claims

are not settled, there are other matters where individual Southeast Asian countries and China can cooperate, for example, they can explore the possibility of jointly exploiting the resources of the South China Sea. There can be joint exploration for petroleum and natural gas. There can be agreements on tourism and fishery. All these things can be done bilaterally.

As far as the international law of the sea is concerned, what is being worked on is an agreed Code of Conduct between China and ASEAN. This should be pursued steadily and with political will. China has agreed to the need for a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Pending that codification, of course, the sea powers can continue to navigate the South China Sea under the law of the sea. Everyone, the claimants and the sea powers, should refrain from military confrontations and provocations.

Do you see military cooperation between Thailand and China as a significant development in our relations?

It came about out of necessity. Military cooperation started in the wake of the Vietnamese invasion and liberation of Cambodia and the hot pursuits into Thailand. The United States was suffering from the Vietnam syndrome and was not inclined to assist us. It was China which gave us political, diplomatic, and military support. At our request, China supplied us with ammunitions, which were badly needed during our confrontations with Vietnam. The People's Liberation Army also invaded Vietnam from the North, which was militarily very helpful because it pinned down Vietnamese forces in the north which otherwise could have been deployed to Cambodia.

This military cooperation started in 1979-1980. By the time I became Ambassador to Beijing in 1986, the ground had been laid for closer military relations. The Thai knew how Chinese military equipment worked and knew that they were compatible with whatever we had. So, we started to purchase Chinese armored personnel carriers (APC) and tanks. While I was Ambassador there between 1986 and 1990, Thai military delegations went to see how they were produced and how they maneuvered and found that they were not as expensive as American products, and we could afford them. At the same time, the Royal Thai Navy started to construct some warships in Shanghai. This continued and now the Navy is also purchasing Chinese submarines. This military relationship grew out of necessity. The keywords are that it is practical and economical.

Looking back over the last 45 years, do you see any missed opportunity in our relations with China? Was there anything that we could have done otherwise?

In 1949, when Nanjing fell, my grandfather, who was our last Ambassador in Nanjing, was among the last to leave. Together with the American Ambassador, he went down from Nanjing to Shanghai, and on to Yokohama where they parted ways. The Thai Embassy in Nanjing had actually evacuated to Guangzhou. That Embassy was still a full embassy because at that time, towards the end of 1949, the forces of the Republic of China were still in control of Guangzhou.

As the Government of the Republic of China was going into exile on the island of Taiwan, the Thai government of the

time in 1949 could have considered that the government of the Republic of China was no longer in control of mainland China and therefore had lost its legitimacy. The choice could have been to recognize the People's Republic of China in Beijing and discontinue the recognition of the Republic of China in Taipei. Thailand could have changed recognition, but it did not. We continued to recognize the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan until 1975. Why? It was a political decision based on prejudice against communism. It is a traditional conservative point of view. In 1911, when the Qing Empire was overthrown by the Kuomintang under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Thai government at the time also disliked the new republican government in China. It was the same tendency of not recognizing a revolutionary regime.

The Thai government only recognized the republican government of China led by Chiang Kai-shek in 1944. Again, it was out of necessity because the Republic of China was one of the Allied Powers that was fighting the Axis Powers. It was the first time that the Thai government renewed diplomatic relationship with China, which had been broken in the middle of the 19th century. It is debatable whether had we recognized the People's Republic of China from its inauguration on 1 October 1949, our relations would have been even closer today. In bilateral relations, it takes two to tango. China, from 1949 to 1975, also had her ups and downs.

If it was not possible in 1949, maybe it could have been earlier than 1975? Some other Southeast Asian countries had established relations with the People's Republic of China a year or two before we did.

After 1949, the Korean War soon broke out. Thailand fought on the side of the United Nations under the leadership of the United States. The next window of opportunity was around 1954-1955, after the Korean War. The Thai government had started to think about better relations with China around then even though SEATO had just opened its headquarters in Bangkok in 1955. In 1955, Prince Wan attended the Bandung Conference and met with Zhou Enlai. With regards to Thai-China relations, Zhou Enlai made a very significant announcement in Bandung, saying that henceforth China considered overseas Chinese as nationals of the countries in which they were born, which is the Roman law concept of *jus soli*. This meant that people of Chinese descent in Southeast Asia would be citizens of those countries. The Chinese government would no longer recognize them as Chinese citizens.

This was an important breakthrough because ever since the second half of the 19th century and under the Republic of China, the Chinese government had always considered overseas Chinese as Chinese citizens. That was unacceptable to the governments of Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand. When Zhou Enlai made that statement in 1955 at a side meeting with Prince Wan during the Bandung Conference, it presented an opportunity.

But then, there was always the sticking problem of the Communist Party of Thailand, which did not recognize

Thailand as a constitutional monarchy. Therefore, so long as the Communist Party of China supported the Communist Party of Thailand, there was no possibility of normalizing relations. But again, who knows, the decision could have gone another way. This window of opportunity was shut when a more right-wing nationalist government of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat came to power in 1957. From 1957 onwards, any window of opportunity was closed until 1971.

After Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat died in 1963, we had the government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn from 1963 to 1973. Before October 1973, there was a small window of opportunity in 1971 when the People's Republic of China became the representative of China in the United Nations. The Thai government had the opportunity to recognize the People's Republic of China by deciding that, since the People's Republic of China had replaced the Republic of China on the Security Council and in the United Nations, it had become the only rightful Chinese government recognized by the whole world. We could have seized that opportunity and recognized it. But that was in 1971, we could not do it, because in 1965 the Communist Party of Thailand had declared a 'People's War' against the Thai government, and the Communist Party of Thailand was supported by the Communist Party of China. Also, in 1971, the Vietnam War was raging with Thailand as "the biggest US aircraft carrier" in the world. We had to wait until a little longer to start the process of normalization.

Looking back, I think 1949, 1955, 1971 were missed opportunities. When we started official talks in August 1973,

we should have been the first ASEAN country to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China, but it dragged on until 1975, and we were overtaken by Malaysia and the Philippines. I regretted that.

What were the reasons for the delay? Was it because of the domestic political situations in 1973?

It was delayed because the Thai government did not have the will to make a decision. It wanted to have its cake and eat it too. It wanted good relations with the PRC without having to establish diplomatic relations. The unwritten decision was that we could exchange as many sports teams or cultural or trade delegations as we liked, but not to have diplomatic relations.

Between 1973-1975, we had a lot of domestic political problems, which affected the decision-making process. Also, looking at the personalities involved, all the usual biases and prejudices were there. The sticking point was that the Communist Party of China should stop supporting the Communist Party of Thailand, and that the communist insurgency in Thailand must stop. There were also other sticking points such as the nationality of Thai citizens of Chinese descent, which was not really a problem because the Chinese government had already told the Thai side in 1955 that it did not recognize dual nationality.

The decision not to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China was largely due to the Communist Party of China's support for the Communist Party of Thailand, which in the end solved itself. The Chinese government's point of view was that we could establish Government-to-Government

relations, while leaving Communist Party relations aside. In the end, with the fall of Vientiane, Phnom Penh, and Saigon to Communist forces, and with the expectation that the Community Party of Thailand would wither away without Chinese support, the political decision was finally made to normalize relations. That decision was taken by the Social Action Party under M.R. Kukrit Pramoj.

Simply put, you have to make a political decision. You cannot leave the normalization of diplomatic relations to public servants, because public servants, civil or military, have a way of delaying decisions if there were no directives from above. When the Social Action Party, which had only 18 seats, formed the government with the firm decision to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China, the public servants, military and civil, in the National Security Council were able to solve all the problems in just a month. The process which had started in August 1973, at the end of the day, took only a couple of weeks to resolve everything.

Not to make a decision was the easy thing to do. "Exchange sports teams", "exchange trade delegations", "exchange cultural delegations", "improve relations"; those were the instructions we received from the government from 1973 to 1975. During those two years, as Chief of the East Asia Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Political Department, I went to Beijing so many times on such missions that the porters at the Beijing Hotel remembered me! Every time I went, I said the same thing. I repeated what our problems were, and the Chinese would insist that there were no problems. It took a political decision to get things finally done.

Who were the major personalities involved in making the decision on recognition?

The real credit must be given to Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan, from the time that he was Director-General of the Political Department, but especially during the time that he was Deputy Foreign Minister. It was he who made the decision that we should go to Beijing in December 1973 to buy petroleum from the People's Republic of China.

In order to do that, the government had to revoke Revolutionary Order Number 53, which opened the window of opportunity. And it was kept open throughout by Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. He was not in the Prime Minister's party, which was the Social Action Party. He had his own political party, the Chart Thai (or Thai Nation) Party, which became an important component in the coalition government. The official line of the Social Action Party, announced publicly during the election campaign, was that they would normalize relations with the People's Republic of China. It was fully supported by the Chart Thai Party.

The final impetus came after the rescue of the American cargo ship, the Mayaguez, in the Gulf of Thailand. The Thai military had allowed the US military to use Sattahip naval base to rescue the Mayaguez without informing the Prime Minister. He was very angry, for various reasons. Prime Minister Kukrit Promoj was furious that the Thai military did not seek permission from him first. Our Ambassador in Washington, D.C., Anand Panyarachun, was recalled for consultation. Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan then assigned Anand Panyarachun as

the lead negotiator to normalize relations with China. It was an ideal decision because he was a veteran diplomat who, in 1971, had already been in contact with the Chinese while he was Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York.

What do you consider as highlights in our bilateral relations over the past 45 years since our relationship had been normalized?

After 1975, the highlight, which was unforeseen at the time, was that China would come to our assistance in the 1980's in the last part of what I would call the Third Indochina War. Back in 1973 or even 1975, I could not have imagined that China would invade Vietnam. I would not have imagined that China would be sending ammunitions to help the Royal Thai Army to fight the Vietnamese. This may be because I usually never think too far ahead anyway. I never thought I would become Ambassador to Beijing in 1986, and never thought that I would be going to Chinese military installations to see how their armoured personnel carriers and their tanks work! I could never imagine that I would be present in Shanghai when they laid down the keel of the first Thai warship to be constructed in China. I could never have foreseen any of this.

When I was Ambassador in Beijing from 1986 to 1990, Thailand was the biggest foreign direct investor in China, through the Charoen Pokphand (CP) conglomerate. I could never have imagined that a Thai company, called the Ek Chor China Motorcycle Company, would be making motorcycles in Shanghai. I was there for the opening of its factory. All these things were unimaginable. When I went to China, CP was making animal

feed and operating chicken farms in 13 provinces of China.

During one annual diplomatic tour for ambassadors in China that was arranged by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, they took us to one of these CP factories. It was a huge factory that used American technology from a company in Pittsburgh. In front of it, there were 3 flags, Chinese, US, and Thai. The other ambassadors were flabbergasted! They were whispering whether I had arranged the tour especially to see this factory. A Thai factory using American technology in China!

Since then, CP is now operating in all the provinces of China. An amazing feat! Now it is not just CP, but many other Thai companies have invested in China, such as Mitr Phol, which is producing sugar in the south of China. On a lesser scale, there is even a Greyhound Café in the middle of Beijing, a branch of Greyhound restaurants from Thailand. Such a different world after 45 years.

Although we were the biggest foreign direct investor in China in the 1980s, things changed rapidly with the arrival of the Europeans, the Americans, the Japanese and the South Koreans and so on. While we are still a major player, we are of course no longer the top investor in China.

One of the biggest developments during these years is the explosion in people-to-people contacts, tourism, and education. A large number of Chinese tourists visit Thailand every year. Thai students now start taking degree courses in China and vice versa. Do you see these trends continuing in the near future?

For 2020-2021, the trend has been completely disrupted

by the COVID-19 pandemic. But up to 2019, around 8-10 million Chinese tourists visited Thailand a year. Again, this could not have been imagined in 1975. They have contributed enormously to the Thai economy because they made up about one third of all tourists in Thailand each year. Thailand became an even more popular destination because of the Chinese film, *Lost in Thailand*. Many people said it was very funny, similar with the Thai sense of humour. I have not seen it.

There is now also a new “Chinatown” in the Huay Kwang area of Bangkok, which is fascinating. Lots of Chinese shops and restaurants, all of which have only Chinese-language signs. There are also many hostels in the area which cater mainly to Mainland Chinese.

Those are the highlights from the personal point of view. But the real highlight is the exponential rise of China to being the leading economic power of the world. Just look at Shenzhen. In 1973, it was a muddy fishing village with only 3-4 buildings. When I visited it again towards the end of my posting in Beijing in 1990, factories were just coming up and they were just beginning to produce compact discs. At that time, what was being manufactured there was not even as advanced as what was being produced in Thailand. Now the place is beyond recognition!

China has become the number one or number two economic power in the world. With that wealth comes political and military power, as well as tensions with the United States that was mentioned earlier. It is a different world, and a world made more dangerous by President Trump. I hope that things will be back on track again under President Biden. Rivalry and

competition between great powers is natural, as long as they do not deteriorate into confrontation, either trade or political or military, all of which should be avoided by all people of goodwill.

The subject of the “Rise of China” has been extensively discussed. How do you see the rise of China affecting our bilateral relations?

At hearing the term “Rise of China”, the Chinese media would say “the peaceful rise of China to its rightful place in the world.” That is the correct description. If you go back in history to about 1800, economic historians would say the Chinese economy was then the biggest in the world. So, if in 2020 the Chinese economy is the biggest in the world, according to the long perspective that we should look at history, it is nothing new. In other words, the world is back to where it was in 1800. It has taken a while, but it is nothing new. It may be new to the United States but it is nothing new to the people in Asia whether in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, or anywhere in Southeast Asia.

All of us in East Asia are accustomed to China as the centre of our world, and China saw itself as such and it calls itself as such. The “Middle Kingdom” is literally the “Central Kingdom” if you look at the two characters of the name. For the neighbours, it has always been how to deal with the Middle Kingdom. We are used to this. We have always dealt with the Middle Kingdom. The Han Chinese of the Middle Kingdom had dealt with the principalities and kingdoms that existed before modern Thailand, going back to the middle of the first millennium of the Christian era. The Chinese were already here in Dvaravati time. They were here from the beginning of Siam.

We sent so-called tributes to the Middle Kingdom in order to have good relations and to trade with the Chinese.

This relationship, from the Thai point of view, is nothing new. Of course, there are new factors both immediate and medium-term. If we go back to 1975 when we normalized relations with the People's Republic of China, the latest incarnation of the "Middle Kingdom", the Chinese in the mid-1970's needed us as much as we needed them. Our relations took off and became very close and cordial straight away to the extent that the Communist Party of China toned down its support for the Communist Party of Thailand. The party-to-party relations were no longer as important as state-to-state relations. Our expectation was correct.

Another important factor that is different from back in 1800 is the presence, in the second half of the 19th century and for much of the 20th century, of the Western powers in the region. With the British and the French as the countervailing powers to the Middle Kingdom, we officially stopped sending tributes. Today, the British, the French, the Dutch, and the Portuguese have left Southeast Asia, but there is still the presence of another superpower, the United States.

The continued presence of the United States is very important to us as a countervailing power because it is always dangerous to have a unipolar world. To have a multipolar world is always better for a 'power with limited interests' like Thailand. In the world where the Middle Kingdom has risen to its rightful place in the world, it is fortunate to have the countervailing power of the United States. If we are concerned about the Chinese - US rivalry, people who are even more concerned are

the Japanese and the Koreans who are nearer to China. Vietnam is in the same position. For us, we are a little further away, which is helpful.

If we take a long view of history, then these developments seem like nothing new. But people who take a shorter view of history, they would say that there are a lot of changes. One concern is that China to taking a more aggressive stance, discarding Deng Xiaoping's famous instruction. Would that change how to deal with China?

Of course. I take every opportunity to remind my former and present Chinese counterparts of one of the clauses in the declaration that established diplomatic relations between Thailand and the People's Republic of China. Up until 1975, and for some time afterwards, China was always saying that it was against hegemony. In the declaration of 1 July 1975, both Thailand and China agreed that we were opposed to hegemony of one country over another. I often remind my former and present Chinese counterparts that China is opposed to hegemonism. The question is whether China has itself become a hegemon? I think we need to remind China regularly that it is against hegemonism.

We need to remind China through Chinese diplomats of this as often as possible because they have become wolf diplomats or whatever they like to call themselves and have become rather aggressive. I do not think this serves China at all well. They are not like the Chinese diplomats I used to know from the 1970s and 1980s. I think China is better served by being firm but polite and looking after its interests without being aggressive and provocative. We can leave that to the United

States. The best way for China to handle relations with the United States is to use calm to still movements, as in Chinese martial arts.

It is often said that what comes naturally with the rise of China, peaceful or not, is the rise of nationalism within China, and as the result, many Chinese officials have to appear to be aggressive in dealing with other powers like the United States because it is expected of them. What is your view?

There is a rise of nationalism everywhere in the world, not just in China, but also in the United States and in European countries. Nationalism is one of the great banes of world history. All people of goodwill should endeavour to contain nationalism. While citizens of every country should be patriotic, patriotism should not lead to nationalism, which is an aberration of patriotism. Nationalism usually leads to chauvinism, to claims on territories and to other dubious claims which are equally dangerous.

In the context of the rivalry between the great powers, how effective do you see our brand of Thai diplomacy dealing with this new bipolarity?

Our brand of diplomacy, to go back to the beginning of our conversation, is that it has to be flexible and agile and balanced in all directions. In order to survive in a world that is dangerous to our survival as a free and independent country, as it was at the end of the 19th century in the age of high imperialism, in the middle of the 20th century at the time of the Second World War, or during the Cold War, it is all the same. We have to be flexible and agile and watchful in order to survive.

ASIA-PACIFIC VS INDO-PACIFIC

How do you see the role of India and Japan in the new context or concept of the Indo-Pacific? How to you see their role in the region and in relations to Thailand?

The Indo-Pacific is a new concept. We used to talk about Asia-Pacific, but now we refer to Indo-Pacific, joining the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, which is a natural geographical phenomenon because they are connected anyway. This linkage between South Asia, the Indian Ocean, and East Asia, the Pacific Ocean, seems like a new concept, but actually it is a natural phenomenon. In terms of the international relations of Thailand, it is very useful. As a small power with limited interests, it is always useful to operate in a multilateral and multipolar world. During the Cold War, we had the Free World and the Socialist Bloc. After the Cold War, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, we had a brief period of having just one superpower. But today we are back to the multipolar world. The Soviet Union has become Russia, but Russia is still the biggest country in the world with a Pacific front, where the regional capital is Vladivostok, which means “Lord of the East.”

Then we have the traditional powers in the Indo-Pacific region. The real new power in this context is India. This can be seen in both perspectives, of Thailand and of India. I think India and Thailand have been too remote from each other, especially in the 19th and 20th century. This is unnatural because India was the original source of Southeast Asian religions and culture.

The relationship used to be very close. Indian merchants

came into what is now modern Thailand through the South of Thailand. However, the relations became more distant, especially in the 20th century. The last moment of our close relationship was perhaps in 1871 when King Rama V paid an official visit to Calcutta, then the seat of the British Raj before they moved it to Delhi. He was able to see what the British were doing in India. For the visit, the King designed a modern uniform for his entourage, the Rajapatan or Royal Pattern, which we still use today.

After 1871, as India became part of the British Empire, there was no real contact until relatively recently. This did not begin to change even with the independence of India because of its active role in forming the Non-aligned Movement (NAM). As India was one of the leading members of the NAM, it kept us apart because the NAM was seen as being aligned to the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc rather than to the Free World.

Now the party of Prime Minister Modi has a new policy of looking east which opens new opportunities for relations between Southeast Asia and India. We agreed to strengthen BIMSTEC.³⁰ BIMSTEC, like ASEAN, started slowly and only reached the ministerial level in 2003. Between 2021 and 2022, Thailand is the chair and host of the BIMSTEC Summit. This opens up new opportunities for cooperation between Thailand, Southeast Asia, and India. It is a restoration of thousands of years of relationship. India has become a powerful country in its own right, both militarily and economically. There are many opportunities both for Thai investments in India and vice versa. This is truly a new element of opportunities for Thai international relations.

Moving from the “Indo” to the “Pacific” side, our relationship with Japan is an old one, dating back at least to the 16th century. It has always been a good relationship. From the 16th century, Thailand was one of the few countries that exported rice to Japan and continues to do so. Since the middle of the 19th century, with the Meiji reforms taking place roughly at the same time as King Rama V’s reforms in Siam, our relationship has always been very close. It can be said that we fought on the same side in both the First World War and the Second World War! Japanese economic development has been very beneficial to the Thai economy. The fact that the Japanese relocated a lot of their industries from Japan to Thailand over the past 20-30 years has created a huge Japanese community in Bangkok.

But in all this huge equation of a multipolar world in the Indo-Pacific region, we must not forget the Republic of Korea, which has also developed exponentially. It provides another multipolar dimension to Thai international relations. As I always say, it is always beneficial and useful for a small country like Thailand to be able to navigate in a multipolar rather than in a bipolar world.

Since the Asia-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific never lacks big powers, how do you see Thailand navigating among these competing major players?

Well, let them compete! Major powers competition has proven beneficial to us. Twenty years ago, Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan talked about equidistance. It was rather interesting because, in a way, there is no such thing as equidistance! Physically, it is not possible. China and the United States are

not at the same distance away from us. China and Thailand are on mainland Asia, whereas physically, the nearest US land to us is probably Guam. Beyond that, you would have to look to Hawaii. Ultimately, the capital of the United States is Washington, D.C., and the economic capital is New York. Both cities are on the Atlantic seaboard.

Naturally, the United States tends to look eastward over the Atlantic to Europe rather than westward over the Pacific to East Asia. Americans are, after all, mostly of European stock whether Anglo-Saxon or German, like President Trump, or Irish like President Kennedy. They look to Europe rather than across the Pacific to places inhabited by Asians, who have a different way of life.

Although equidistance is a useful concept, it is difficult to practice because we are naturally drawn more towards our fellow Asians. In particular, we in Thailand are drawn towards our fellow mainlanders, that is more towards China than towards Japan, which is an oceanic country with a slightly different culture. We are also drawn more towards China than to the archipelagic countries of Southeast Asia.

Having questioned the concept of equidistance, the fact remains that multipolar points in the Indo-Pacific help us a great deal. We have more room to manoeuvre, more capacity to navigate. You have to be skilful to navigate. You cannot use the same approach to all of them. It has to be nuanced. Again, to go back to my description of our diplomacy, we have to be flexible, agile, and nuanced in the conduct of our relations with all these points of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Are we equipped to be a skilful navigator?

It depends a great deal on the stability of our government, the support that the Prime Minister gives to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the ability of that particular minister to conduct diplomacy and international relations. Our distinguished Foreign Ministers in the past have always had to contend with convincing the rest of the government into following what they were doing. For instance, Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan had to convince the rest of the government on the rightness of the policy to normalise relations with China. Before that, if we go back to the time of Dr. Thanat Khoman, he had to convince and persuade the rest of the government to accept regional cooperation. So, the personal ability of the foreign minister is a significant factor in the success of the conduct of our diplomacy.

Following on your points about the multipolar world, how should we navigate the current strategic rivalry between the United States and China, which some people have termed a new “Cold War”?

There are two levels to this issue, the level of Thailand, and the level of Thailand together with ASEAN. We are too small in this world to act alone in the context of great power competition and rivalry, which threatens world peace. I think what Thailand must do, and must persuade our ASEAN neighbours to join us to do, is to be a good bridge between China and the United States. This bridge has several levels, like some big bridges with roads and rails.

At one level, both individually and together with ASEAN, we must advocate and insist on the rule of law, especially the

rules of international law. We must speak at every forum possible to remind competing powers that they must operate within the framework of international law and agreements. A concrete example is that we must speak up at the WTO that all countries should and must observe international trade law. During the time of President Trump, the United States was undermining the efficacy of the WTO. I hope that this will cease and that the United States would go back to work with the WTO. WTO trade dispute settlement mechanism has not been working over the past few years. It must be restored. Apart from international trade, both China and the United States must observe international law.

There are gives and takes across the board in all sectors in this new “Cold War” between China and the United States. The Cold War did not benefit anyone. Thailand’s and ASEAN’s role are to repeat that it does not benefit anybody and that both sides must observe international law. We must advocate this in every forum and speak up whenever possible.

How do you see us build this bridge and what should it look like?

The most important part of the bridge is already there in the form of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). It was a Thai initiative, constructed here in Bangkok by Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan. We should work on it. It may be easier with the Democrat administration because the Secretary of State who agreed to the ARF at the time was a Democrat, Madeline Albright.

Much discussion is ongoing about ASEAN centrality in the regional architecture. ASEAN should be the one who drives the efforts. But with the major powers' competition, do you see ASEAN maintaining this centrality?

ASEAN centrality must not be just an empty word. ASEAN is central to us in Thailand. ASEAN centrality should be central to ASEAN. We should walk the talk and do our homework every year. We should think about what we can do at each ASEAN summit. If we are truly committed to the concept of ASEAN centrality, the great powers are not going to believe or help us if we do not make ourselves central. We must speak up. Some ASEAN ministers see it this way, too. Former Indonesian Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, has spoken consistently about ASEAN centrality. He was on the right track, but we have to work at it if we believe in it. I do.

ASEAN needs strong coordination. ASEAN Foreign Ministers have to think about it all the time, not just once every six months or so. We have to follow up and keep reminding the world of ASEAN's positions.

As a strategic concept, do you think that the Indo-Pacific is a strategy to contain China and Russia?

If or whenever this thought occurs, then Thailand should speak up against it. There should be no thought of containing anybody. The whole idea of containment was created and used in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. It might have worked then, eventually the Socialist Bloc did collapse in Europe along with the Soviet Union. But that was the past. It had its own

origin. It cannot be replicated in the Indo-Pacific or the Asia-Pacific.

Thailand and ASEAN should not assist in containing China, but should draw China out to work with Southeast Asia and East Asia. We should do our best to restrain the United States from confronting China. By confronting China, you will just beget Chinese confrontation in return. It is dangerous to peace in the Indo-Pacific region. All people of goodwill should be working for peaceful coexistence and not for confrontation. As I said, all this need hard work and homework and initiatives.

What sort of initiatives?

ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is one, and we should build on it. From 2001 to 2004, under the Thaksin government, many initiatives were led by Thailand. The most important one was actually to join the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific. The Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) was a Thai initiative on pan-Asian cooperation that brought together countries from the Persian Gulf such as Kuwait and Bahrain, right across the continent to Japan. This initiative came before the Look East policy of Prime Minister Modi or the Pivot to Asia of President Barack Obama. We should work at it and not let it dissipate. We have to be visionary and ambitious!

CHAPTER

5

RELATIONS WITH
NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

OVERVIEW

How do you see Thailand's diplomatic relations with its neighbouring countries?

Relations with neighbouring countries are always the most important conduct of our international relations and diplomacy. It was always so in the past, and it is so in the present. There was an interlude in this state of affairs during the time of high imperialism, when our neighbours became colonies of the great powers. We can always go back to the deathbed speech of King Rama III in 1851 when he warned that from then on, relations with our neighbours would no longer be a problem, but the problem would be from Western countries, and we should learn from them but not let them dominate us. In fact, problems

with our neighbours did not end right away, they lingered until the 1880's, when the upper part of Burma became part of British India, and the northern part of Vietnam became part of the French empire. From then on, when we had to deal with our immediate neighbours, we had to speak to London and Paris. That's why we opened our first resident missions in London and Paris during that time.

But after the Europeans left from the 1950s onwards, the interlude of what I have called frozen relations between Thailand and its immediate neighbours started to thaw or defreeze. Once the colonial ice melted, all the old problems, notably border problems, came back. We have a long border with Burma of 2,405 kilometres, most of which remain un-demarcated. We have border problems with Lao PDR and Cambodia. We also have some border problems with Malaysia. Some of these border problems became armed confrontations over the years. This is when relations become difficult and interesting because, in relations with neighbouring countries, it is not just the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is involved, but also the Ministry of Defence, the armed forces, and the Ministry of Interior and the border provinces. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs to have close relations with these home ministries in order to conduct effective foreign policy, which is complex and frustrating, worthwhile and fulfilling, all at the same time.

Moreover, this diplomacy has a people to people or popular element, which is different from diplomacy at far away capitals or multilateral diplomacy in Geneva or New York. This makes it more difficult and challenging, but it is the heart of our

diplomacy. We have to handle it with care to make sure that it maintains good relations with our neighbours.

The 'interlude' lasted almost a century, but when the colonial ice melted, it became hot because of the Indochina wars. How did they affect our relations with the neighbours further?

In a way, the Indochina wars were extensions of the colonial interlude. What were the Indochina wars about? The first one which ended in 1954 was about the liberation and unification of Vietnam from the French. After the Geneva Conferences and the end of the First Indochina War, the compromise was that Vietnam was divided into North and South. The Second Indochina War was about the unification of Vietnam and getting rid of the South Vietnamese government, which one could say was the puppet government of the old imperial power. Then the United States took over the Second Indochina War, so it was a continuation of the colonial interlude. The Third, and final, Indochina War was the war in Cambodia, which was a by-product of the Vietnam War.

Finally, with the Paris International Conference on Cambodia in 1991, Indochina was at last free of the French and the Americans. From 1991 onwards, Thailand had to deal directly with all our traditional neighbours. And who left us with problems? The former imperial powers. We have to live with it and resolve all these left-over problems.

How did our involvement in the Indochina wars affected our relations with the neighbours?

Although Vietnam is not exactly our immediate neighbour, our relations have great potentials to be beneficial. Vietnam won the First and Second Indochina Wars in 1954 and 1975, so it has nothing but rightful pride in these great achievements. This is the source of Vietnam's very positive attitude and outlook on their relations with Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia. They have no complex. In the wake of their glorious victory, they can work with Thailand and the other Southeast Asian countries to build up ASEAN.

Our relations with Lao PDR and Cambodia are more fraught because we have a lot of historical baggage. This historical baggage was made heavier by France, the colonial power, as a result of all the agreements it forced on us. In my experience of dealing with Myanmar, or rather with the Burmans, the majority race of Myanmar, the relations have the potential to be very beneficial. They have no complex about us Thai from the past, rather the contrary. Like the Vietnamese after the two Indochina wars, the Burmans have no hang-ups or prejudices about the Thai. It is the other way round. It is we who have hang-ups about Burma. Other races in modern Myanmar, whether Shan or Mon or Karen, are friendly towards the Thai. So, there are great potentials for mutual benefits. But, of course, the border problems will have to be resolved in the long run.

Historical baggage with neighbouring countries seems to be quite heavy and modern diplomacy has not been able to resolve it. Why is that so?

Because the baggage is historical, we should start by working through such organization as ASEAN or the South-east Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) to resolve these historical questions. It is important to recognize the historical baggage and try to lighten this baggage and put it in its proper place. For example, relations with Cambodia are still heavy with historical baggage. Some Cambodians seem obsessed about the Thai conquest of Phra Nakorn³¹, their capital, in 1431. Our Laotian brothers are still obsessed with the Thai conquest of Vientiane in the 1820's after the war between King Rama III and Chao Anou.³² But for all people of goodwill, they need to put this historical baggage down, open it, recognize it, and then move on. We are now in the 2020s. We have to put away historical incidents and not let them hinder our relations in the 21st century. I know it is easier said than done, but for all men of goodwill, this is what they should be doing. Thai and Cambodian historians should be working together. What happened in the past should stay in the past. We should move on. Personally, I am working on this, but we should convince everyone to work on it too. It is hard work, but we have to keep working at it.

With Myanmar, the Burmans and the Burmese generals have the best historical baggage in their relations with us because they were always on the winning side. It is the Thai side that carries the historical baggage.

The relationship between the Thai state and the Malay state is more complicated, but the historical baggage is there with the Thai citizens of the Malay race in the Southern part of Thailand, some of whom are not comfortable with the Thai state

and prefer to have a state of their own - or we do not know what they really want, perhaps some of them want to join Malaysia. Such historical baggage makes our relations with our neighbours very delicate and has to be handled in a very sensitive way.

In the former Yugoslavia, there were similar problems. Well into the 20th century, they were still quarrelling about a battle in the 14th century which established the dominance of the Serbs. Yugoslavia is now broken up into many countries.

In Europe, there were terrible wars between the three major countries, Britain, France, and Germany. Today, there is hardly any nationalist history left. European historians can sit down and discuss events of the past objectively without nationalistic rancour. We should be able to do the same in Southeast Asia, and I hope that ASEAN and SEAMEO will enable us to do so in the future.

Do you agree with the argument that maybe we emphasize too much the differences rather than the commonalities of our cultures?

I agree absolutely. I think Southeast Asian history should be revised and rewritten. This goes for Thai history as well. The dominant school in history writing in Southeast Asia has been nationalist. This is understandable, because after the colonial interlude, each country had to establish its national identity. Although Thailand was not directly colonized, it also went through the period of nation building, from the end of the 19th century up until today. But we are not living with imperialism anymore. Moreover, since 1967, we have ASEAN. So, it is high time that all the Southeast Asian countries rewrite their history and find the commonality in their past.

We should be rewriting our own national history and should be studying Southeast Asian history. They seem to have relegated history to a minor part of the Thai curriculum today. There seems to be no time for it. People are too busy studying artificial intelligence!

What I want to repeat is that problems with our neighbours date back hundreds of years. When you have this historical baggage, it is a heavy load to carry. We have to put it down but gently otherwise we may dislocate our shoulders. If we manage it well, it may turn out to be the most fulfilling part of our diplomacy.

This historical baggage was likely aggravated by our involvement in the Vietnam War. In the late 1940's, the then Thai government was sympathetic to the independent aspiration of our neighbours, but later because of changing circumstances and the spread of communism, we decided to align ourselves with the United States. Do you think there was a missed opportunity? Had we followed a different path, the weight of the historical baggage might have been lessened?

There are always missed opportunities! But I think most of the time, opportunities are missed because they were there to be missed. We would have missed them anyway, because the circumstances made it so. For example, to go back to our relations with China, Sun Yat-sen came to Thailand many times. There is even a lane in Chinatown in Bangkok named after him. The family that looked after him, the Tansajja family, is still prominent in Thailand today. But back in the reign of King Rama V before the Chinese revolution of 1911, he was regarded

as a dangerous activist. The Chinese government in Beijing and the British authorities in Asia were warning the Thai government about this 'dangerous' rebel. So, despite being greeted warmly by some Sino-Thai families, Sun Yat-sen was suspect to the Thai government. We chose not to recognize him or the Republic of China until we had to at the end of the Second World War. That was a lost opportunity.

It was the same with Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh came to Siam several times, first as the representative of the Comintern.³³ He was actually the founder of the Communist Party of Thailand. Later on, he spent some time in the Northeast of Siam. Ho Chi Minh would have been regarded as a dangerous Communist agent, and then later as a dangerous rebel against French rule in Indochina. Like Sun Yat-sen, he was suspect to the Thai government. He only became popular in Thailand recently.

After the Second World War, the dominant political party in Thailand was led by Pridi Panomyong. He had the idea of establishing the Southeast Asian League (SEAL). He wanted the League to be an anti-colonial organization. Thailand would support the people who were fighting the French in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam in their struggle against colonialism. But after 1947, the Pridi faction of the 1932 People's Party lost out. Pridi himself had to flee to Beijing. That was a lost opportunity for us to forge unity with our 3 neighbours to the East. Now we can claim SEAL as a forerunner of ASEAN and ACMECS. But we took a different path after 1947. Then in 1949, when the Communist Party of China won the civil war and founded the People's Republic of China, people were afraid of Communist

China. This was deliberately fuelled by the Western countries, the French and the British who were hanging on to their colonies in Southeast Asia. The Americans soon joined in.

As I said we missed opportunities, but the opportunities were there to be missed! And the opportunities at the time did not look all that attractive compared to the lure of the West, which had everything to offer.

Is it only with hindsight that we can call these turning points missed opportunities?

At the time they did not look like missed opportunities. They seemed more like turning points to nowhere. It was not the road on which we had been travelling, which was modernization or Westernization. At least we did turn these missed opportunities to good use later, like when we claim that we had always looked after Ho Chi Minh.

Could you please elaborate on the role of other government agencies that are important in shaping policies towards our neighbours?

The army is especially important because they are at the border. They are the one in the bunkers, not us diplomats. Their role in our relations with our neighbouring countries is rightful because they are in the field, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must always take the situation in the field into account. The key word here is that we have to be realistic. Whatever happened, we have to do our best with the situation as we find it. At the same time, we must improve the mechanism for cooperation and exchange of views with the Ministry of Defence and the armed

forces by using the mechanism that already exists, namely the National Security Council. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must take into consideration many factors. For instances, in our relations with Cambodia, we must take into consideration the actual situation on the border as well as public opinion. We cannot work in a vacuum. That is what makes it so difficult.

There is also an issue concerning inter-agency coordination in Thailand. For example, on contract farming, the government encourages Thai companies to invest in growing crops abroad, but then an agency prohibits the import of such crops or put up a very high tariff. How do we resolve this kind of issue that becomes diplomatic problem with our neighbours?

It is a problem of coordination. For example, we encourage our companies to engage in contract farming with Lao PDR. They grow corn to be imported to Thailand for animal feed, but then they meet with non-tariff barriers. It is up to the Thai government to remove those barriers. It takes time, but it has to be done and it will be done sooner or later otherwise it is a contradiction. On the one hand, you are promoting contract farming, on the other hand you prohibit the import of such products. This needs to be corrected by our economic ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should help push coordination at all level.

What about the business sector? Does it have a role in fostering relations? There is a perception that our business sector is exploiting our neighbouring countries.

I do not worry too much about the business sector. They

always manage very well. And on exploitation, it is up to the neighbouring countries to defend themselves using their laws. It is also up to the government to promote responsible business. It is a two-way process.

Apart from the historical baggage, it is often argued that Thailand's relations with its neighbours are affected by the Thai people's condescending attitude towards the neighbouring countries, as well as competitive attitude towards some neighbouring countries, like Vietnam.

The fact that Vietnam is doing well and developing so fast is good for Thailand. Thai people can see that after the terrible wars, Vietnam can still develop so rapidly. What does it mean? It means that as the Thai side begins to perceive Vietnam as a competitor, we can learn from Vietnam why they are succeeding because they are disciplined, dedicated, and hard working. They prioritize education. All these things are good for Thailand to emulate, to buckle up and be like them. I think competition is good for Thailand, otherwise we get complacent. Complacency is a very bad thing.

As for 'chauvinism' in the Thai attitude and outlook, I grade this in three levels. First, we should all be patriotic, that is to love the land of our birth. Then comes nationalism, which is the bane of every nation-state. Chauvinism is when we start to claim land that we think belong to us. When this gets out of control, it leads to armed conflicts. This was what happened after the revolution of 1932. The Thai government turned nationalism into chauvinism when they reclaimed provinces which Siam had

lost to the French in Laos and Cambodia, as well as to British Malaya. But these provinces, which were reclaimed in the chauvinistic spirit, had to be returned to Cambodia, Laos, and Malaya at the end of the Second World War. The spirit of chauvinism that is still alive in the Thai nationalist psyche is over Khao Phra Viharn.³⁴ Now that we have lost twice in the International Court of Justice over the ownership of Phra Viharn, I hope that wiser counsel will prevail in the years to come.

What about cultural chauvinism? Much of this feeling comes from the belief that they borrowed from us, while in fact there is a lot that we borrowed from them.

Again, this is the question of getting the facts right. You should get the facts right that Khmer culture had covered most of modern Central and Northeastern Thailand well into the 15th century. There is nothing wrong with that. In the case of England and France, up until the 15th century, the language of the English court was still French. It was not until the reign of King Henry IV that English was spoken in the English parliament. In the 14th and well into the 15th century, the people in Ayudhya probably spoke Khmer, the people who spoke Thai were on the western side of the river in Suphan Buri and the regions to the north of Ayudhya.

Such facts that our kingship, culture, language and others in Ayudhya were based on Khmer culture should be taught in schools. The cultural dispute about Khon, which the Khmers call Khol, is another example. In the 14th-15th century, the Khon of Ayudhya probably came from Cambodia. But later on, in the

19th century, when a part of the Cambodian royal family which had taken refuge in Bangkok took the Khon to Cambodia, by that time the Khon had evolved into the Thai Khon. So, what the Cambodian royal family took to Phnom Penh in the middle of the 19th century was the Thai Khon. But since then, the Khol in Cambodia developed on its own and rediscovered its own roots. As with the Thai Khon, it became the Khmer Khol of today. But both the Thai Khon and Khmer Khol had the same origin in the mists of time, as in the Phi Ta Kon performance to appease the spirits in Loei, northern Thailand.

We need to get the facts out. Another example is when I was in Kelantan, Malaysia. After a Katin ceremony at a Buddhist monastery in Tumpat, there was a Manora performance. My Malaysian host said this is of Malay origin, but Thai people would say that it is Thai. As I was on a diplomatic mission, I had to say that it was a regional cultural performance. But, of course, Manora is Southern Thai because it is based on a Buddhist tale.

THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA

Can we discuss the Cambodian crisis 1978-1990 and the Phra Viharn/Preah Vihear conundrum? Why are they such complex issues?

The Phra Viharn/Preah Vihear conundrum is a very complex issue and dates back to the beginning of the 20th century when we were demarcating the border with the French. Cambodia was then a protectorate of France. Preah Vihear in Khmer or Phra Viharn in Thai is a Khmer temple in a very remote area and unknown to most Thai and Cambodian people of the

time. From the middle of the 19th century, with the exploration of Cambodia starting with Henri Mouhot at Angkor Wat, the French loved these beautiful Khmer ruins that we also love today.

When they were demarcating the border in this area, they came upon this spectacular Khmer temple on top of a promontory which rose from the Thai side and dropped hundreds of meters down to the Cambodian plain. Although geographically it was really a part of Siam, the French roughly cut off the very top of this promontory and marked the temple as on the Cambodian side, which geographically does not make sense because the temple could only be approached from the Thai side as the promontory on which it was built then drops down a perpendicular cliff for more than five hundred meters to the Cambodian plain below.

In the 1920's when Prince Damrong³⁵ visited Phra Viharn, French officials were there to greet him on top of the promontory. They had to climb up, but the Prince ascended from the Thai side, which was much easier. Although by agreement, the temple was on Cambodian soil, they had only demarcated the border roughly. That was the source of the problem. The adjoining province, called Battambang in Khmer, and Phra Tabong in Thai, had been a part of Siam until the beginning of the 20th century.

After the Thai-French war preceding Pearl Harbor, which was adjudicated by Japan, Battambang was returned to Thailand, including the Phra Viharn Temple. Thailand occupied the temple from the end of the Second World War until the case was taken to the International Court of Justice by Cambodia at the beginning of the 1960's. Phra Viharn has been the flash point in Thai-Cambodian relations from the time that Cambodia

regained its full sovereignty as the succeeding state to the French Protectorate. It remained a flashpoint from the 1950s until today.

This is the problem with historical baggage. It is something that politicians of both countries can always turn to for political gains. From the Cambodian point of view, its politicians have to be seen to defend Cambodian territory, history, and monuments. Preah Vihear is a symbolic issue of Cambodian patriotism and nationalism. In the same spirit, it is fully reciprocated from the Thai side.

The only way that both countries can settle this dispute is for them to cooperate and say that this beautiful monument belongs to both the Thai and Cambodian peoples. They must forget the disputes from the past and say that this historic temple belongs to mankind and should be accessible to both sides. Everyone should be able to go up from the Thai side and also from the Cambodian side. When it was still possible to do so, I went up from the Thai side, descended to the Cambodia side, and back the same way. It was exhausting and I was quite ill from the exercise. The most important thing is that the whole area should be declared a zone of peace. It should be de-militarized and de-mined. Instead of being a monument symbolising the disputes between Thailand and Cambodia, it should be turned into a historical, cultural and religious park symbolising good relations between Thailand and Cambodia.

In 2002-2003, the then Foreign Minister Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai had proposed to the late Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia, Mr. Sok An, that there should be a joint submission from Thailand and Cambodia to register Phra Viharn / Preah

Vihear as a UNESCO world heritage site. The opportunity was lost when Cambodia decided that the temple belonged to them and they should present it to UNESCO unilaterally. They succeeded and it led to another crisis in our relations.

A major factor in this issue is domestic public opinion. This is actually the case with all our neighbours. We still seem to have suspicions of one another's motives. Do you think public opinion is a major factor in the ensuing crisis?

Public opinion in the capitals and in the local provincial capitals, stirred by the media and politicians and academics, can be dangerous. But if you are right on the border, the people on either side of Phra Viharn are racially the same. They speak the same language. They walk across the border. They mingle and trade. They are related.

The task of people of goodwill in both Phnom Penh and Bangkok is to explain the facts to the people so that public opinion would recognize the temple for what it really is. To recognize that it is Khmer but happened to be built at the end of a promontory, which rises in modern Thailand. These facts should be recognized and the two countries should cooperate in turning the temple into a symbol of good relations. There are people of goodwill in both countries who have thought about it.

A former Japanese Vice President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Takao Morita has always been very keen into turning the whole area into a historical and spiritual park. He worked on this with his friends in the ADB, his friends in Japan and Nepal. I fully support Mr. Morita's effort, but unfortunately it came to naught.

This particular problem also illustrates how domestic politics can seriously affect our relations with neighbours. How do you see this particular problem resolved?

It will take a long time, but you just have to keep at it. Former Foreign Minister, Kasit Piromya, has always advocated the rewriting of Southeast Asian history under the aegis of ASEAN or SEAMEO. Historians and archaeologists of ASEAN countries should get together and put the correct facts on paper to be given to all students in Southeast Asian countries, from primary school to university, so that we would share the same set of facts. This is being done, but it takes time. I do not know how long it will take for it to seep through and be absorbed.

I would like to mention a project that I have been involved in for a number of years. We take Thai middle school children on the border with Cambodia to go into Cambodia to assist in archaeological digs in Cambodia and vice versa. These Thai and Cambodian school children all speak the same local Cambodian dialect in Buriram, Sisaket, and Sa Kaeo. When they are digging at sites on the road from Angkor in Siem Reap through to Pimai in Thailand, they realize that we belong to the same history and culture. We speak the same language, and we are friends. More and more of this should be done. Students on both sides should participate in each other's archaeological digs so that they would realize that all of this belong to Southeast Asia, not just to a particular country.

Of course, there are facts, but facts can be interpreted in many ways to benefit the nationalistic elements in any country.

That is what I want to do away with! The nationalist interpretation of history. We should promote Southeast Asian commonality.

In modern time, Thailand's relations with Cambodia are not just focused on border issue, we have other cooperation as well. How do you see these major disputes affecting the overall bilateral cooperation?

We still have to go back to the border issue. A great American poet once said, "good fences make good neighbours." I agree. You either have good fences or no fences at all. What Thailand and Cambodia should do is to complete the border demarcation. I believe that, during the demarcation process between us and the French, we managed to put up only 73 border markers. Some of them are now lost, moved, or stolen. I once saw one in a house of an expat in Bangkok. I asked where he got it and he said he bought it from an antique dealer. That is one marker lost! Other markers, I was told, had been moved. So, our border must be scientifically demarcated from the Gulf through to Ubon Ratchathani. I do not think they have gone far into this due to politics. Both sides have discussed it at the meetings of the Joint Commission (JC) and the Joint Boundary Committee (JBC), but the process is very slow.

We must locate the border marker between Thailand and Cambodia in Trat Province, in order to project the line into the sea, so that we can negotiate how to share the natural gas off the Thai-Cambodian coast, as we did with Malaysia. A positive

note to this is that, since they have not managed to agree on the maritime boundary, the natural resources are in safe keeping for future generations.

THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH LAO PDR

How do you view Thailand's current state of relations with Lao PDR?

At the moment, I think it is going well. We import a lot of electricity from Lao PDR, which is good for both sides' economy. The governments are cooperating with each other very well. There are no real outstanding issues. But again, with Lao PDR, we must complete the border demarcation. There are a few remaining problems on land and, also, in the Mekong River. It is a question of time. We have to keep at it.

With Lao PDR, we also have cultural baggage. How should we resolve it?

It is the same with Cambodia. We have to get the facts right. We have to stop thinking of Chao Anou as a rebel. We have to build a history that it was a war between Vientiane and Bangkok, since at the time, there was no modern Thailand or Laos. It was a war between two kingdoms, and Chao Anou was and is a Lao hero. We have to acknowledge this.

Again, as in the case of Cambodia, they were states fighting for dominance, which was natural. There were winners and losers. It is a fact of life. The problem is that people do not accept the facts of life. It is the duty of each government to make sure that the correct facts are out there. Of course, these facts

are open to interpretation. But I would say facts are facts but interpretations are free, as long as they do not lead to nationalism and chauvinism, which lead to confrontation and threaten regional peace and well-being.

It is often observed that Thai people tend to be chauvinistic towards Lao people, and that it is the major factor hindering our relations. Do you agree with this observation?

It is up to the Thai authorities to mitigate and improve such attitudes and do away with condescending feelings towards Lao PDR and our other neighbours and to advocate equality of relations. This is coming about through regional tourism. When Thai tourists go to Lao PDR, Cambodia, or Vietnam, they get to know our neighbouring countries better and lessen their feelings of superiority. They see that our neighbours also have great history and culture which we can all enjoy.

THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH MYANMAR

How do you view Thailand's current state of relations with Myanmar?

We have become dependent on Myanmar for legal and illegal labour, which the Thai economy cannot do without. About 25 years ago, there were about 200,000 workers from Myanmar, it has now grown to about 4 million. In 2020-2021, a number of these workers became super spreaders of COVID-19. This created all sorts of implications because it led to a strain on our bilateral relations, as nationalists and racists blamed Myanmar workers for spreading waves of COVID-19. This was unfair.

About half of these workers came to Thailand legitimately. The other half, or a little more than half, came illegally. It is up to the Thai government to put an end to the illegal elements of the Myanmar workers.

The second point is that the Thai government, and those who employ Myanmar workers in their endeavours must be made responsible for the health and welfare of these workers., who are indispensable to the Thai economy. This issue must not be allowed to strain the good relations between the two countries. The issue of the Myanmar workers is more complicated than appears on the surface because there is no proper statistics as to who they really are. Among them, there are minorities who do not regard themselves as Myanmar at all. They are Mon, Shan, Karen, etc. Their native tongues are not Burmese. This complicates the issue because they are in a sort of “no-man’s land.” They find it difficult to fit into the Myanmar state, and they find themselves in limbo in Thailand. This complicates our relations with these workers and with the Myanmar government.

This issue of ethnic groups in Myanmar has been a complicating factor in our relations with Myanmar since its independence.

Not just from its independence, it is historical. It is a problem of the modern Burmese state, which is now Myanmar, that it has not been able to solve its relations with its ethnic minorities. This complicates the relations between our two countries, which otherwise could be very good.

We celebrated the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic relations in 2018. Looking back over that period, we did not always have smooth bilateral relations. What do you think are the complicating factors other than the ethnic minority issue?

It all springs from the failure or at least the inability of the central government in Yangon and in Nay Pyi Taw to solve the ethnic minority issue. As a result, the leadership of the ethnic minorities in Burma have always, to this day, sought refuge in Thailand either legally or illegally. Many members of the princely families of the Shan state are living in Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Other ethnic minorities have found refuge on the Myanmar-Thai border. Minority armies also seek refuge on Thai soil, the most famous of which is the Karen.

Moreover, the political opposition to the government also sought refuge in Thailand, not just the ethnic minority but the Burmans themselves, starting with former Prime Minister U Nu. I do not think it has ever been the Thai government's policy to support the ethnic minorities in Myanmar, or to support the Burmese political opposition. It is the long and porous border of about 2,400 or so kilometres that enables these leaders and their followers to be always able to cross into Thailand and seek refuge. The government in Yangon or Nay Pyi Taw is always suspicious of the Thai government's intentions, but I think our government simply gives refuge to whoever manage to cross the border. They have little choice, given that people on either side are racially the same any way.

The followers of the National League for Democracy (NLD) often believed that Thailand supported the previous military regime in Myanmar. Do you see it that way?

I do not see it that way. I do not think the Thai government has ever directly supported the Burmese military. The Thai government has to work with the government in power in Yangon or Nay Pyi Daw, which is normal practice.

It seems that, with either the military regime and the democratic government, our relations with Myanmar were never close.

I think relations with neighbours are always complicated. They have to be handled very carefully, subtly, and with great sensibility. At least to me, the potential for good relations is always there. I have always found working with our neighbours the most difficult but most satisfying.

Is that why we try to deal with them collectively through regional cooperative mechanisms like the GMS³⁶ and the ACMECS?

These sub-regional organization help, but ultimately, they are supplementary to the bilateral relations. What counts is bilateral relations.

When we started the ACMECS, it was intended that it would be the building block for bigger cooperative mechanisms in the region, such as ASEAN. Do you see it that way?

Surely, I see it that way as well. ACMECS is an important building block in the regional architecture and our policy towards our neighbours. We should make the block as solid

as possible. This is the inner core of our policy towards our neighbours in the region because ACMECS joins us to our immediate neighbours on mainland Southeast Asia, which is at the heart of our foreign policy. We should develop it as much as possible, first of all, through connectivity. What does this mean? It means road networks. I can remember very well when I became Permanent Secretary in 2001, the first meeting in my new capacity was about connectivity, how to link Vietnam, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Myanmar. This predated the ACMECS. Even back in 2001, the people who had the vision about our place and our position in Southeast Asia were already working on the transportation network. People were very excited that Pitsanulok was going to be the crossroads of Indochina.

What does transport connectivity bring? It brings trade in agricultural and manufactured goods, as well as service and tourism industries. With more trade, you have economic development which enriches and develops these countries together. Of course, our neighbours have other networks of connectivity. Vietnam can look East to the South China Sea and onwards to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. But on the land front, it is important that we connect the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean. A major project now is the trilateral highway, where Myanmar would be the major link in the road network from Thailand to India. ACMECS is at the centre of this plan. In the West, it will take us to Bangladesh and India, and in the East, it will take us to the South China Sea to Hainan, Hong Kong, Shanghai and so on. ACMECS is the core.

What should be done to enhance development cooperation with our neighbours?

I think development assistance is very important. That is, we offer assistance in building roads. Twenty years ago, the road from Mae Sot to Myawaddy, and on to Hpa-an, was so narrow that traffic to and from Hpa-an had to be conducted on alternate days. Now we have enlarged that road and traffic can flow both ways every day. I think the Myanmar government is now widening the rest of the way from Hpa-an to Yangon. All these things take time because we are developing countries and do not have the necessary resources. Within Thailand, our road networks are much more developed. But what we would like to see is that the road networks in Myanmar, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam are as developed as in Thailand.

Where will the resources come from? One traditional source is the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The other alternative would be the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank led by China. We have to come together and plan joint projects in order to develop our transport networks. It needs a master plan. With a master plan comes the need for hefty investment, which Myanmar and Thailand do not have. We should help Myanmar to borrow internationally to develop its transport network. This is true for India as well. Compared to China, the transport network in India is still under developed.

Apart from the economic linkages, how do you see the cultural linkages between Thailand and Myanmar?

Culture always plays an important part in bilateral

relations, especially between neighbours. Myanmar/Burma and Thailand/Siam have always been culturally close. Back in the 18th century, when there was still no such thing as the modern states of Myanmar and Thailand, we could see clear cultural relations between the heartland of Myanmar, which is far to the north around Mandalay, and the areas of Chiang Mai and Ayudhya in Thailand. The culture of the Mon is also shared by both countries.

So, there is a great basis for cultural cooperation between modern Myanmar and modern Thailand based on the historical cultural relations. Particularly between the Thai and the Burman people, cultural relations passed through the Mon and the Shan minorities. Modern Myanmar culture is based partly on Mon culture. Mon and Thai cultures are also very close. So, culturally, there are great similarities between Myanmar and Thailand through the Mon and Shan connection. These should be nurtured.

Of course, another great link between modern Thailand and modern Myanmar is Theravada Buddhism. Monks of the two countries go back and forth regularly. Pilgrimage sites in Myanmar are revered by the Thai people.

THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH MALAYSIA

We have religious and cultural affinity, through Theravada Buddhism, with all of our immediate neighbours except Malaysia. Is that an important factor in our relations?

With Malaysia, we are moving towards the culture of the archipelago. Malaysia, or Malaya, connects us to Indonesia via Sumatra. Culturally and religiously, we are much closer to

our neighbours to the West, East and North. Thailand and Lao PDR are racially and linguistically close. With Myanmar, the Eastern side of Myanmar/Burma are the Shan, who belong also to the Thai race, language, and religion. The Mon straddle the border. Their culture is shared by both sides. When we move south, we are moving into a very different culture and space. But we have interacted since ancient times with our Malay neighbours, especially the northern states of Malaysia: Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu, which used to be within the Thai sphere of influence. In Kelantan especially, there is a sizable Thai minority living peacefully in Tumpat District as Bumi Putra alongside Malays. They participate happily in each other's religious and cultural activities, which should be the model for the southern-most three provinces of Thailand.

Malaysia is part of the Islamic world that leads on to Sumatra and Indonesia. But as with our other neighbours, the potentials for close and good neighbourly relations are there. We have not had any major problems with Malaysia from the time that it regained its independence from the British. It should be noted that the first and great Prime Minister of Malaya, which later on became Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman started his education at Thepsirin School in Bangkok. The royal family of Kedah has some Thai roots. I met Tunku Abdul Rahman once. He was very kind and welcoming to the Thai delegation which called on him in Penang in 1985.

In more recent times, there is also a feeling among some Thai circles that Malaysia is our major economic competitor. What is your view?

All our neighbours can be regarded as competitors because we produce more or less the same things. Nowadays we talk a lot about globalization. With the enlargement, widening and deepening of the ASEAN Free Trade Area, this sense of competition and rivalry can be turned into cooperation and mutual benefit. For instance, there are now cars assembled in Indonesia sold in Thailand and vice versa. The same go for many products from Malaysia and Vietnam. As long as we trade with each other through AFTA, the competition can be turned into something mutually beneficial.

But, of course, this sense of rivalry and competition can have negative effects. We have talked about the destructiveness of the rivalry between the United States and China. Instead of looking for a fight, what they should do is to turn their competition and rivalry to mutual benefits. It is true for the China-US trade as it is true for Southeast Asian trade. So, we should not be thinking about trade competition or economic rivalry between us and Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. We should all work on what brings mutual benefits.

We have the Joint Development Authority (JDA) for joint petroleum exploration and resource sharing between Thailand and Malaysia. This is the way forward. If there are problems, you should not concentrate on the problems but on how to find solutions. We used the Thai-Malaysia model for cooperation in the Gulf of Thailand between Thailand and Vietnam, and in the future, we could do the same thing with Cambodia.

We still have not completed the demarcation of our border with Malaysia. Do you think we will ever resolve all these border issues with the neighbours?

Theoretically we should be able to resolve all the problems. The Thai-Malaysian demarcation process is close to completion, with only some small sections left. I already quoted Robert Frost, “good fences make good neighbours.” When things work and there is no conflict, there is no need for a fence. On the Swiss-French border, there are places where their border passes through houses. Part of the airport of Geneva is in fact in France. French customs and immigration officers work at Geneva airport to check and clear passengers who go on to France. Sometimes problems disappear of their own accord by attaining maturity. This level of maturity between Switzerland and France is an example. I hope that we in Southeast Asia will attain a similar level of maturity one day.

Do you think the region will ever get to that level of maturity in the future?

Yes, with cultural cooperation, I think we can. If the Europeans can reach that level of maturity, so can we. I really do believe that, with practical and political maturity, problems with our neighbours will resolve themselves in the years to come.

In the future, how do you see the countries of Southeast Asia fare in international affairs?

The only way that they can play a role in international affairs is when they join together. And now they have joined

together in ASEAN. Individually, they just do not have the weight or the mass, but as 10 countries, they do have strength and will be listened to internationally. But it also depends on how they hold themselves and what they can contribute to the international order.

Malaysia belongs to the Islamic world. It wishes to play a bigger role in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and has been active in that organization. I think it is a mistake. I think Malaysia's future lies more with ASEAN than the OIC. The OIC, even though it stretches from Malaysia to Morocco, is basically a Middle Eastern organization at its core. It is not the world of Southeast Asia. As Malaysia is in Southeast Asia, she should concentrate on Southeast Asia. The Malaysians probably do not see it that way, but that is how I see it.

Does that also apply to Indonesia?

Indonesia is different with her background. From its inception, Indonesian foreign policy, as set by President Sukarno, was always to be 'active and independent.' Indonesia, under Sukarno, was a secular state. Their outlook on the world was secular and was based on Pancasila and not on Islam. Of course, this can change, but I do not think it has yet.

The religious groups have become stronger post-Suharto, but I do not think they have won the ideological debate in Indonesia. The heartland of Indonesia is still Java, and Java traditionally has not been fundamentalist. The Islam on Java has always been syncretic with Hindu and even Buddhist elements. Culturally, Java and Bali, the core of Indonesia, are closer to mainland Southeast Asia than to the Malay world.

From your own experience, how do you think our neighbours see us?

They see us exactly as we see them, both negatively and positively. For instance, Cambodia has love-hate relations with Thailand. The same for Lao PDR. Vietnam and Myanmar, in history, have been winners, so they have no complex about Thailand. I think the Malays in Malaysia also have historical baggage about Thailand.

But as I said before and am fond of repeating, all these things can be resolved through cultural cooperation and historical objectivity. We simply just have to work at it. There are lots of people of goodwill who are working at it. Unfortunately, there are also people working the other way as well.

My conclusion is that the potentials for good-neighbourliness and good relations with our immediate neighbours are there. We must nurture these potentials by doing our homework, by being persistent, and by being consistently a good neighbour to our neighbours.

CHAPTER

6

THAI DIPLOMACY:
PROCESS AND OUTLOOK

Let's recap on the foreign policy process in Thailand. What is the role of agencies apart from the Foreign Ministry?

Foreign policy and diplomacy are like history. They are inclusive of everything. Anything that involves non-domestic affairs can be considered foreign affairs, and if there are foreign affairs, then there has to be foreign policy. Foreign affairs do not happen in a vacuum. They always happen in a context, especially for a country like ours, which is located on the mainland of the Asian continent. We always have to interact with our immediate neighbours. This is always the start of our foreign policy and diplomacy.

With this context, foreign affairs are inclusive. Take our relations with our immediate neighbours: Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. For the past 20 years or so, relations with

Myanmar always start off with the problem of migrant labour, both legal and illegal. When I was Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs from 2001 to 2004, I had to spend a great deal of time discussing with my Myanmar counterparts about how to administer the Myanmar labour seeking work in Thailand. This meant that we have to coordinate with the Ministry of Labour, the Immigration Bureau, as well as with the police and the military.

In the case of Myanmar, there are also refugees who flee from Myanmar to Thailand. This is also the case with Laos and Cambodia to a lesser or greater extent. With Malaysia, there are also problems of the same nature, but in reverse.

In order to cope, we need to have an efficient and effective mechanism to conduct foreign policy towards our neighbours. There is an existing mechanism: National Security Council (NSC). The NSC has an internal mechanism to deal with security affairs, starting with the highest-level meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, and down the line to those chaired by the Secretary-General of the NSC, down to those chaired by his deputies, at all of which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is represented.

If this mechanism works properly, then we should have the wherewithal to coordinate our foreign policy not only for our immediate neighbours but for the rest of the world. But in order for this mechanism to function properly, all the agencies involved must lay all the facts on the table so that officials who are responsible for making foreign policy can use them and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can formulate the policy to present to the government.

For foreign policy to be efficient and effective, it must come from all the sources available. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot manage it alone. For instance, in order to have an effective and efficient international economic policy, the government has to coordinate the needs and the wishes of all economic ministries, and these demands must be properly coordinated. Our international economic policy usually goes through the mechanism of the Committee on International Economic Policy (CIEP) before reaching the government at the cabinet level, which may then authorize the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be the lead agency. This was the process used in the consideration of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which is clearly an inter-agency foreign affairs.

In my experience, foreign policy can be both top-down, directed by the Prime Minister or a Foreign Minister with a personal vision and commitment, or bottom-up with policies recommended by public servants. Either way, it must be well thought out and well-coordinated for it to be effective.

I used to joke about the difference between the US Department of State and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. We work in exactly the same way, but as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand has fewer resources, we have to maximize what we have, whereas the Department of State has so many resources that they have to summarize. But in the end, it comes to the same thing: we all have to optimize whatever we have. They also have to work closely with their National Security Council. Let me remind you that their most distinguished

Secretary of State in recent times, Henry Kissinger, came from the National Security Council, just like one of the longest serving Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila, who also came from the National Security Council.

With the emphasis on coordination, it seems that we are describing a foreign policy that is fragmented or compartmentalized. So, what is the role of the Foreign Ministry?

The Foreign Ministry must be the final coordinator of foreign affairs. But to be an efficient coordinator, it must have all the facts. To have an effective and efficient foreign policy on international affairs and security issues, we must have the full cooperation of our security agencies, be it the armed forces or the intelligence agencies. Yes, they are compartmentalized and we must have their confidence and trust. There must be mutual respect. There are two ways of acquiring this. By working through a mechanism such as the NSC, or by having good personal relations and connections. This is necessary especially in the Thai social and cultural context. That is why the National Defence College is such a useful mechanism in acquiring this kind of network.

Because the domestic ministries are highly specialized and deeply occupied with whatever they are doing, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to reach out to acquire information and facts, and to ask ourselves constantly what we should be doing to assert Thailand's position on the world stage. Although we are the ministry that is ultimately responsible for foreign affairs, the

substance comes from the domestic ministries, defence, labour, commerce, finance, education, culture, etc. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to ask what they want us to do. For example, the Ambassador of Thailand in Paris is also the Ambassador Permanent Representative to UNESCO, so he needs to work with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, and Ministry of Science in order to put Thailand on the UNESCO map.

From the more recent experience, it appears that most ministries like to take the lead in their own specialized field at the international level. How can the Foreign Ministry establish trust and relationship when domestic politics, politicians and ministers, seem to dictate otherwise?

I prefer to address this question from the structural perspective rather than the political perspective. The Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should not compete in the area of competence of either ministry. The Ministry of Commerce is competent in commerce, but when commerce has an international political economy aspect, then it should work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When the matter is specific, there should be no competition on who takes the lead. But when the issue becomes political, political consideration from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must be taken into account. Whenever matters come to the political level, the two ministries must work together. Ultimately, when the issue becomes foreign affairs and not just commercial affairs, it is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that is responsible.

How does it work in practice? For instance, in most of our embassies, depending on the level of commercial rela-

tions, there is an official from the Ministry of Commerce. That official is responsible for commercial affairs. But when matters become political, such official may not have political access of the receiving country at the requisite level and should ask the Ambassador to make the connection for him. As ambassador, I always worked closely with the official from the Ministry of Commerce. I would go to the Ministry of Commerce with him or her to talk about commercial problems we had with that country. I always had good relations with colleagues from the Ministry of Commerce abroad and have remained friends with them to this day.

When Thailand engages in international negotiations, should concerned ministries be given the leading role, if the matters under negotiations involve specialized or specific issues under their competency? Or should it be given to the Foreign Ministry?

All ministries are competent to conduct their own negotiations when it is technical. But once it becomes political, then they must coordinate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For instance, in Geneva, we have two missions, one to the UN organizations and the other just to the WTO. There is separate mission to the WTO because the work is so specialized. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not competent to conduct negotiations on specific goods. The arrangement in Geneva is a very good example of where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also represented in the mission to the WTO, which is always headed at the ambassadorial level by an official from the Ministry of Commerce.

The US mission to the GATT, and later to the WTO, has always been headed by an official at the ambassadorial level who is either a public servant or a political appointee. Their staff come from their economic departments in Washington, D.C., and other agencies, including the State Department. That is the ideal model, which we are also using in Geneva.

In Washington, D.C., I also worked closely with my economic minister, the official from the Ministry of Commerce. We would go to the US Trade Representative office together and it was a good working relationship.

How do you see domestic politics influencing the formulation of foreign policy in Thailand?

The two cannot be separated because this is another dimension of foreign policy formulation. In order to have effective foreign policy, we must coordinate with all other ministries when they conduct their foreign affairs. That is within the government's domestic context. But there is always the element of politics, which involves public opinion. Public opinion nowadays is generated not just by the print media or radio and television, but mostly by social media. So, the question arises as to how public opinion influences foreign policy.

Before getting into that, we have to approach this question structurally. I would call the period from 1932 until today the 'constitutional period'. Despite so many constitutions and coups d'état and governments led by the military, there has always been a national assembly. Within the national assembly, there are members of parliament and senators who have

opinions on foreign affairs. In both the House of Representatives and the Senate, there are Foreign Affairs Committees. So, structurally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to work with these committees. We have to take their opinions into account in the formulation of foreign policy. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to persuade and convince them that what we are doing is in the interest of the country. It is like the relationship with other ministries. It is both structural and personal. We have to take time in explaining what we are doing to the members of parliament. If we do this well, they will listen to us. In my experience, the majority supports the conduct of foreign policy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is also natural that some would oppose it.

To go on to public opinion, in the age of social media, you just have to do the same thing. The Information Department needs to be pro-active in communicating with the public and in persuading them that what we are doing is in their interest. Again, not every member of the public will be persuaded. We just have to keep at it!

Public opinion can also cause problems for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy, as we have seen in our relationship with Cambodia. How should we deal with this kind of public opinion that disrupts the conduct of foreign affairs?

It is very difficult. We just have to be very patient and try to persuade or to convince public opinion of the facts. One can have opinions about facts, but facts remain facts.

We should always be pro-active in our communica-

tion with the public. We should always be telling the public what we are doing, and not to wait until problems arise. That is why we should conduct ourselves through the Information Department, and for the Government through the Department of Public Relations. The Government has its radio and television channels, Channels 5 and 7, Thai PBS and TNN, all of which should be very pro-active in providing the platforms for interaction between the Government and the public. I started my career in 1969 at the News Analysis Division of our Information Department under Dr. Manaspas Xuto³⁷, who was a super active chief. He imbued me with the importance of public diplomacy.

Looking back at the problem with Cambodia in 2007-2008, it appeared that the credibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was much affected by domestic politics. What we said were facts were not accepted as facts. How should we deal with this kind of situation if it ever happens again?

We cannot escape reality. I move from ‘fact’ to ‘reality’ now. Certain issues are very emotive. Emotions exacerbate the issues. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is, first of all, to persuade and convince the public of the facts of the situation. Unfortunately, we also have to face the reality that, in politics, the government or a minister may be unpopular with an important segment of the public. We cannot do anything about it. That is why I think it is so important to get the facts out, and to keep on reminding the public that these are the facts on every issue. It is important to be as transparent as possible.

When talking about getting the facts out, to what extent can we reveal? How transparent can we be when conducting foreign affairs?

Once upon a time, a top British public servant had to go to court about facts. The judge asked exactly that question, and the Head of the British Civil Service answered that he had been 'economical' with the facts. He was quoted widely on this. That particular reply, to be 'economical' with the facts, became famous or notorious at the time, but what he said was perfectly sensible.

One can be transparent with facts relevant to the issue at hand but does not need to reveal all the facts. In international relations, we do hold something back to protect our final negotiating positions. Based on this reality, certain facts do not have to be revealed. We can be as transparent as possible without revealing our final positions.

Apart from public opinion, the business or private sector, as well as civil societies, can provide input on foreign policy formulation. How do you see their role, and how to deal with their ideas and aspirations?

As usual, I would approach this structurally. Of course, the private sector is important, and they can express their views on what they want the government to do through the Chamber of Commerce, the Board of Trade, and the Federation of Industries. It is up to the government to have dialogue with them on a regular basis. There are existing channels and mechanisms which need to be utilized fully to gather all the facts and opinions, so that we can formulate foreign policy efficiently. The trouble with us is that, in my experience, we are not sufficiently open with each

other. We hold back. We do not give all the facts and opinions to each other at the meetings where these facts and opinions should be laid on the table. We are sometimes economical with the facts at the wrong time.

Modern technology makes things move very fast. How do you see modern technology making an impact on foreign policy formulation?

In one of his novels, if I remember correctly, John le Carré said “in the world of intelligence, what is urgent is not important, and what is important is not urgent.” I think it was a very perceptive remark. There are certain things of long duration, *longue durée* in French, which take time to ponder over. In this modern world, for Generation Z, everything moves very fast. As soon as something happens, it is on Twitter or Instagram or whatever. There is no time for thought.

This can lead to many problems, as we saw with President Trump. He is fond of Twitter, and he is read by many people, some of whom are extremists who took things to extremes and even occupied Congress. That is the danger of using the modern media to communicate without thinking through. People can now opine in public about something without having thought much about it. I always prefer to think for the long duration, to have time to consider about the implications of things, rather than airing my immediate thoughts. Foreign Policy and diplomacy can stay overnight.

Immediate reaction to events can have an impact on foreign affairs. How should we cope with it?

We should try to slow things down. COVID-19 has helped the world to slow down a lot. We should use technology as wisely as possible and not allow technology to use us. Life has become a lot easier in many ways because of technology, but we have got to be its master and not the other way round. In the old days, we used manual typewriters, then electric typewriters, and now we use computers. Technology has made life a lot easier, but it should not run our lives.

As you mentioned before, there is a difference between foreign affairs and diplomacy. And now in the 21st century, foreign affairs have expanded to cover all kinds of issues, such as international economics and trade, human rights, and the environment. We have also many more players, especially non-governmental players. So, how should the Ministry of Foreign Affairs deal with this new landscape in foreign affairs?

We have to be open and broad-minded. There are so many players, and we have to take them all into account. With human rights, for instance, we have to be alert and open to what non-government organizations are saying. NGOs are both international and local. Human Rights Watch is a global NGO with a chapter in Thailand. All the NGOs are doing their best for the world. While we have to be alert to what they say, we hope and expect that they are being objective and factual and not playing politics.

We have to know what is of universal interest and values. For instance, what is our position on enforced disappearance? There was a panel discussion on enforced disappearance at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand. An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in the audience. He would have made a report to the Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would have to gather as many facts as possible from other agencies. It is then up to them to provide us with the relevant or pertinent facts in so far as they are available and possible to be revealed. Based on those facts, we can formulate our diplomatic positions. This goes across the board, whether on enforced disappearance or human trafficking and so on.

When I was in Geneva, we had to work on many human rights issues. The best thing to do is not to be on the defensive and enclose ourselves in government positions, but to reach out and hear from NGOs about their concerns before formulating our positions, which should always be a reasonable one based on facts and not in denial. The 'in denial' position has no credibility. This can be applied to all sectors of our public diplomacy, from human rights to animal rights. In Geneva, we have lots of problems with animal rights - of elephants, monkeys, chickens, even sea horses. We have to acquire the facts and formulate our positions which is credible and not in denial of facts. What the NGOs have been doing is also useful domestically because we can tell the government what is wrong with our country.

That is an interesting point. On many social issues, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is at the frontline to deal with the international community, the press and the NGOs. How do we use diplomacy to deal with issues arising from domestic failings at home when they are raised internationally?

I must repeat that the way to deal with this is not to be in denial. We should not deny what the world sees, that is wrong. For example, up to 10 years ago, we used to see elephants walking on the streets of Bangkok. There were lots of complaints from NGOs, especially international NGOs based in Geneva. We reported it to the government. Now we no longer see elephants walking on the streets of Bangkok. This is an achievement. There is much more awareness now on how to treat elephants. Most of the developments in animal rights have come from the NGOs, and they have all been positive to our way of treating animals. My point is that we must not have a knee-jerk reaction to what the NGOs say. We should take what they say seriously and turn their criticism into something positive and constructive for our country.

Looking to the future, it is said that Thailand is among the “Middle Powers”. How do you see our role in the world as a Middle Power?

The World Bank or the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris designates us as an “upper middle income oil importing country.” Cut out the “oil importing” part, this makes us an “upper middle income” country. There is the word “middle” there. Such a description is a fair one. If you look at statistics of the OECD, the World Bank,

and the IMF, you will find that Thailand's GDP hovers around number 19 or 20 in the world of nearly 200 nations. Economically, we are nearly in the top 20 economies in the world, going up and down a little on the year.³⁸

As an upper middle-income country, we should also be an upper middle power, and not a power with limited interests as we were designated for the Congress of Versailles after the First World War. But we do not behave according to our economic ranking. We box underweight, so to speak, when we should be boxing in a higher weight. But then, to box underweight accords with historical Thai diplomacy. In other words, we like to keep off radar. We have always preferred to keep a low profile so that we would not get in harm's way. But I think that it is too modest because it does not reflect our real position in the world.

On the other hand, there are countries which box above their weight. Countries like Finland, Ireland, and Switzerland, always have a greater say than their economic position because they are "good citizens" of the world. As of 2021, I do not think Thai diplomacy match our real strength.

I have always encouraged Thai citizens to play a greater role in international organizations. There are simply not enough Thai officials at even the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta. I am very pleased when Thai officials work and perform well at the ASEAN Secretariat. Apart from the ASEAN Secretariat, we should have more people at the UN Offices and other Specialized Agencies. Maybe it is something to do with our nativism; we prefer to stay home rather than try to go forth as international civil servants.

When I was Ambassador in Paris, the Ministry asked

whether I would like to run for the top position at UNESCO, I said no. I had no wish to be an international civil servant. That was a negative thing to say. But I knew that the Japanese Ambassador in Paris was also in the running for that post. Not only did I think that he was more qualified, more senior, but I also knew that his government was fully behind him with all its resources as a major donor to UNESCO. He was bound to win. Nevertheless, it is a question of attitude, and my attitude was wrong. I should have run against him and put our point of view and our vision for UNESCO before the world. But then the question arose: what was Thailand's position and vision for UNESCO? If I had run at that time, I would have had one in the end!

My point is that Thailand, as a nation, does not have a very internationalist outlook. We are inward looking, concerned with just ourselves, when our economic position warrants more than that. We should be much more internationalist, but we are not. When I was Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, it was the time for election for the post of UN Secretary-General. One of our neighbours proposed that our Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai, should run for it at an ASEAN Ministerial Retreat in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. On returning from that meeting, Dr. Surakiart asked me what he should do, and I told him in English "go for it." He asked me why, and I said even if you lose, you would put Thailand on the map during the campaign, and it would be a good thing for Thailand to have a higher profile. After that conversation, Dr. Surakiart went to talk to Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. He came

back to tell me that the Prime Minister had the same opinion.

That is how the campaign started. Dr Surakiart eventually lost to the candidate from the Republic of Korea, but that is another story. My point is that we should always go for it. We should encourage Thai citizens to go for positions in international organizations. It is a good personal experience for those who run, and it puts Thailand on the map. Those who do go to work in international organizations, be it at the ASEAN Secretariat, the United Nations, the FAO, the WHO, have always done a good job and put Thailand on the map. We do have competent officials to work in international organizations. But this is a minor point when compared with the fact that, in general, the Thai government and the Thai people do not have an internationalist outlook.

During the 19th century, Siam/Thailand seemed to have been more internationalist and open than many countries in the region. But now, it is often said that Thai foreign policy is reactive rather than proactive because it lacks an internationalist outlook. Do you think we have lost our internationalist outlook?

From the end of the 19th century, we needed to have an internationalist outlook in order to prove that we were a sovereign country. That was how we became a founding member of the Universal Postal Union. Along that line, we became an early member of the International Council of the Red Cross after 1893. We signed the earliest Geneva Conventions. We participated in the International Conferences prior to the First World War called the Hague Peace Conferences. We were a founding member of

the League of Nations and participated actively. In the 1930s, we hosted international conferences in Bangkok.

When did this internationalist outlook disappear? Perhaps it never really did. Prince Wan was the 11th President of the UNGA in 1956 and played a very important role in dealing with two major international crises: the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt and the Soviet intervention in Hungary. He was also Rapporteur of the Bandung Conference in 1955, where “he gave valuable help to Ali Sastroamidjojo in breaking the deadlock and bringing about a last-minute compromise solution to the Conference Declaration on Collective Security Pacts”.³⁹ Prince Wan certainly had an internationalist outlook. His successor, Dr. Thanat Khoman was equally internationalist in outlook. He initiated the establishment of ASEAN and led other efforts for international cooperation in Asia and the Pacific. After Dr. Thanat, the people with an internationalist outlook were Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

Maybe what we had were personalities with internationalist outlook. But as a society, Thailand may not be as internationalist in its outlook as Singapore or Indonesia.

In the case of Singapore, being a small island nation, they have to be internationalist in their outlook. Besides, they have so many brilliant people and Singapore is too small to contain them. In the case of Indonesia, they have always had an internationalist outlook with their “bebas dan aktif” or free and active diplomacy. That was the foundation of their diplomacy from the time of President Sukarno.

For Thailand, we have had foreign ministers who definitely had an internationalist outlook. Perhaps it is an exaggeration on my part to say that, as a society, we do not have an internationalist outlook. I still believe so but we should improve.

What should we do to raise our international outlook?

It is awareness raising and one of the roles of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to encourage and promote internationalism in Thai foreign policy and diplomacy. That should definitely be something to work on.

“Skilful diplomacy” was something you talked about earlier. Do you think our diplomats now are as “skilful” as those in the past? Do they have the same level of internationalist outlook as those in the past?

I must say that the quality of the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been getting higher all the time. I am not saying this to scratch our own back, but I really do believe so. All this is thanks to former Permanent Secretary Arsa Sarasin, who reformed the recruitment system and made the entrance examination much more competitive and professional. Moreover, nowadays, once the officials enter the Ministry, they have to attend and participate in many useful courses, which are very good for them. In comparison to when I entered the Ministry in 1969, the overall quality of officials in the Ministry today is much higher. This does not mean that in my time we did not have people of quality. We had outstanding officials. We had “stars” but it was much more elitist than it is today.

What skills do you think a good diplomat need?

There are many skills. Career diplomats or officials at the Ministry will stay at the Ministry for 30-35 years before mandatory retirement, if he or she joins the Ministry at around the age of 25. First of all, the most important thing that I told people when I was in the Ministry was that you are here for the most important part of your life. There is always something new to learn. The entrance examination is not the last one in your life. The whole 35 years of your career is an examination. You should always study and prepare for it. What I always encourage people to do is to read: books, articles, newspapers, and also to watch television and listen to the radio. You always have to study and analyse what you are studying in order to formulate your views for presentations, whether we are desk officers, directors of divisions, or directors-general of departments. You always have to formulate your views and present them up the line through to the Minister. It is a continuous learning process and examination. You must never cease to learn. That is absolutely basic.

At the same time, you have to go out from the Ministry and reach out to other ministries and agencies and NGOs and to the media. You have to establish relationship with them so that you can get new information and new ideas. You cannot just stay only in the Ministry. I started out in the Information Department and through my work I got to know Suthichai Yoon, one of our most distinguished media persons today. I have known him now for more than 50 years, and it has been very stimulating and useful for me.

Once we are posted abroad, from the very first posting,

you have to get to know your colleagues in the ministries of your host country and in the other embassies. From my first posting in Jakarta in 1976 until today, I still maintain friendship with those I first met in Jakarta. You have to keep up and maintain relationship with other foreign ministries and other ministries in the world throughout. This is not to just keep up the personal relationships, but also to get new ideas and perspectives on how they are thinking and how they work.

This is the occupation of one's whole life. You have to go out and be open and meet people. That is the business we are in: meeting people, getting to know people and to know how they think, in order to formulate our position. One of the most senior members of our Ministry, former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, who is now 88, is still very active with the media, the NGOs and society in general. That is the model and what we should aim for.

EPILOGUE

As for me, I have been very lucky in acquiring whatever diplomatic skills I have. From the morning of my first day at the Ministry, when my father took me to report to the Minister, Dr. Thanat Khoman, I have learned from my superiors. I was assigned to the Information Department, which had been founded by Dr. Thanat himself. He played a leading role in our public diplomacy. On my first afternoon, I was sent to take notes of an interview given by the Minister to a foreign journalist and started to learn how he handled undiplomatic questions. At the Information Department, I started in the News Analysis Division with Dr. Manaspas Xuto as Chief. He was a conscientious and tireless leader who meticulously corrected our work, both in Thai and English, in red ink. There were no formal training courses for new entrants in those days, my contemporaries and I were learning

on the job. Our Chief did a good job because three of us, Nitya Pibulsonggram, Kasit Piromya and I became Foreign Ministers, even our only lady colleague, Phatchari Amornwiwat, was spouse of another Foreign Minister. We had a great time together with our other colleagues, Chawat Arthayukti and Surapong Jayanama. Within the Information Department, I also served in the Radio Division and the Culture Division and learned more about public diplomacy. The only division I did not serve in was the Newspaper Division, but then Chiefs, Pracha Guna-Kasem followed by Nissai Vejjajiva, regularly called me to meet Thai and foreign journalists. That was how I came to know the great Teh Jongkadikij of the Bangkok Post, Suthichai Yoon of the Nation, and others.

The big breakthrough in my learning curve happened in 1972 when Khun Phan Wannamethee had me transferred from the Information Department to the Political Department, where he was Director-General. He put me on the China desk of the East Asia Division at a time the Ministry was beginning to consider relations with the People's Republic of China. I had to teach myself Chinese history and contemporary affairs from scratch. The only book of Mao Zedong in Thai was locked in a safe in the Ministry library. The Director-General himself took me down to the library to meet the librarian and asked him to open the safe so that I can borrow the book to read.

In August 1973, I accompanied Khun Phan in a badminton delegation to China. I took the notes of his exchange of views with his counterpart in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and learned from him how to handle a very delicate situation. I still

have those notes. Later on, in December of the same year, I was in Deputy Foreign Minister Chatichai Choonhavan's delegation to Beijing to purchase crude oil. The Minister's Secretary, Arsa Sarasin, also went. What was most memorable to me from that trip took place at one of the meetings at the Chinese Ministry of Trade when Khun Arsa put up his hand and pointedly asked Minister Chatichai to ask for the price. Ever since then whenever I have had to negotiate on goods and services anywhere, I too have asked for the price.

In June 1975, I accompanied Khun Anand Panyarachun to Beijing to negotiate the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the Kingdom of Thailand and the People's Republic of China. Khun Anand was actually our Ambassador to the United States at the time but had been recalled for consultations in the aftermath of the Mayaguez incident. He was considered the ablest of our diplomats, having become Ambassador at the age of only 33. To us young officials, he was a legendary figure. He had the personality to match his reputation and negotiated with confidence and style. It was very impressive and I remain impressed to this day. That is why I consider him a model. On 1 July 1975, we established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. It made my career.

When Khun Anand came back from Washington, D.C., and became Permanent Secretary, he posted me to Jakarta with the specific instruction to the Ambassador that I was to be the ASEAN Desk Officer at the Embassy. I am grateful for that posting to this day. It made me a committed ASEANista and dedicated Southeast Asianist. During my posting in Jakarta,

we had the crisis of the refugees who fled the former Indochina countries by land and sea. The Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, hosted an international conference on the so-called Boat People in Jakarta. I wrote a report on that and it seemed the only person who appreciated it at the Ministry was my best friend, Woraphut Jayanama. At the end of 1979, there was a Senior Officials Meeting on the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, where Tony Siddique of Singapore and I largely drafted what later became the first ASEAN Foreign Ministers Statement on that situation, now properly called the Vietnamese liberation of Cambodia. Little did I know that I would spend the next decade working on the same matters.

It did not surprise me that when I came back to the Ministry at the end of 1979 I was sent to be a director at the ASEAN Department, where I was later promoted to be Deputy Director-General. I was reunited with Pracha Guna-Kasem, who became Director-General there and together we served the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting of 1983. For that year I was reunited with Anand Panyarachun, who had resigned from the service but was invited back to head the Thai working group for the development of ASEAN. When that working group became the ASEAN Task Force and Khun Anand was elected its chairman, thus fulfilling a comment of his in New York that “Anand is captain of everything”, I became the Task Force’s secretary. Khun Anand presented the Task Force Report to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting of 1983 and it became the basis for ASEAN development thereafter. AMM 1983 was held without any noticeable problem

and Pracha Guna-Kasem praised me for being able to handle both policy and administrative affairs. I was very pleased.

After AMM 1983, Arsa Sarasin, who had become Permanent Secretary, made me an Ambassador attached to the Ministry at the age of 39. Arsa was the best team leader I ever served throughout my entire career. He had a meeting with the top echelon of the Ministry every morning to discuss what was going on with remarkable openness and good humour. As one of the most junior persons in the room, I often thought things cannot get better than this. His immediate assistants called these meetings “morning prayers”. One of them, Pisan Manawapat, compiled notes of these meetings which I hope will be published one day to show what a great leader Arsa was.

I really enjoyed working with Arsa Sarasin and, like Pracha Guna-Kasem, he assigned both policy and administrative work to me. I did everything that came my way, from writing numerous speeches for Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond and Minister Siddhi Savetsila, until I was described as a speech writer, to Senior Officials Meetings to helping rebuild an old wing of the Ministry. The experience has been valuable to me ever since. In the middle of 1986, Arsa decided that it was time for him to move on. He asked to go to Washington, D.C., where our old Embassy-Residence on Kalorama Road still stands with its basement where Arsa and his friends had grown up. He recommended Beijing for me, which was a great honour, because I was able to go back and complete what I had started in 1973.

I was away for 15 years from 1986 to 2001, going on from Beijing to Geneva, Paris and Washington, D.C., The experience

was memorable, enriching and life-enhancing. In Beijing, I was there for the Tian An Men Incident, which actually lasted about 50 days. I witnessed the very first event when students from Beijing University marched into town to commemorate the death of Hu Yaobang. I was stuck in the same room as Prime Minister Li Peng in the Great Hall of the People at the opening of the World Bank Conference, which was besieged by the demonstrators. Towards the end, the Thai community came to camp out at the Embassy before they were led to the airport by my wife for evacuation to Bangkok. I never doubted that Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan would send planes to evacuate the Thai community because he had had the experience of not having evacuated the Thai community from Saigon in time before it fell in 1975. There were also other memorable moments in Beijing, such as many audiences of His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk to discuss the situation in Cambodia. He resided in exile at the old French Legation in the Legations Quarters, served champagne and caviar. If the conversation was going well, I was offered a second flute, but when my glass was not refilled, I knew it was time to take my leave.

While I was in Geneva, the Paris International Conference on Cambodia took place in 1991. That finally brought to an end the wars in Indochina. I participated in the work to repatriate the Cambodian refugees back to their own country. It was another story that had come round full circle. I also worked with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, not knowing that in 2008 I would be joining the Thai Red Cross Society and be graciously appointed its Secretary General in 2021. My proudest

achievement in Geneva was the purchase of both the new Mission and the new Residence during my tenure.

Paris and Washington, D.C., were two major bilateral postings at the end of my diplomatic career. In Paris, I conveyed the invitation to President Chirac to attend the first ASEM Summit in Bangkok. ASEM was originally a Singapore-French initiative, which had started when I was in Geneva but Singapore passed the torch to Thailand to host the first summit. They probably had their reasons which will surely be revealed one day by Singaporean historians. In Paris, I was in the receiving line when King Norodom Sihanouk paid a state visit. That was another story which came round full circle. I also presided over the renovation of the venerable Embassy on Rue Greuze, which had been purchased in March 1914 just before the First World War. Her Majesty Queen Sirikit had also resided there. On an official visit to France, She wanted to visit her old home but it was under renovation, otherwise She would have seen her tiny old room, and the wood-panelled dining room with its fireplace and Dutch blue-and-white tiles which were fortunately preserved thanks to her last-minute reminder.⁴⁰

Washington, D.C., was my last post as Head of Mission. I am glad that I had followed in the footsteps of my grandfather, Phraya Abhibal Rajmaitri. I even managed to visit the house on Cape Anne, where the Thai Legation was to stay during the summer when the Washington diplomatic corps moved to Cape Cod. It was before the Second World War when there was no air-conditioning. I wish they would revive the practice because that is such a beautiful part of the United States. I stayed in Washington, D.C., for only 17 months before I was recalled to

be Permanent Secretary. It is a regular complaint of some of our host countries that our ambassadors stay so briefly. The standard response is that it cannot be helped because senior ambassadors are in short supply and their services are required at home.

My years as Permanent Secretary, 2001-2004, were eventful. I was fortunate to have worked with a brilliant Foreign Minister, Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai, and an outstanding Prime Minister Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra. Thaksin was fond of saying that, before he became Prime Minister the only Ministry he had served in, for 109 days, was Foreign Affairs. I was therefore present at the creation of ACD and ACMECS. In my last full year as Permanent Secretary in 2003, Thailand was Chairman of APEC. I had to chair so many Senior Officials Meetings that, at one of the last ones in Phuket, they had SOMCHAIR dyed in to my beach-shirt. I still have it and sometimes wear it to Ministry reunions.

That about wraps up my diplomatic career with so many lessons learnt which I gladly pass on to new generations of our diplomats when they invite me to talk to new entrants. I have served distinguished Foreign Ministers, who were very kind to me, Dr. Thanat Khoman, General Chatichai Choonhavan, Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila, Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai. I have already acknowledged the great role in foreign affairs and diplomacy of Permanent Secretary Anand Panyarachun. But finally, I wish to dedicate the thoughts in this book to two men who kindly gave me the major breakthroughs in my career, Khun Phan Wannamethee and Khun Arsa Sarasin.

NOTES

¹ Phraya Abhibal Rajamaitri (Tom Bunnag) was a career diplomat who served as Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs (June 1932–September 1933), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1933–1934), Minister of Siam’s Legation at Washington, D.C., (1935–1940) as well as Ambassador to Nanjing (1948–1949).

² The International Studies Center and the Institute of East Asian Studies, Thammasat University, co-hosted this seminar titled “General Chatichai Choonhavan in Contemporary Thai Diplomacy and Politics” to celebrate the centenary of his birth on 25 August 2020.

³ The International Studies Center hosted this seminar on “Thai Foreign Policy 1932–1946” on 23 September 2020.

⁴ Phan Wannamethee is a highly respected diplomat who served as Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, as well as Ambassador to Germany and the United Kingdom. He also served as the 6th Secretary-General of ASEAN from 1984–1986. He became the founding Director of the ISC in April 1987, leaving at the end of 1991 upon his appointment as Secretary-General of the Thai Red Cross Society. He retired from that position in 2021.

⁵ See, for example, Anuson Chinvanno, *Brief Encounter: Sino-Thai Rapprochement after Bandung 1955–1957*, International Studies Centre, Bangkok, 1991, p.12.

⁶ Prince Charoonsakdi Kridakara (1875–1931), a grandson of King Rama IV, was a graduate of Cambridge University. He served as Minister of Justice between 1910–1912. He was later appointed Minister at the Siamese Legation at Paris and was one of the representatives at the Versailles Peace Conferences in 1919. He died in Geneva in 1931.

⁷ See Stefan Hell, *Siam and the League of Nations: Modernisation, Sovereignty and Multilateral Diplomacy, 1920-1940*, River Books Co., Ltd., Bangkok, 2010, pp. 55-56

⁸ See Stefan Hell, *op.cit.*, pp. 85-123

⁹ Prince Sittiporn (1883-1971) was a younger brother of Prince Charoon, and was also educated in England. He worked in the Ministry of Finance, attaining the position of Director-General of the Opium Department. After resigning from government service in 1921, he became a pioneer in modern agricultural practices in Thailand.

¹⁰ The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage was established in 1904 to promote knowledge of the culture, history, arts and natural sciences of Thailand as well as those of neighbouring countries.

¹¹ Prince Traidos Prabandh (1883-1943), was Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1923 to 1932. In 1919, together with Prince Charoon, he headed the Siamese delegation to the Versailles Peace Conferences.

¹² See Stefan Hell, *op.cit.*, p.210

¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 66-67

¹⁴ Mom Luang Birabongs Kasemsri was a respected diplomat who served as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations in New York (1980-1988). He also served as Ambassador to Japan (1988-1991) and the United States (1991-1994). He later served as Principal Private Secretary to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej from 1995 until his untimely demise in 2000.

¹⁵ Dr. Arun Panupong is another respected diplomat and a legal expert. Having served as Ambassador in several countries, he was appointed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and then Minister attached to the Prime Minister Office in the Prem Tinsulanonda's cabinets. He later served as the second Director of the ISC, succeeding Phan Wannamethee in 1992.

¹⁶ ABB Ltd. is a Swedish-Swiss multinational corporation headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland. It was founded in 1988 following the merger between ASEA of Sweden (founded in 1883) and Brown, Boveri & Cie of Switzerland (founded in 1891).

¹⁷ General Boonsang Niampradit was Commander of UNTAET Peace-Keeping Force between 2000-2001. He was later appointed Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of Thailand in 2006.

¹⁸ United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

¹⁹ The World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna in June 1993. The major outcome of the Conference was the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

²⁰ Arsa Sarasin is a much-admired diplomat who served as Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs (1982-1986) as well as Ambassador to the United States. He was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in the cabinets of Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun (1991-1992). From 2000-2012, he was Principal Private Secretary to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. He is a member of a prominent family. His father, Pote Sarasin, was Prime Minister of Thailand in 1957.

²¹ Air Chief Marshal Siddhi Savetsila was one of the longest-serving Ministers of Foreign Affairs (1980-1990). He was Secretary-General of the National Security Council between 1974-1980. In 1991, he became a member of the Privy Council of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej until he passed away in 2015.

²² Supachai Panitchpakdi served as Deputy Minister of Finance, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce. From 2002-2005, he was Director-General of the World Trade Organization, and later, from 2005-2013, he served as Secretary-General of UNCTAD.

²³ Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai is a distinguished Harvard-trained legal expert. He was the first Thai to earn a doctorate in law from Harvard Law School. He served as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 2001-2005 and Deputy Prime Minister between 2005-2006. He was also Minister of Finance between 1995-1996.

²⁴ Dr. Surin Pitsuwan (1949-2017) was a Thai politician who received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1982. After a short stint as lecturer at Thammasat University, he was elected member of parliament for the first time in 1986. From 1992-1995, he served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. He

became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1997, serving in that capacity until 2001. He later became the 12th Secretary-General of ASEAN (2008-2012).

²⁵ Sompong Sucharitkul is a senior diplomat and a distinguished legal expert. He received law degrees from leading universities in 3 countries, namely University of Oxford, University of Paris, and Harvard University. He served as Ambassador to several countries including Belgium, Japan and Italy.

²⁶ Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand

²⁷ Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) is an initiative to bridge the economic gap among the five member countries, namely, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam.

²⁸ Nitya Pibulsonggram (1941-2014) was a senior diplomat who served as Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs from 1999-2001, and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2006-2007. He also served as Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York (1988-1995) and Ambassador to the United States (1996-1999). He was the youngest son of Prime Minister Field Marshal P. Pibulsonggram.

²⁹ Kasit Piromya is a former senior diplomat who served as Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Russia, Indonesia, Germany, Japan and the United States. He became a Democrat Party politician and was Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2008-2011.

³⁰ Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a sub-regional grouping of seven countries of South and Southeast Asia, namely, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Formed in Bangkok in 1997 under the name BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand Economic Cooperation), it was renamed as BIMSTEC in 2004. It has a secretariat in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

³¹ This old capital city of the Khmer empire is known today as Angkor. The word Angkor is derived from the Sanskrit *nagara*, which is pronounced “nakorn” in modern Thai.

³² Chao Anouvong, or regnal name Xaiya Setthathirath V, was the last monarch of the Kingdom of Vientiane. He led the war against Siam in 1826-1828.

³³ The Communist International (Comintern), also known as the Third International, was an international organization that advocated world communism. It was founded in 1919 and controlled by the Soviet Union. It was succeeded in 1947 by the International Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties or the Cominform.

³⁴ Phra Viharn (in Thai) or Preah Vihear (in Khmer) is an ancient temple built during the period of the Khmer Empire. It is situated atop a 525-metre cliff in the Dongrak or Dangrek Mountain Range, which marks the border between Thailand and Cambodia. In 1962, following a lengthy dispute between the two countries over ownership, the International Court of Justice ruled that the temple belonged to Cambodia.

³⁵ Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862-1943) was a son of King Rama IV. He was the founder of the modern Thai education system as well the modern provincial administration in his capacity as Minister of Interior (1892-1915). In the years following his resignation from his ministerial post, he concentrated on writing about Thai history, literature, culture and arts.

³⁶ The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is a trans-national region of the Mekong River basin. It came into being with the launch of a development programme by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1992.

³⁷ Dr. Manaspas Xuto is a respected diplomat who served as Ambassador to Austria, Canada, the Soviet Union, Italy and the United States.

³⁸ Actually 23 according to World Bank and UN 2019 Statistics

³⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, *Bandung. Towards the First Century* (Jakarta, 2005), p. 59

⁴⁰ 8 Rue Greuze, Paris, 16eme, was both Chancery and Residence. Life and work there between the Wars were memorably recorded in Tawee Issarasena, *Mémoire*, (Bangkok, 1992).

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Interviewed & Edited by ANUSON CHINVANNO

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