

**Thailand's Second Triumvirate: Sarit Thanarat and the military, King Bhumibol Adulyadej
and the monarchy and the United States. 1957-1963**

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Introduction

In 2006, a military coup backed by royalists set aside yet another elected civilian government in Thailand. Coups are quite common in Thailand as the country has experienced twenty attempted and completed coups in the 20th century. Most of the coups were undertaken by the military with support from the monarchy. From 1957 to the present, an alliance consisting of the military and King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the monarchy has manipulated, influenced, and controlled Thai politics. The coalition has intervened repeatedly to maintain the status-quo that it created to protect its interests, wealth and political power. The military-monarchical relationship began in 1957 with the convergence of Sarit Thanarat, a military general, King Bhumibol, and the United States. This alliance is known as the Second Triumvirate.

The United States played an important role in welding the military and the monarchy together as allies. Sarit's coup was the catalyst that formed the alliance by turning to the monarchy for support, but U.S. aid enabled the relationship to progress well after Sarit's death in 1963. Sarit did a good job stabilizing the domestic scene, which allowed U.S. policies to be implemented. King Bhumibol gave his royal sanction to both Sarit's regime and to U.S. intervention, which strengthened their ability to pursue anti-communist policies and secure the country from subversion. The support the United States and Sarit gave the monarchy became a large factor in the institution's re-ascension to political power. By leaning on one another, members of the Second Triumvirate pursued endeavors that benefitted themselves and each other concurrently. Most importantly, this triangular relationship helped build and solidify an alliance between the military and monarchy that still endures today. In focusing on one angle of the Triumvirate yields valuable explanations on Thai politics, but such an approach sheds only partial light on Thai politics. In order to truly understand

the intricacies of modern Thai politics, the relationships between members of the Second Triumvirate must be examined both separately and conjointly.

Before 1957, Sarit found himself in a three-way struggle for power against Phao Siyanon, police chief, and Phibun Songkhram, the premier. Sarit's bid for political influence began when he became commander-in-chief of the army in 1954. A window of opportunity opened for Sarit when Phibun and Phao were implicated in the fraudulent elections of February 1957. Criticism against Phibun and Phao's tampering of votes mounted. With some momentum, Sarit pressed for a new government. Then in September of 1957, Sarit and his army units forced Phibun to step down. Phibun and Phao were forced into exile. Even though Sarit was the new leader in Thailand, his position was still tenuous as military rivalries cropped up. He sought for legitimacy by turning to King Bhumibol and the United States for key symbolic and material sources of support.

The monarchy had been relegated to the sidelines of Thai politics for over two decades. In 1932, Phibun Songkhram, a junior military officer at the time, helped lead a coup that changed the country from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. King Prajadhipok was on the throne at the time. His role was changed from an absolute ruler to a mere figurehead. When King Bhumibol ascended the throne in 1950, the monarchy's political influence was still limited. Royalists had resisted suppressive measures enacted by Phibun's government on the monarchy's activities, but they had gained no ground. The tide finally turned in 1957 when the monarchy found an opportunity to regain its former preeminent role in Thai politics by working with Sarit's military faction.

The political alignment of Sarit and the monarchy added a new dimension to U.S. foreign policy in Thailand. From 1932 to the end of World War II, the United States largely ignored

Thailand. After World War II, Thailand was still considered backwater as American leaders paid more attention to communist activities undertaken by the Soviet Union and China. From the beginning of Phibun's second term as premier in 1947 to 1957, U.S. presidents and other foreign policy-makers tolerated his regime. Their relationship was not always smooth, however. In the beginning, Phibun was an ardent supporter of the West, but towards the end of his tenure some of his policies ran contrary to what U.S. officials saw as American interests. He began flirting with the idea of neutralism and establishing relations with leftist governments, such as China. Phibun advocated for a foreign policy more independent of the United States. He allowed the press, politicians, and the public to criticize U.S. foreign policy. In addition, exacerbating this shaky relationship, two different U.S. agencies funded Phibun's political rivals, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. military. Both U.S. organizations did not openly advocate opposition to Phibun, however. The CIA funded and trained Phao Siyanon's police while the U.S. military was doing the same with Sarit's army. The State Department and Eisenhower administration continued to morally support Phibun. By the mid-1950s, Phibun had brought Phao into a weak political alliance in an attempt to counter Sarit. When Sarit ousted Phibun in 1957, the State Department and Eisenhower administration were placed in a tough situation as they had just backed his rival, the loser. The winner, Sarit, was still relatively unknown in many U.S. leadership circles and his political intentions remained ambiguous.

The coup of 1957 was a facilitator for bringing Sarit, King Bhumibol and the United States together. However, it was not love at first sight. Each member was suspicious of one another's objectives. At the beginning of 1957, Sarit had expressed some leftist and anti-American sentiments in his newspaper, *San Seri*. Historians found evidence that in the mid-1950s, King Bhumibol and the U.S. saw Sarit as a drunkard and corrupt. In addition, since the monarchy had little political influence before 1957, it rarely appeared on the U.S. radar as a potential working-political ally.

Nevertheless, each associate in the triangular relationship cautiously turned to one another to guard its own interests. Sarit wanted to protect and legitimize his new government. The monarchy was seeking to return to politics as a significant player. U.S. foreign policy interests were to halt the spread of communism in the region. What was not yet foreseen was the formation of a strong strategic relationship between Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States that would last well beyond Sarit's death in 1963 the U.S. pull out of the region after the Viet Nam War. The ultimate result of the Second Triumvirate was a military-monarchy alliance that would endure into the 21st century. **In having found themselves in a precarious situation in 1957, why and how did Sarit, King Bhumibol and the United States come to rely on one another beginning in 1957? After finding themselves in a marriage of convenience, why and how did it evolve into a more institutionalized relationship – one that cemented the military-King Bhumibol alliance all the way to today?**

The weak formation of the Second Triumvirate in 1957 transitioned to a stable coalition and ultimately created a military-King Bhumibol union by 1963. After his coup in 1957, Sarit wanted to protect his new power over the government against other army rivals vying for power. King Bhumibol and other royalists were seeking a way back into politics after almost two decades of obscurity. With communism on the rise in the region, the U.S. needed strong allies in Thailand to maintain stability. Even with their own agendas and reservations, the three partners of the eventual Triumvirate saw the benefit of joining together. Beginning in 1958 anti-communism became an agenda that wrapped the three parties around a common cause. Fighting communism gave Sarit a pretext for suppressing opposition and rivals. Royalists followed Sarit's attacks by elevating the persona of King Bhumibol as an arch anti-communist. The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations flooded Thailand's military with weaponry and funds to bolster the regime's ability to quell subversion. Anti-communism helped bond the Second Triumvirate together. Entering the

1960s, the Second Triumvirate produced a military-King Bhumibol relationship. Material wealth and prosperity from royal assets and businesses increased King Bhumibol's coffers, and U.S. economic-development aid abundantly filled Sarit's cronies' bank accounts. The military and King Bhumibol used the revenue and business benefits they received for leverage and to court strategically positioned allies throughout Thai society, which would later translate to political support. Money and business privileges were tools for social and political consolidation. During Sarit's tenure as premier, the Second Triumvirate transformed into a solid pact that subsequently strengthened the relationship between the military and King Bhumibol, which has lasted until the present.

In 1963, Sarit died. Instead of following the whims of another military leader, the army was no longer solely the personal fiefdom of a single general but was inextricably interwoven with the fortunes of King Bhumibol and the monarchy. Sarit had established the army as the protector of the monarchy. Loyalty among the army and elites lay with the king and not a military strongman. The Second Triumvirate transformed into a strong alliance because the wealth and resources incurred from their association provided each party with the means of attaining more influence and political power in Thai domestic affairs. U.S. intervention fostered an environment that solidified the relationship between the military and King Bhumibol. They both became strong anti-communists and allies of the United States. The relationship between Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States, which began as a marriage of convenience, became entrenched and helped establish a Thai military-monarchy alliance.

Members of the Second Triumvirate – Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States – together, have all had large impacts on Thailand, but the three-dimensional relationship between these major actors has been overlooked. Scholars have emphasized one or two of these dimensions in Thai historiography, but it is critical to examine the way all three powers interacted and shaped

the political landscape for decades to come. Literature on U.S.-Thai relations focuses on the eras spanning Phibun's tenure from 1947-1957, the Viet Nam War 1965-1975 and beyond; little is said about Sarit and King Bhumibol.¹ Works that do include Sarit and the United States skim over King Bhumibol's role.² Other literature on military-monarchy relations gives little attention to Sarit and the influence of the United States. Scholars like James Ockey, Paul Chambers, Michael K. Connors, and Thongchai Winichakul focus in varying ways on military-monarchy ties from the 1970s to the present and how they continue to manipulate and control Thai politics today.³ However, the U.S. aspect is missing. In Thak Chaloehtiarana and Paul M. Handley's books, each member of the Second Triumvirate is included but Sarit and King Bhumibol, individually, are the main emphases.⁴ Thak and Handley do not approach their arguments from a triangular perspective. Duncan McCargo comes close to seeing Thai politics from more than a bilateral view with his idea of "Network Monarchy". He argues that the monarchy created strong political and social networks to benefit and protect the king and institution.⁵ Palace members and other allies act in behalf of King Bhumibol in both selfish and altruistic ways. However, Sarit's role in the network is small; he is seen as only the genesis of the monarchy's restoration. U.S. influence is not present in McCargo's work either. Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpachit, on the other hand, do reference the influence of Sarit, King Bhumibol and the United States together.⁶ However, Baker and Pasuk seem to place more focus on

¹ Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand 1947-1958*, University Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 1997; Sean R. Randolph, *The United States and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics, 1950-1985*, UC Berkeley Press: California, 1986; David A. Wilson, *The United States and the Future of Thailand*, New York: Praeger, 1970, p. 10

² Surachart Bamrungsuk, *United States Foreign Policy and Thai Military Rule*, D.K. Book House: Thailand, 1988, p. 8-10; Frank C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States*, Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1965. In this book, Darling does devote a chapter on Sarit but his main focus is on how U.S.'s pull out of Viet Nam will affect Thai domestic politics.

³ James Ockey, "Monarchy, monarchy, succession and stability in Thailand", *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 46, No. 2, August 2005, p. 115-127; Paul Chambers, "Thailand on the Brink: Resurgent Military, Eroded Democracy", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 50, Number 5, 2010, pg. 835-858; Michael K. Connors, "Liberalism, Authoritarianism and the Politics of Decisionism in Thailand," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2009, 355-373; Thongchai Winichakul, "Toppling Democracy", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 38: No. 1, February 2008, 11-37

⁴ Thak Chaloehtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotism Paternalism*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2007; Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2006

⁵ Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand", *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 18, No.4 December 2005, pg. 499-519

⁶ Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpachit, *A History of Thailand*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpachit, *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, Second Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002

Sarit and the United States while the king holds a minor position and is not an agent unto himself.⁷ What is missing from the above narratives is looking at Thai politics from the lens of the Second Triumvirate. Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States together, played an integral part in building one another's political power and laying the foundation of a military-monarchy alliance that continues to control Thai politics today.

In order to show why and how the Second Triumvirate came together in 1957 and how the relationship became institutionalized and helped solidify a military-King Bhumibol alliance, the paper is organized chronologically, but the dates are roughly hewn and not concrete. Chapter 1 will illustrate the origins of the Second Triumvirate from 1932 to 1957. The history of military-monarchy and military-U.S. relations is set forth. Chapter 2 (1957-1958) shows the turning point that brought Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States into a convenient partnership. Chapter 3 discusses how anti-communism became a common interest that causes the three parties to converge into further supporting one another. Chapter 4 shows a transition phase in the Second Triumvirate. After several years together, the three parties saw the mutual benefits of the relationship. All members sought now to protect their access to wealth, money and resources. Breaking up the alliance would seem counter-productive. Chapter 5 is another transition. An offshoot alliance – that is not in opposition to the Second Triumvirate – is formed between the military and King Bhumibol. Sarit's death brought a change in the military, defining it as an institution and not by its leaders. The army's primary duty was to protect the king. In the conclusion, the legacies of the Second Triumvirate and more importantly the military-King Bhumibol relationship is narrated. The events and policies of the Second Triumvirate during the years of 1957 to 1963 continue to affect Thailand. The military and the monarchy have frequently intervened from 1963 to today to manipulate favorable political

⁷ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 177, 180, Baker and Pasuk, 2002, p. 302

outcomes. Modern Thai politics today is a byproduct of policies undertaken by Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States.

Methodology: In order to answer some of the questions of why and how Sarit and the military, King Bhumibol and the monarchy and the United States ended up dominating Thai politics and helped build a military-King Bhumibol alliance, the scholarly literature on Thai civil-military relations, the monarchy and its power structures and U.S. foreign policy were surveyed. For Thai civil-military relations Thak Chaloemtirana and John L.S. Girling were the main scholars looked at. In U.S. foreign policy the works of Daniel Fineman, Frank C. Darling and David A. Wilson were the foundations. Paul M. Handley, Duncan McCargo, Kevin Hewison became the bases of understanding King Bhumibol and the monarchy.

To add to the scholars above, other and more recent literature, articles and primary sources were tapped into and synthesized with the previous. For U.S. foreign relations some authors included Surachart Bamrungasuk, Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit and J. Alexander Caldwell. In civil-military relations the writings of Moshe Lissak, Claude W. Smith Jr., Paul Chambers, Benedict Anderson, Thongchai Winichakul and Robert J. Muscat, to name a few, were used. In addition to Handley, McCargo and Hewison, Supamit Pitipat's thesis, James Ockey, Jack Fong, and Katherine A. Bowie helped bring more light to the mysterious royal institution.

Primary sources came from Royal and Thai government materials and Thai newspapers and magazines such as *Siam Rath* and the *Bangkok Post* and the *Royal Thai Government Gazette*. U.S. declassified documents included telegram and cables from the *Foreign Relations of the United States* volumes and classified material from wikileaks. Publications from Congressional meetings and hearings brought broader context to America's overall strategy in Southeast Asia. There was also a wealth of information from research reports from the United States Information Service and the

U.S. military. Sources and literature from U.S.-Thai and civil-military relations, and the monarchy are synthesized and cross-referenced to show the formation and interrelated nature of the Second Triumvirate and eventual creation of a military-monarchy alliance.

Chapter 1: Origins of the Second Triumvirate, 1932-1957

The convergence of Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States into a political alliance was unlikely and unforeseen. From 1932 to 1945, Phibun's 1932 coup group controlled Thai politics with little opposition from royalists. Sarit was a mid-level army officer and not involved in the political sphere yet. King Bhumibol received little attention because his brother, King Ananda Mahidol, was the next heir to the throne. In U.S. foreign policy, Thailand was almost non-existent. The country came up on the U.S. radar during World War II when Phibun aligned Thailand with the Axis powers. Thai politics changed quickly after World War II. Phibun was ousted in 1944 and replaced by other members of the 1932 coup group. Then in 1946, King Mahidol died mysteriously and his younger brother, Bhumibol took the throne. The monarchy still had limits on its political power. Royalists continued to fight against the restrictions but to no avail. Phibun returned as premier in a 1947 coup and continued to stymie any political movements of the royalists. However, during his time away Phibun lost much of his political influence with the military. In the meantime, Sarit was slowly climbing the ranks in the army. Phao Siyanon and the police force had risen in prominence and was becoming a challenger to Phibun. Much like before World War II Thailand was still of minor significance to U.S. policy-makers. Communism spreading from the Soviet Union was President Truman's main concern. By the mid-1950s, Thailand's political scene was fracturing. Sarit rose to the rank of commander-in-chief of the army in 1954 and funded by the Joint United States Military Assistance Group. Phao's political clout and police force was growing in strength with help from the CIA. Phibun, with moral support from Eisenhower and the U.S. embassy, was struggling to fend off the growing status of Sarit and Phao. The maelstrom was exacerbated as royalists were still seeking a foothold in Thai politics. King Bhumibol was the royalists' front-man in their drive to rebuild the prestige of the monarchy. As a result of communist incursions in the region, U.S. involvement in the country increased with CIA support for Phao's police and U.S. military funding

for Sarit's army. In reaction to Sarit and Phao's growing influence, Phibun changed his domestic and foreign policies. He began an opening-up policy towards the East and loosened constraints on political liberties in Thai society, which concerned U.S. leaders. The idea that Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States would ever cooperate with each other was still far from reality. It was unclear who would come out on top in the domestic battle between Phibun, Phao, and Sarit. The United States helped exacerbate the situation as it was funding all three parties. The monarchy, though receiving some public-image promotion from the U.S., still had little say in political issues. Royalists, though seemed distant from the fray were still not done with their machinations to restore the power of the monarchy. By the end of 1956, Thailand was in a political mess.

This story starts in 1932 when Thailand took a step towards a "modern" government. King Prajadhipok, two reigns before King Bhumibol, was an inept ruler and yielded no male heir. Thailand was in the throes of the Great Depression and then went bankrupt. Desperate for some kind of solution to the country's woes, King Prajadhipok drafted a constitution along with some economic reforms, but they were rejected by other royalists.⁸ Then in a bloodless coup, later in 1932, a small group of military and civilian officials aided by military officer Phibun Songkhram and others transformed Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. King Prajadhipok and the role of the monarch were relegated to that of a mere figurehead. Members of the 1932 coup group had been educated in the West and wanted a more "modern" government based on a constitution and a weak monarch.⁹ However, getting rid of the royal institution was not simple. The 1932 coup group could not legitimize their new government by offering the Thai people a constitution because it was a foreign concept to the people of Thailand.¹⁰ Thus, the 1932 coup

⁸ Handley, p. 42.

⁹ Claude E. Welch Jr. and Arthur K. Smith, *Military Role and Rule: Perspectives on Civil-Military Relations*, Duxbury: MA, 1974, p. 87-89

¹⁰ Thak, 2007, p. 2

leaders kept King Prajadhipok on the throne as their source of legitimacy. The new situation for the king was a difficult transition. His power was no longer absolute and he had little say in politics. After three years, King Prajadhipok abdicated in bitterness. He stated his distaste for the new government by saying, "I am willing to surrender the powers I formerly exercised to the people as a whole, but I am not willing to turn them over to any individual or any group to use in an autocratic manner without heeding the voice of the people."¹¹ The king considered the new government illegitimate because it did not truly represent the people. Political power came from the people, wanted a monarchy and not a foreign-style government, according to the king. King Prajadhipok's last statement would be the beginning of a 25-year conflict between Phibun's coup group and the monarchy.

Over the next fourteen years, the monarchy was largely dormant. For a time, it looked as though the institution would fade into history. Royalists tried several times to assassinate Phibun but failed.¹² The lifeline of the monarchy was almost cut short because King Prajadhipok produced no male heir. To ensure the continuation of the institution, royalists looked outside of the country to find a new king. Ananda Mahidol, living in Europe, was chosen to be the next monarch. However, Ananda did not speak Thai well and lived most of his life abroad. Tragically, he did not reign for long when he died in 1946 and Bhumibol Adulyadej, his younger brother, became the titular king of Thailand. The monarchy at this time still had no formal political power and was a minor player in government. Phibun, who became prime minister again in 1947 (his first term was from 1938 to 1944), blocked any attempt by royalists to influence political policies. When King Bhumibol returned from Europe to take the throne in 1951, Handley cites that Phibun's military group "sacked royalists

¹¹ Handley, p. 53

¹² Handley, p. 58 and 60

who had dominated the parliament and government for four years.”¹³ He reorganized “a single national assembly of 123 members, 103 of them from the police or military.”¹⁴ Royalists had no say in Phibun’s purging. To further intimidate the royalists, Handley says Phibun unleashed one of his critical allies in the police force, Phao Siyanon, to repress any political opponents that were loyal to the monarchy.¹⁵ Relations between Phibun and King Bhumibol were severely strained from the get-go.¹⁶ Any attempts by King Bhumibol and the royalists to gain some political power in government were effectively halted by Phibun, who had certain military factions and the entire police force to help impose his political policies. The monarchy had no means to fight back against Phibun’s restrictions.

Sarit’s life during the time from the 1932 coup until the end of 1945 was devoted around the military. After graduating from military academy, Sarit’s first army commission was in 1928 where he became an officer in the First Battalion of the First Regiment in Bangkok.¹⁷ Thak argued that early on in Sarit’s career he exhibited the attributes of a dictator. He said Sarit was “...a man of prowess, one whose store of power is immense, unpredictable, and uncontrollable...”¹⁸ Sarit’s military experience included the suppression of an attempted coup in 1933, where he was a Lieutenant and the protection of Thailand’s northern region during World War II. In regards to Thai politics, Sarit had no involvement as he was still a junior officer.

From 1932 to 1945, Thailand was far from the thoughts and concerns of U.S. leaders. Since economic and political interests in Thailand were minimal, U.S. foreign policy towards Thailand

¹³Handley, p. 115

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ Handley, p. 105

¹⁶ Fred Warren Riggs, *Thailand: the Modernization of a Bureaucratic Polity*, Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966, p. 229

¹⁷ Thak Chaloeitrana, “Distinctions with a Difference: The Despotism of Sarit Thanarat and the Demagogic Authoritarianism of Thaksin Shinawatra,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol 19, No. 1, 2007, p. 56

¹⁸ Ibid

before WWII was to simply maintain good relations.¹⁹ It was not until 1941, when Phibun joined the Axis powers, that the United States began worrying about the country. However, defeating Japan was still the main objective. Former Phibun ally and member of the 1932 coup group, Pridi Banomyong defected to the allied side and formed his own resistance movement called *Seri Thai*.²⁰ Agents from the U.S. Office of Strategic Service fought with Pridi against Japanese forces. When Japan surrendered in 1945, Phibun received a five-month jail term, the army was left intact, and Pridi became premier, but only for several months.

After WWII, the United States was worried about the increasing communist activities in Asia but not so much with Thailand. The Soviet Union's influence was spreading into Europe, central and eastern Asia. U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia was still minimal. It publicly remained neutral from independence movements but simultaneously supported the persistence of European colonialism in the region. In 1947 Phibun performed a coup. The U.S. did not intervene. Bamrungsuk explained the reason for the lack of U.S. response by saying, "...the U.S....were paying attention largely to European problems, to the Near-East situation, and to China and Japan."²¹ Even, when the Europeans returned to reclaim their colonies the United States kept their distance. The Truman Administration issued NSC 48/1, titled, "The Position of the U.S. with Respect to Southeast Asia" in December 1949.²² U.S. policy was to help European and nationalist groups to find a compromise because if not so, conflict could breed an environment for communist forces to exert influence.²³ U.S. economic and military aid was sent to Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam to bolster the French in holding its colonies. The communist threat in Thailand was very small and thus the country was not a concern for U.S. leaders.

¹⁹ Bamrungsuk, p. 29

²⁰ Thak, p. 13

²¹ Bamrungsuk, p. 37; see also Fineman, p. 24

²² Bamrungsuk, p. 39; *Pentagon Papers*, The Senator Gravel Edition, Boston: Beacon Press, Vol. 1, 1971, p. 82

²³ Ibid

The Truman administration changed its mind regarding the importance of Thailand in the early 1950s. Communist China had defeated the Nationalists in 1949. The communists in Viet Nam were gaining ground against the French in the Franco-Viet-Minh War. U.S. policy-makers worried about Southeast Asia falling to Chinese communist influence. With communism on the rise in the region and after sending two U.S. research missions to Thailand, it was concluded that giving aid was pertinent to protecting the country from communism.²⁴ It was not until 1949 when Thailand was to receive military assistance.²⁵ However, the Korean War (1950-1953) and according to Fineman, issues in Burma in 1954 drew the attention of Eisenhower administration's (the new presidency) away from Thailand.²⁶ In addition, French loss in Viet Nam became another source of distraction for the United States.²⁷ Nevertheless, the United States still had a vested interest in preventing communist influence in Thailand. Soon the country would become home to one major thrust of U.S. anti-communist policy in Southeast Asia.

Domestically, Thailand's politics factionalized. Three divisions emerged and fought for preeminence in the country in the 1950s. The groups consisted of Sarit, a senior military leader, Phao, the head of the police, and Phibun, who was the prime minister. The beginning of Sarit's political participation was when he was persuaded to join Phibun's 1947 coup. Thak says that Sarit was recruited "because... [he] commanded the troops needed to control Bangkok."²⁸ Sarit was later rewarded with the command of the "powerful first division."²⁹ Phibun's decline within the army allowed Sarit to climb the ranks and eventually become the commander-in-chief of the army in

²⁴ S. P. Hayes, *The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia: The Griffin Mission of 1950*, Lexington: Heath Lexington Books, 1971, p. 223-225, 227; "Minutes of the Under Secretary's Meeting, Department of State", November 8, 1950, *The Foreign Relations of the United States: East Asia and Pacific*, Washington: Government Printing Office, Vol. 6, 1967, p. 156

²⁵ Bamrungsuk, p. 45

²⁶ Fineman, p. 128

²⁷ Fineman, p. 190, 193-194, Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, decreased the amount of aid for Thailand because of geo-strategic concerns in Viet Nam

²⁸ Thak, 2007, "Distinctions with a Difference: The Despotism of Sarit Thanarat and the Demagogic Authoritarianism of Thaksin Shinawatra," p. 60

²⁹ Ibid

1954.³⁰ Further strength came to the army when he accrued aid while on a trip to the U.S. in 1954.³¹ Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) advisers worked with the Thai army in training and funding the institution. Sarit's influence permeated as he gained positions on the boards of companies and used the money to win over allies.³² According to Thak, Sarit "bided his time and was quieter about his political agenda than his adversaries".³³ He was busy consolidating the army. To counter Sarit and the army, Phao built up his police force. Phao aligned himself with the CIA, which strengthened his institution.³⁴ His main source of revenue was the opium trade, which he had a monopoly over.³⁵ By 1956, the police force grew to 48,000 while Sarit's army totaled 45,000.³⁶ The armed forces were precariously balanced between Sarit and Phao's cliques. Both were slowly building up their arms, manpower, and political support so as to challenge the other for control of the country. Sarit and Phao were ready to duke it out for succession to the premiership.

However, Phibun would not relinquish his position without a fight. After becoming premier a second time in 1947, Phibun – who once had much clout among the army brass – and the 1932 coup group lost much of their former influence in the military. With Sarit and Phao battling for political preeminence, Phibun was busy shoring up his position. Following Phibun's domestic and foreign policy can be confusing as he vacillated between the Eastern and Western camps and was repressive at one time and liberal at another. First, Phibun established a weak partnership with Phao's police force to protect his tenuous position as premier. Both, however, were still suspicious of one another.³⁷ In foreign policy, he recognized Bao Dai's Vietnamese government. Then in 1954,

³⁰ David A. Wilson, "The Military in Thai Politics," edited by John J. Johnson, *The Role of the Military in Under-Developed Countries*, Rand Corporation, Princeton University Press: New Jersey, 1962, p. 264

³¹ Darling, 1965, p. 103

³² Riggs, p. 274

³³ Thak, 2007, p. 56

³⁴ Bamrungsuk, p. 58

³⁵ Thak, 2007, p. 57

³⁶ Bamrungsuk, p. 62

³⁷ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 147

he joined Thailand to the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) that said if one nation were threatened by subversive and communist forces, the members would intervene to defend the integrity of that government. By supporting Bao Dai's government and becoming a member of SEATO, Phibun hoped that the U.S. would come to the rescue if his government were ever under attack.³⁸ SEATO was a protective measure from possible coups against him.

Phibun felt that all these policies were still not enough to protect himself against Sarit and Phao. Thus, he moved from military initiatives to implementing some political reforms to counter Sarit and Phao's growing influence domestically and with MAAG and the CIA.³⁹ In 1955, Phibun began a policy of rapprochement with China and a democratization campaign to bolster domestic support. According to Fineman, Phibun sensed that a small window had opened for U.S.-Chinese rapprochement when Zhou En-Lai, premier of China, issued a statement that it would seek peaceful co-existence with nations that did not enter into alliances hostile to Beijing.⁴⁰ Fineman argues that by adopting a warm policy towards China, Phibun would appease critics within parliament, the government, moderate groups, and the public who wanted a more independent foreign policy from the United States.⁴¹ He then publicly asserted in 1957 that Thailand would "recognize Communist China as soon as Communist China is admitted into the United Nations."⁴² Next, Phibun lifted the ban on freedom of speech and press. Criticism of Thai foreign policy, American intervention, and Phao's ruthless use of the police became public.⁴³ A forum called "Hyde Park," was established where people could speak about and debate political topics. Fineman cites that Phibun's democratization policies led to a domestic battle between Phao and Phibun for the hearts and minds

³⁸ Bamrungsuk, p. 71

³⁹ Fineman, p. 209

⁴⁰ Fineman, p. 212

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² *Bangkok Post*, August 30, 1957

⁴³ Fineman, p. 221

of leftists, neutralists, and pro-Chinese.⁴⁴ Since Phibun had few allies among the military, police, and some U.S. circles, he turned to the public for popular support. He moved according to the mood of the parliament, the press, and moderates who favored a foreign policy separate from the U.S. By appealing to democratic principles such as freedom of the press and speech he hoped to gain an advantage over Sarit and Phao in the domestic arena. Phibun was desperate for any advantage against his rivals.

Adding to the domestic turmoil in Thailand was the intervention of different U.S. government agencies, which has been alluded to. At the beginning of the 1950s, the United States funded the operations of all three Thai factions.⁴⁵ The CIA trained and funded Phao's police; the Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) advised Sarit's army and the U.S. embassy along with different presidencies, morally supported Phibun.⁴⁶ In 1951, the CIA began a program of surveillance, arms smuggling and espionage activities behind enemy lines in places like Burma and Laos. Phao's police force was given the lead in these covert missions. The CIA and police formed a strong relationship through their many missions abroad. For Sarit, a MAAG headquarters was established to supervise U.S. military advisers and the training of the Thai army.⁴⁷ Schools and preparation of soldiers and officers were expanded. Approximately fifty officers a year were trained in the United States.⁴⁸ Military facilities proliferated. The U.S. built Thailand's military logistics and increased the amount of advanced weaponry for the army. All the improvements made to the military were said publicly to buffet communism. In reality, the threat of communism was minimal.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Fineman, p. 222

⁴⁵ Bamrungasuk, p. 73

⁴⁶ Fineman, p. 210

⁴⁷ "Telegram from the Charge in Thailand (Turner) to the Secretary of State," May 23, 1951, *The Foreign Relations of the United States: East Asia and Pacific*, Washington: Government Printing Office, Vol. 6, 1977, p. 1611-1612

⁴⁸ *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, Prepared by Foreign Areas Studies Division, American University: Special Operations Research Office, June 1963, p. 543

⁴⁹ Declassified Documents, "Transmittal Memorandum, DDIM-31-54, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff", October 26, 1954; declassified in 1981, item 306A

The aid was more of a sign of sincere support for the Thai government's support of an anti-communist policy.⁵⁰ The U.S. intra-agency funding scheme proved problematic to Thailand's political stability. As Sarit and Phao's wealth and constituencies grew, they began vying for power and dominance over each other.⁵¹ The United States was well aware of Thailand's political jockeying as demonstrated in a State Department report that concluded, "The senior Thai military personnel are jealous and suspicious of each other. This has resulted in poor inter-service coordination and cooperation."⁵² The Thai police and army institutions became more independent, reliant on U.S. aid, and felt little loyalty to the central government. U.S. aid and intervention bred disunity and conflict among the Thai political leadership and armed forces. In spite of this recognition, the United States did not implicate its own actions in exacerbating tensions between the cliques. The CIA and MAAG had their own agendas and seemed to pay little attention to the consequences of their intervention. The fight against communism was the major priority. Thailand's stability was being compromised by U.S. intervention.

Even with U.S. aid being dispersed among the different Thai institutions, American leaders and policy-makers had their biases. Sarit was not well supported among many U.S. leaders. Baker and Pasuk state that, "They [the U.S.] had long written off Sarit as a corrupt and drunken libertine."⁵³ Sarit had expressed anti-American sentiments and even encouraged détente with leftist groups through his newspaper, *San Seri*.⁵⁴ According to Fineman, "few American officials befriended Sarit."⁵⁵ Ambassador Max W. Bishop (1955-1956) refused to work with him. At a reception given in behalf of the Joint Chief of Staff, Chairman Radford was "shocked and disgusted" with Sarit's

⁵⁰ Bamrungsuk, p. 57; Declassified Documents, "Transmittal Note to the National Security Council," August 4, 1954, declassified in 1981, item 488A

⁵¹ Bamrungsuk, p. 75

⁵² Bamrungsuk, p. 73

⁵³ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p.148

⁵⁴ Fineman, p. 235-236

⁵⁵ Fineman, p. 232

drunken behavior.⁵⁶ Sarit's standing was low on the totem pole. He was not a very impressive leader because of his immoral behavior and anti-American rhetoric. From the mid-1950s to 1957, Sarit was not seen as an option to funnel U.S. foreign policy through.

Phao's standing in the eyes of many U.S. policymakers was much more favorable than Sarit's. According to Bamrungsuk, in 1951, some U.S. specialists considered Phao as Phibun's successor. Bamrungsuk argued that "Phao's police were thought to be more flexible, more open to new roles and responsibilities, than was Sarit's army."⁵⁷ The U.S. embassy was especially supportive of Phao. William Donovan, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand from 1953 to 1954, supported the CIA's operations and felt it was the best means to fight communism.⁵⁸ John E. Peurifoy, the next Ambassador, in a letter to the State Department gave an indication that many Thai's were convinced that Phao was a highly favored leader.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, U.S. leaders were not ignorant of Phao's opium trade. The CIA aided Phao's shipment and sales of opium by protecting routes and providing transportation.⁶⁰ Opium funded Phao and CIA operations in Southeast Asia. Phao was becoming not only politically more powerful, but his economic capacities were expanding. As a result of the combined work of the Thai police and CIA in covert missions, Phao's police force was a growing asset in the U.S. fight against communism in the surrounding regions.

Somewhere in between Sarit and Phao was U.S. sentiment for Phibun. The United States strongly supported Phibun at the beginning of his second term as premier. However, according to Fineman, Phibun's opening-up policy in the mid-1950s was the beginning of a rocky phase between

⁵⁶ Ibid or see, "Cowen to G2," December 22, 1954, 792.551/12-2254, RG 59, United States News Agency

⁵⁷ Bamrungsuk, p. 60

⁵⁸ T. Lobe, *United States National Security Policy and Aid to the Thailand Police*, Denver: University of Denver Press, 1977, p. 23

⁵⁹ "Peurifoy to Secretary of State," August 4, 1955, 792.00/8-455, RG 59, United States News Agency

⁶⁰ Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1972, p. 138-139

the two countries.⁶¹ U.S. feelings towards Phibun were complicated. After sending Thai troops to Korea, recognizing Bao Dai's Vietnamese government and joining SEATO relations between Phibun and the U.S. embassy and Eisenhower administration were good. However, starting in 1955, their attitude towards Phibun was changing. Fineman stated, "Although no American officials suggested it at the time, Phibun's incipient anti-Phao democratization campaign posed serious dangers for the United States."⁶² Claude Welch Jr. and Arthur K. Smith, political scientists, cite that as Phibun liberalized the public sphere and made accommodations with China, American support waned.⁶³ Frank C. Darling, a U.S. foreign policy historian, cited that "many Americans became alarmed and believed that their anti-communist programs were in jeopardy" because of Phibun's opening-up movement.⁶⁴ U.S. Ambassador Bishop, in his first press conference in the country, publicly denounced Phibun's government possibly engaging in trade relations with China.⁶⁵ Despite Phibun's flip-flop policies, the embassy and the Eisenhower administration still supported him even as other U.S. officials were withdrawing their support. In a State Department telegram to the embassy in 1957 – before the coup – Secretary of State John Foster Dulles said that the administration "agreed that Phibun remained the most reliable, constructive and statesman..." and that backing remained with him.⁶⁶ For better or worse, Phibun was Washington's man.

Around the mêlée between Sarit, Phao, and Phibun was the monarchy. King Bhumibol returned from Switzerland to ascend the throne in late 1951. From the start of King Bhumibol's reign, royalists did not sit on their laurels. Handley says royalists moved quickly to counter Phibun's

⁶¹ Fineman, p. 209

⁶² Fineman, p. 210

⁶³ Welch Jr. and Smith, p. 94

⁶⁴ Darling, 1965, p. 150

⁶⁵ *New York Times*, March 4, 1956

⁶⁶ Fineman, p. 241; "Telegram from Secretary of State Dulles to Bangkok Embassy," September 3, 1957, 792.5-MSP/7-557, RG 59, United States News Agency

government so as to “lock in influence early to control” favorable political “outcomes.”⁶⁷ In their first set of actions, King Bhumibol – under the guidance of royalists – refused to sign the 1932 constitution Phibun was re-instituting and boycotted the general elections of 1951. Their efforts were futile.⁶⁸ After being repulsed, the monarchy rallied and took a break from politics by working on King Bhumibol’s public image, their symbolic source of power. King Bhumibol’s supporting cast consisted of the Privy Council, his personal staff, and a cache of princes.⁶⁹ They filled his schedule with meetings with foreign dignitaries, royal ceremonies, charity programs, and religious activities. Princes with business and social connections promoted the king’s image throughout the country. Kukrit Pramoj, an important ally of the palace, established the *Siam Rath* newspaper that according to Handley “woven throughout its reportage, essays, and literature was an intellectual argument for the monarchy and consistent criticism of the king’s rivals, Phibun in particular.”⁷⁰ Surprisingly, the palace attempted to make peace with Phao. King Bhumibol presided over police ceremonies and visited the Border Patrol Police’s (BPP) training camp often.⁷¹ Thomas Lobe and David Morell, scholars of Thai history, cited a study where the BPP “came to view themselves as holding special responsibility for protection of the Thai nation and the king.”⁷² King Bhumibol and the palace elites were very busy using different avenues to counter the limitations placed on them by Phibun and his government. Enhancing the power of the monarchy through politicking was a temporary failure but by building the king’s royal image and courting allies some fruit was borne.

After a brief reprieve, King Bhumibol and the royalists remounted another comeback. The battle this time was for the hearts and minds of the Thai people. Phibun passed a piece of populist

⁶⁷ Handley, p. 115

⁶⁸ Handley, p. 117

⁶⁹ Handley, p. 119

⁷⁰ Handley, p. 123

⁷¹ Handley, p. 125

⁷² Thomas Lobe and David Morell, “Thailand’s Border Patrol Police: Paramilitary Political Power,” in *Supplementary Military Forces: Reserves, Militias, Auxiliaries*, ed. Louis Surcher and Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1978, p. 157

legislation that broke-up the palace's hold on large plots of land and then redistributed it to the people. King Bhumibol refused to sign the legislation but then acquiesced after some pressure.⁷³ Royalists responded by proposing countrywide tours for the royal family as a way of promoting anti-communism. After pressure from foreign government officials, Phibun allowed King Bhumibol to travel the country. The tours were a resounding success and threatened Phibun's popularity. Large crowds greeted King Bhumibol at every major stop. After feeling endangered by the growing support for the monarchy Phibun cancelled further trips.⁷⁴ The next battle was over religion. Both fought to be seen as the top patron of Buddhism. King Bhumibol, however, played the trump card when he entered the monkhood as a novice monk in October of 1956. Handley said that King Bhumibol now "sealed [his] projection of unmatched virtue" over Phibun.⁷⁵ Another blow to Phibun came in the form of charity programs. Businesses, elites, and even the poor donated to royal causes in return for merit. Anthropologist Christine Gray cited that after giving money to the monarchy, many businesses were rewarded with further financial connections.⁷⁶ King Bhumibol and the royalists took their time to regroup by building strong support bases with businesses, elites and the people. Royalists were crafting an image of a king who was righteous and loved and cared for his people. As Phibun blocked the monarchy's machinations for more political sway, royalists and King Bhumibol flanked him by winning the hearts and the minds of the people.

The monarchy's public image was integral to U.S.'s anti-communist policies. Through the efforts of the CIA and the United States Information Service (USIS), King Bhumibol's royal persona was propagated throughout the country. Music composed by the king and his concerts were aired on the radio by the U.S. government.⁷⁷ The CIA and the USIS printed massive amounts of material

⁷³ Handley, p. 126-127

⁷⁴ Handley, p. 127

⁷⁵ Handley, p. 131

⁷⁶ Christine Gray, *Thailand: The Soteriological State in the 1970s*, PhD. Dissertation: University of Chicago, 1986, p. 399

⁷⁷ Handley, p. 123

showing how communism was in opposition to the king.⁷⁸ Handley cites that in 1956, USIS “had eight mobile teams putting on films and music shows contrasting the beloved king and queen with the evil specter of communism.”⁷⁹ Pictures of King Bhumibol were distributed in villages and films glorifying royalty were showed. By pitting communism against the monarchy the CIA and USIS struck a strong chord among the masses. More support for the royal institution meant less potential recruits for the communists. Though the threat of communism was almost non-existent, propagating the image of King Bhumibol throughout Thailand aided the CIA and USIS in their efforts to stymie communism. Even with propaganda support from the U.S., the monarchy still had little involvement politically, especially King Bhumibol.

Thailand from 1932 to 1945 was embroiled in battles between military factions and the monarchy. U.S. leaders gave the country a modicum of attention. However, after WWII and with the rise of communism in East and Southeast Asia, Thailand was becoming more important to U.S. foreign policy. From the early to mid-1950s, different political and armed-forces groups were tearing Thailand apart. Phibun was struggling to hold some advantage over the surging Sarit and Phao. In addition, the monarchy was still knocking on the door seeking to return to influence in politics. U.S. inter-agency involvement exacerbated the political jockeying by funding all opposing parties. By the end of 1956, Phao looked as if he was going to win out over Phibun and Sarit. Phibun was losing political ground and Sarit did not have much support from the U.S. Royalist’s efforts to restore the monarchy were still slow. Though not fully aware of one another yet, by 1957, the spheres of Sarit, King Bhumibol and the monarchy and the United States were about to collide.

⁷⁸ Handley, p. 124

⁷⁹ Ibid

Chapter 2: Turning Point of the Second Triumvirate 1957-1958

At the beginning of 1957, Thailand's political domestic scene was tense. There was a precarious balance of power between Phibun, Phao, and Sarit. U.S. agencies like the CIA, MAAG, the current Eisenhower administration, and the embassy added to the problems of disunity as their support was spread among the three Thai rivals. Sarit's struggle for political power and request for U.S. military aid came into conflict with Phibun and Phao's interests. Phao, who had a tenuous relationship with Phibun, was breaking away from under his shadow and gaining more political independence. King Bhumibol, with royalist support, increased his criticism of Phibun's policies. The U.S. embassy and Eisenhower administration – though still supported him – grew more concerned with Phibun's foreign and domestic policies. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. In February of 1957, elections were held in which Phibun won but were accused of fraud. Sarit, who had not participated in the elections, seized the opportunity, and exploited the public's displeasure and performed a coup, ousting Phibun and Phao. The royalist's long-time enemies were out of the way. The palace rode on the coattails of Sarit's coup, which aided the restoration of the monarchy. In return, Sarit was able to use the name of the king to legitimize his coup and repressive policies. However, the CIA, U.S. embassy, and Eisenhower administration were in an awkward position as they were confronted with the less well-known character of Sarit. Reluctantly and after some cajoling, Washington decided to back Sarit and his new government. All three parties had reservations about the new partnership but each had immediate concerns that needed to be met. Sarit needed to legitimize his new regime; royalists wanted to restore the power of the monarchy; and U.S. policy makers had geo-strategic interests to protect. Thus, it became convenient at the time to align their interests and work together.

1957 would see massive changes in Thai politics. In the beginning of 1957, to gain a modicum of advantage over Phao and Sarit, Phibun announced that he would hold elections as part of his liberalization campaign. Though Phibun and Phao's relationship was shaky, they ran together under the same political party.⁸⁰ Sarit did not participate. On February 26, 1957, the election took place and two days later it was announced that Phibun won by popular vote and that his party had gained 85 seats in parliament.⁸¹ Immediately after the results were made public, protest ensued and the opposition mounted against Phibun and Phao. The *New York Times* posted that the opposition parties labeled the elections as the "dirtiest ever."⁸² Kukrit Pramoj, an influential politician, blasted Phibun and Phao and compared their actions to that of "Stalin and Beria".⁸³ Phibun's government attempted to mollify the criticism reaped from the election results by suppressing all opposition and the expression of negative public sentiments. Phibun blamed secret domestic groups and the opposition parties for falsely accusing the government of doing wrong and seeking to sow dissension.⁸⁴ No evidence was provided by the government.⁸⁵ After the public statements, Phibun's government banned public meetings, some newspapers were closed and their editors arrested, and articles critical of the elections and government were prohibited. Phibun's move to build popular support back-fired as support was plummeting. The fraudulent election was the beginning of the down-fall of Phibun and Phao, as other domestic forces like Sarit and the monarchy were ready to kick them while they were already down.

With public support turning against Phibun, Sarit made his bid for political power. During the elections, Sarit and his cadres pretended to be aloof and uninterested in politics. By 1957, he beat

⁸⁰ Darling, 1965, p. 157

⁸¹ *Bangkok Post*, February 28, 1957

⁸² *New York Times*, March 1, 1957

⁸³ *Siam Rath Weekly Review*, February 28, 1957

⁸⁴ *Bangkok Post*, March 2, 1957 and *New York Times*, March 2, 1957

⁸⁵ Darling, 1965, p. 158

out all other army factions and controlled almost the entire institution.⁸⁶ Sarit's political position was boosted as it was rumored that he had the support of the palace, according to Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, a historian.⁸⁷ This was quite a surprise since before 1957 Kobkua says that the king thought Sarit was "corrupt and uncouth."⁸⁸ It is possible that some of the princes backed Sarit and not the king. With a strong army and some royal sanction, Sarit aggressively made his move. First, he exposed the corruption and operations of Phao's police and the CIA-run Sea Supply Company in his two newspapers.⁸⁹ As a result, the CIA and Phao were forced to lay low in politics and field operations. Next, he attacked Phibun. Sarit argued, "The government is not acting in accordance with public opinion, particularly in domestic affairs."⁹⁰ Several days after the election results were announced, Sarit intervened in a gathering of 2000 students from Chulalongkorn University who were protesting the elections and readying a march on the Ministry of Interior. He played off of their frustrations by sympathizing with their plight and even encouraged them to demonstrate against the government.⁹¹ Further, Sarit accused Phibun's government of corruption and indicted Phao of lèse-majesté and of trying to arrest the king, according to Handley.⁹² Though he had no evidence, the accusations were enough to incite further protestation. Phibun and Phao's support plummeted as Sarit's popularity increased among the disgruntled students, some members of parliament, and the press.⁹³ By September, the *Bangkok Post* cited that 1200 persons had taken to the streets again in protest against Phibun's government. It was said by the *Post* and by Thak that the protestors saw Sarit as their savior from the corruption of Phibun.⁹⁴ With support, – supposedly, –

⁸⁶ Fineman, p. 237

⁸⁷ Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun through Three Decades*, Oxford University Press: England, 1995, p. 30; see also, Handley, p. 136

⁸⁸ Kobkua, p. 155

⁸⁹ *San Seri*, July 1 and 2, 1957; *Sayam Nikorn*, August 9, 1957

⁹⁰ *Bangkok Post*, August 21, 1957

⁹¹ Darling, 1965, p. 159

⁹² Handley, p. 137-138

⁹³ Handley, p. 137-138

⁹⁴ *Bangkok Post*, August 21, 1957; *Bangkok Post*, September 16, 1957; Thak, p. 79

from the monarchy, and as Bangkok's public and politicians increasingly opposed Phibun and Phao, Sarit was emboldened. He was not the genesis of the protests, but Sarit exploited the moment to his benefit. The balance of domestic power was shifting from Phibun and Phao to Sarit.

The elections of February 1957 gave the palace the occasion to resurge into politics. By 1957, Handley and Kobkua cite that the palace had made connections with Sarit.⁹⁵ This relationship between the palace and Sarit could have begun as a result of Sarit's appointment to the Royal Guard.⁹⁶ He was a seven-time member of the royal organization; three of them were in 1957.⁹⁷ After the elections of 1957, King Bhumibol refused to recognize Phibun's newly elected government.⁹⁸ Then the king suggested in a public speech that the government eliminate those members in the national assembly who were appointed by Phibun.⁹⁹ This open suggestion by the king, according to Handley, attacked "Phibun's political base."¹⁰⁰ King Bhumibol opposed Phibun's proposition to increase "the number of unelected members in parliament" by questioning "the move's constitutionality."¹⁰¹ The last nail in Phibun and Phao's coffin came when royalists' propagated rumors that Phao sought to arrest the king.¹⁰² After seven years of being suppressed, attacks on Phibun by palace elites and King Bhumibol were not rebuffed. The partnership with Sarit emboldened the monarchy to oppose Phibun. A window for the restoration of the royal institution was slowly opening.

As Phibun's popularity was declining U.S. leaders were having trouble figuring out how to respond. The U.S. image in Thailand was being bombarded by Phibun's liberalization campaign. In

⁹⁵ Kobkua, p. 30; see also, Handley, p. 136

⁹⁶ *Biography and Works of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat: A Cremation Book*, in Thai, Bangkok: Royal Thai Army, 1964, p. 6-7; Bamrungasuk, p. 78

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Kobkua, p. 90

⁹⁹ Handley, p. 136

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Handley, p. 137

¹⁰² Handley, p. 138

the summer of 1957, Darling cites that “many local newspapers accused the United States of war-mongering and praised the Soviet Union and Communist China for promoting world peace.”¹⁰³ To add context to Darling’s statement, both communist nations had issued a peaceful co-existence policy to all non-threatening nations in the 1950s. Thus, the U.S. was seen as an aggressor.

Newspapers owned by Phibun and Sarit led attacks against the United States.¹⁰⁴ The *Bangkok Post* cited many anti-American slogans on posters during the May Day parade in 1957. Some signs said, “Thailand is not an American Colony,” “Quit SEATO,” and “Abrogate Anti-Communist Act.”¹⁰⁵

The State Department and U.S. embassy met with both the Thai Ambassador in Washington and Phibun in Bangkok to convince them to stop the anti-American statements, but nothing changed.¹⁰⁶

By the middle of 1957, various U.S. officials began conceding that Sarit may win the domestic battle against Phibun and Phao. The State Department’s Office of Intelligence Research stated that if Sarit won he would have a neutralist foreign policy.¹⁰⁷ The interdepartmental National Intelligence

Estimate’s predictions were different as it stated, Thailand’s foreign policy would not change

“radically; at least in the short run.”¹⁰⁸ Finally, by the end of summer, U.S. leaders braced for the

worst case scenario in Thailand. In a State Department telegram to the U.S. embassy, Secretary of

State Dulles advised Ambassador Bishop to remain neutral. Dulles said that Phibun was their choice

as leader in Thailand but “in light of the likelihood of an army coup, to maintain good relations with

Sarit.”¹⁰⁹ They were not sure who would come out on top thus, U.S. leaders did not want to be seen

¹⁰³ Darling, 1965, p. 163

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ *Bangkok Post*, May 2, 1957

¹⁰⁶ Correspondence from “Pun to Wan, May 20, 1957, Cabinet Papers, [3] SR.0201.17, box 1, file 2, Thai National Archives; “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State,” *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1955-1957*, May 24, 1957, Washington: Government Printing Office, Vol. XXII, 1989, p. 919-920

¹⁰⁷ Office of Intelligence Research, “Probable Developments in Thailand,” OIR 7503, May 13, 1957, 82, United States News Agency

¹⁰⁸ “National Intelligence Estimate, Probable Development in Thailand,” June 18, 1957, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1955-1957*, Washington: Government Printing Office, Vol. XXII, 1989, p. 926

¹⁰⁹ “Telegram from Secretary of State Dulles to Bangkok Embassy,” September 3, 1957

on the wrong side and lose any influence in the country. The United States would not wait long, as almost two weeks later they would find out which faction triumphed.

In one last stand to hold onto power, Phibun tried to uncover Sarit's corruption. Phibun ordered all of his cabinet members to detach themselves from all of their business activities and ventures.¹¹⁰ Phibun attacked one of Sarit's power bases, his money. Sarit was involved in siphoning money from companies and the lottery bureau. Instead of balking, Sarit and several other cabinet members resigned. According to Fineman, the public and press rallied around Sarit.¹¹¹ In response, Sarit gave an ultimatum to Phibun and Phao's resignations. The ultimatum brought favorable reactions, as a small crowd gathered in front of the offices of the government protesting for Phibun's resignation.¹¹² With momentum on his side, on September 16, Sarit's tanks and soldiers entered Bangkok and forced Phibun and Phao to step down and leave the country.

Sarit sought royal sanction for his actions. Two hours after the coup was announced, Sarit "rushed to the palace" and received a decree from the king declaring "martial law" and naming "Sarit as Bangkok's military custodian, 'Defender of the Capital.'"¹¹³ The details involving the decree are somewhat debatable. Thak argues that "the King probably had no choice but to comply" with Sarit's coup, whereas Handley says, "the speed in which [Sarit] obtained royal sanction exposes the palace's complicity."¹¹⁴ Both arguments may have some validity. As was said earlier, the king saw Sarit as "corrupt and uncouth."¹¹⁵ On the other hand, Handley cites a warm response to the coup from the palace and monarchy: "His majesty the King has graciously observed that the Revolutionary Party's objective of protecting the people... is a noble one" and "you [Sarit] will have

¹¹⁰ Fineman, p. 241

¹¹¹ Fineman, p. 242

¹¹² Ibid; *Bangkok Post*, September 16, 1957

¹¹³ Handley, p. 138; *Bangkok Post*, September 17, 1957

¹¹⁴ Thak, 2007, p. 82; Handley, p. 138

¹¹⁵ Kobbua, p. 155, see chapter 2

His Majesty's full blessing."¹¹⁶ The *Bangkok Post* seems to settle the dispute by implying that the king did give his support to Sarit and was not compelled.¹¹⁷ From February to September, princes may have convinced King Bhumibol to support Sarit. It is important to show this discrepancy because of the implications that result from it. Thak sees the king as being forced into supporting Sarit whereas Handley argues the opposite. The story to which one ascribes will form the perception and opinion one has of the monarchy. The monarchy was either a puppet or a supporter of the puppet-master. It is hard to know what exactly happened in the meeting between Sarit and the king and if he was cajoled by palace elites, but what can be seen is that the king supported the coup. Sarit became the right man to overthrow Phibun because of his power over the army and his connections with the monarchy.

The United States reacted with hesitancy to Sarit's coup. After the coup, in a telegram from the State Department to the U.S. embassy in Thailand, officials expressed some concern about the Sarit regime, saying, "The U.S. objective is to figure out how to encourage suitable forces to join [a] viable combination satisfactory to U.S. objectives in Thailand...and how to induce them to take measures to enhance SEATO and counter-communist subversion and neutralist pressures."¹¹⁸ The State Department exhorted the embassy to "remind these political elements [(Sarit and his military allies)] that they should realize that Congressional support [of] American aid to Thailand cannot be taken for granted if [a] power grouping emerges antagonistic [to] Free World objectives or blind Communist dangers."¹¹⁹ U.S. embassy officials were ordered to convince Sarit's coup group of the dangers of flirting with neutralism and communism and that American support was not to be taken

¹¹⁶ Handley, p. 138

¹¹⁷ *Bangkok Post*, September 17, 1957. Though the *Bangkok Post* supports Handley's argument that the King readily supported Sarit, one must still question the agenda of the newspaper agency. The *Bangkok Post* is a government newspaper and could have been supporting the King and Sarit.

¹¹⁸ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand," *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1954-1957*, October 22, 1957, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, Vol. XXII, 1989, p. 940

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*

lightly. It can also be inferred from the telegram that the State Department was worried about Sarit and the disposition of his regime because of his earlier anti-American rhetoric and leftist sympathies.¹²⁰ The Eisenhower administration wanted to ensure that Sarit would bend to their policies. Nevertheless, U.S. policy-makers proceeded cautiously in supporting Sarit. U.S. leaders went with the quid pro quo approach with Sarit's regime: aid for support.

At this point, it is important to assess the mess left-over from Sarit's coup. Phibun and Phao were driven from power and forced into exile. Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States were now in an uncomfortable situation. Each member knew little of the other. Sarit and the monarchy had just partnered up, and the United States was a new player. It is unclear whether Sarit knew neither what he was doing nor the motives of the palace when he decided to aid them. The U.S. State Department and Eisenhower administration had few working relations with Sarit and the monarchy. Sarit was thrust into their hands. Washington and the embassy feared that Sarit would drastically change Thailand's foreign policy, but they were willing to give him a chance.¹²¹ Sarit and the monarchy had each other's support, but the sincerity of the relationship was still in question. Little evidence, other than that cited by Handley and Kobkua, indicates the strength of the partnership before the coup.¹²² In aligning itself with Sarit, relations between the U.S. government and the monarchy came into closer contact. Previously, according to Handley, the CIA and the USIS promoted the king in their propaganda war.¹²³ However, the State Department had few interactions with the palace. After the coup, the State Department exhorted the Embassy to contact a list of key political figures, the king being the first, in order to build a coalition that would be favorable to U.S. interests.¹²⁴ Thus began relations between Washington and the monarchy. Baker and Pasuk cite how

¹²⁰ Fineman, p. 232

¹²¹ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand," p. 940

¹²² Handley, p. 136; Kobkua, p. 30

¹²³ Handley, p. 124

¹²⁴ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand," p. 940

both Sarit and the United States viewed the role of the monarchy in the beginning. They said that Sarit and the United States “believed the monarchy would serve as a focus of unity, and a force for stability, while remaining susceptible to their control.”¹²⁵ The monarchy would play the role of uniting all factions and creating a stable country. However, they both felt that the king would be a pawn in their hands to fulfill their interests. The monarchy was seen as the junior-most member of the nascent triple coalition. The nature of the relationship was still unknown.

Unfortunately for Sarit, he would not bask in his spoils immediately. After seizing power, he traveled to the United States for surgery. For eight months, he was out of the country. During that time, Thailand fell into disarray. Pote Sarasin, a pro-American and former Thai Ambassador to the United States, was appointed premier by Sarit. However, Pote would last a couple of months and resigned because of corruption. Thanom Kittikachorn, a member of Sarit’s clique, replaced Pote. Thanom came up against an economic crisis and increasing corruption among politicians and government officials.¹²⁶ A factional war emerged again between Sarit’s political party, Sahaphum and Phibun’s party, Seri Manangkhasila.¹²⁷ In a by-election, the Sahaphum party did not win the amount of seats it had projected.¹²⁸ Sarit’s government was losing the ground it had gained in September 1957.

With Sarit’s undivided attention as a hospital patient, U.S. leaders worked hard to change his political mindset and policies. U.S. embassy officials advised Washington to take the opportunity to win-over Sarit’s full support for the West.¹²⁹ Fineman states that since January of 1958, Sarit had

¹²⁵ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 175

¹²⁶ Handley, p. 141

¹²⁷ Fineman, p. 251

¹²⁸ Thak Chaloemtirana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1979 edition, p. 136-138

¹²⁹ “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State”, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, April 3, 1958, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992, Vol. XV, pg. 987

asked for U.S. economic aid to bolster his political position when he returned.¹³⁰ Sarit continued his plea for financial support. Dulles politely rejected his request, while Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter S. Robertson, gave Sarit a tongue lashing by sharing his disapproval for all the anti-American rhetoric coming from his newspaper, *San Seri*.¹³¹ The embassy told Washington to warn Sarit that his political strength would in part rest on American aid as a counter-weight to other factions.¹³² Further, U.S. leaders did a little indoctrinating. Sarit was warned of the dangers of communism. The U.S. embassy advised U.S. leaders “to explain to him [Sarit] the danger of having a free press and leftist groups in government” and how they can “undermine existing institutions – monarchy, representative government, etc....”¹³³ Another concern that Washington resolved was Sarit’s suspicion of the CIA, the former patron of his rival, Phao, and the police. The Thai police issued a statement dispelling false accusations of a coup attempt.¹³⁴ Ambassador Bishop convinced Thai newspapers to stop attacking the CIA run, Sea Supply Company.¹³⁵ Then the golden ticket came when the CIA began supporting Sarit’s cousin, Phoumi Nosavan in Laos and his bid for power.¹³⁶ At the end of Sarit’s stay, Washington reluctantly agreed to fund several projects so that Sarit would have something to show his supporters. Again it was the quid pro quo approach no anti-American statements and policies for economic aid. Washington, with advice from the embassy, took the occasion to mold Sarit and solidify an alliance with him. Sarit was groomed and trained to be a Cold War warrior. With tensions in Southeast Asia heating up, Thailand needed to be stable and

¹³⁰ Fineman, p. 251

¹³¹ “Telegram from Dulles to Bangkok Embassy”, April 30, 1958, 792.551/4-3058; “Memorandum of Conversation by Bushner, May 14, 1958, 611.92/5-1458, RG 59, United States News Agency

¹³² “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State”, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, January 17, 1958, Vol. XV, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992, pg. 981; “Telegram from Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State”, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, May 31, 1958, Vol. XV, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1992, pg. 1017

¹³³ “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State”, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, April 11, 1958, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992, Vol. XV, p. 988

¹³⁴ Fineman, p. 247; Sayam Nikorn, October 5, 1957

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ U. Alexis Johnson with Jef Olivarius McAllister, *The Right Hand of Power*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984, p. 296

not vacillate between the Eastern and Western camps. The United States and Sarit were in firm agreement that supporting each other's policies was advantageous to both their needs.

In fear that a take-over might occur by his rivals, Sarit secretly returned to Thailand in October of 1958 and performed a blood-less and peaceful coup against his own regime. Sarit justified his second coup by proclaiming to uphold and protect the monarchy and fight communism. He was supporting the interests of both his patrons, the monarchy and the United States. On the day of the 1958 coup, Sarit visited the king and “got a green light from the palace” to go forward with the coup.¹³⁷ The he abrogated the 1952 constitution. To justify his actions, Sarit issued the following statement: “The growing internal menace of communism was undermining the basic foundations of the state by attempting to ‘uproot the monarchy, destroy Buddhism, and overthrow institutions of all types which the Thai nation cherished.’”¹³⁸ In return, the king issued his support in the *Royal Thai Government Gazette* by saying that “the coup was necessary to head off a power grab...and permit drastic anti-communist measures.”¹³⁹ King Bhumibol delivered another stamp of approval by “reminding the leaders that they should act faithfully for the good of the people and the nation.”¹⁴⁰ Unlike the first coup, Sarit's justification was not about getting rid of corruption or upholding political freedoms but of protecting the foundations of the country, the monarchy, Buddhism, and the nation. Sarit's regime had royal sanction to rule the country and suppress opposition. King Bhumibol and the monarchy were able to restore its preeminence in Thai politics. The U.S. had a strong anti-communist leader.

¹³⁷ Bamrungsuk, p. 79

¹³⁸ Prakat khong Khana Pattiwat (Revolutionary Council Proclamation) No. 4, October 20, 1958; Royal Thai Government Gazette, “Proclamation No. 2,” October 20, 1958

¹³⁹ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, October 15-16, 18, 20, 22, 1958

¹⁴⁰ Samnak Ratchalekhathikan [Royal Secretariat], Document No. 2183/2501, October 21, 1958; *Biography and Works of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat: A Cremation Book*, p. 76-77; Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 177

When he returned to Thailand in 1958, Sarit was a die-hard Cold War ally of America. The United States took full advantage of having Sarit's undivided attention as a convalescing patient. Sarit, being both convinced by the U.S. and realizing the need to secure his power, moved to subdue any signs of subversion. Fineman cites that upon returning, Sarit made it clear to Washington that "he would no longer tolerate leftists."¹⁴¹ Sarit vowed that he would arrest "seventy-two Thai and Chinese communist 'agents.'"¹⁴² According to Fineman, real communists and leftists were hard to come by, but Sarit targeted anyone showing slight inclinations towards neutralism, socialism "in Parliament, universities, and the press that so annoyed the United States...."¹⁴³ The Anti-Communist Activities Act of 1952 was revised by charging criminals in military instead of civil courts.¹⁴⁴ The government had the power to jail and to interrogate those suspected of communist activities.¹⁴⁵ Many newspapers were closed or ransacked.¹⁴⁶ In Revolutionary Proclamation No. 3, it stated, "Newspapers that act as mouthpieces of foreign interests, advocate or uphold such a harmful ideology as Communism, or attempt to sow discord directly or indirectly shall be drastically suppressed."¹⁴⁷ Labor unions were banned.¹⁴⁸ Sarit reshuffled his cabinet by getting rid of all neutralists and leftists.¹⁴⁹ Sarit went over-board attacking communists because in reality, the threat was small.¹⁵⁰ The U.S. embassy and State Department were well pleased with the "new" and "remodeled" Sarit. He fulfilled the list of instructions from Washington to suppress leftists,

¹⁴¹ Fineman, p. 255

¹⁴² "Telegram from Johnson to Secretary of State," November 10, 1958, 792.00/11-1058, RG 59, United States News Agency

¹⁴³ Fineman, p. 255

¹⁴⁴ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, "Proclamation No. 12 and 16-17", October 27, 1958

¹⁴⁵ Thak, 2007, p. 138

¹⁴⁶ *Siam Rath*, July 6, 17-18, 22, 1958

¹⁴⁷ "Announcement of the Revolutionary Party, No. 3," October 20, 1958

¹⁴⁸ Bamrungasuk, p. 100; *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, October 20, 1958

¹⁴⁹ Fineman, p. 252-253

¹⁵⁰ "Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State", *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1961-1963*, May 27, 1961, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1994, Vol. XXIII, p. 863; *Mobile Information Team Trip 1: a report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok*, January 22, 1962 to February 4, 1962, United States Information Service: Bangkok, 1962

neutralists, and restrict the press. Anti-Americanism would not exist under the new regime. Sarit had returned home attempting to show his new patron that he was a worthy client.

The U.S. was happy with Sarit's new make-over. The State Department issued an official statement regarding Sarit's second coup by saying "that the political changes in Thailand would not affect Thai-United States relations."¹⁵¹ The U.S. government further supported Sarit's policies by opposing other military generals vying for power such as General Praphat because he "had neutralist leanings... [and] was a "lukewarm supporter [of the] monarchy."¹⁵² Sarit was their man. U.S. policymakers needed a strong anti-communist bulwark in Southeast Asia as South Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia were struggling to quell communist insurgencies. Sarit became a good replacement for Phibun.

The political face of Thailand underwent some big changes in a short period of time. Phibun, Phao and Sarit had been entangled in a bitter power-grab while the United States was divided on whom to back, especially as Sarit's power was increasing. Sarit took advantage of the public's protest of Phibun and Phao's electoral fraud by condemning the elections and supporting the people in their criticism. To win-over more hearts, Sarit was critical of U.S. foreign policy and involvement with Phibun and Phao. The palace joined with Sarit and took shots at Phibun. Royalists and King Bhumibol protested Phibun's government and its policies. After the coup in September of 1957, the power balance dramatically shifted in Sarit's favor. Phibun and Phao were deposed. The palace sanctioned Sarit's new government. At the start, the United States were afraid of Sarit's intentions. U.S. State Department officials used their power of persuasion and the threat of cutting aid as methods of molding Sarit into a Cold War warrior. Sarit's policies were more pro-American,

¹⁵¹ Thak, 2007, p. 97

¹⁵² "Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State", *The Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, November 11, 1958, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992, Vol. XV, p. 1053; see also, Frank C. Darling, "Marshal Sarit and Absolutist Rule in Thailand", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 4, Dec. 1960, p. 184, 188. It was reported that General Praphat the Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior had plotted a coup against Sarit while he was in America for surgery.

anti-Communist, and pro-monarchy. Sarit almost lost his hold over the country when he was abroad for eight months but returned in time to turn the tide. The 1957/58 coups were the catalyst that brought Sarit, the king, and the United States together. U.S. leaders had not foreseen the king or Sarit as possible options to work with because of their previous investments with Phibun.¹⁵³ For the time being it was convenient to align with and support one another. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, the relationship that started almost by accident, morphed into a strong bond between Sarit, King Bhumibol and the United States.

¹⁵³ Bamrungsuk, p. 78

Chapter 3: Anti-Communism: A Convergence of Interests after 1958

The coups of 1957 and 1958 brought Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States into an informal relationship. The palace supported Sarit's coup and his regime. In return, Sarit promised to protect the monarchy. The Eisenhower administration and embassy officials were still leery of their new working arrangement with Sarit but were willing to give him a shot. Sarit's 1958 coup showed that he was willing to implement U.S.'s anti-communist policies to the tee. The palace was unfamiliar territory for U.S. leaders since its role and influence in politics was severely restricted under Phibun. In the early stages of the Second Triumvirate, anti-communism was a policy that all three were able to find some common ground. U.S. leaders had imposed a policy of stymieing communism in Thailand, even though there was very little threat of it in the country. Sarit used anti-communism as a ploy to enact a set of policies that would help him craft a modern Thai identity. Anti-communism was incorporated into the idea of Thai nationalism. The royalists saw the over-obsession with communism as an opportunity to intervene and influence Thai politics after a couple of decades of obscurity and irrelevance. To help Thailand fight communism, the State Department increased the U.S. involvement and presence in the country. Military and police aid, weaponry, and training proliferated. Through the use of heavy propaganda, the USIS manipulated the images of the U.S., Sarit, and King Bhumibol. Anti-communism became a mechanism that converged Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States into a strong alliance.

Before delving into how Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States implemented and exploited anti-communist policies, it must be noted that out of all the Southeast Asian countries, Thailand had the least to worry about in regards to a communist take-over. Communism was too small to pose any danger to the country, and especially the United States. Darling cites that as early

as 1950 “the communist threat...was not as big of a threat as the United States proclaimed.”¹⁵⁴ During Sarit’s tenure, the United States embassy acknowledged that communist insurgencies were unlikely to occur in the country. The U.S. embassy sent a telegram to the Kennedy administration in response to the turmoil in Laos between right-wing and communist forces in 1961. Ambassador Kenneth Young stated, “In reply... [I] would like to emphasize at start that I do not think the Communist Bloc will attempt or has any intention [at] attempting to repeat [a] Laos pattern [of] subversion in Thailand.”¹⁵⁵ Further, he said, “[I] do not believe that there is at present time a Communist underground in Thailand of any importance.”¹⁵⁶ Even with communist insurgencies near Thailand’s border, there was still no danger of it spreading to Thailand. The Foreign Areas Studies Division prepared a handbook in 1963 for the U.S. army citing that the Thai Communist Party “was relatively small and its activities were manifested mainly in clandestine propaganda.”¹⁵⁷ Even as late as 1970, well after Sarit, David A. Wilson, writing an analysis of U.S.-Thai relations in the wake of a gradual United States withdrawal from the region, stated plainly, “Communism in Thailand has not a base of power.”¹⁵⁸ Why and how could a country with very little threat from communism become a nation steeped in anti-communist rhetoric? Anti-communism was a minor threat but Sarit and the monarchy went along with it because doing so would protect themselves as well. Washington and the U.S. auxiliaries in the country invested tons of money and resources in shoring up their anti-communist defenses. To reiterate the introduction to this chapter, combatting communism and implementing policies to support it helped strengthen the relationship of the burgeoning Second Triumvirate. Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States saw that the mutual goal of anti-communism was a means of furthering their own individual interests. Sarit created a

¹⁵⁴ Darling, 1965, p. 83 and 85

¹⁵⁵ “Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State,” p. 863

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, p. 335

¹⁵⁸ Wilson, 1970, p. 91

totalitarian regime based on a new Thai nationalist philosophy. Royalists gained significance by promoting the monarchy and King Bhumibol as pro-West allies. The United States, through agencies such as the USIS and the military became heavily involved in Thai politics.

Sarit's Political Way

Part of Sarit's new anti-communist policy was an innovative philosophy on Thai politics. Sarit's style of rule was much different from Phibun. Members of the 1932 coup, including Phibun and Pridi, received their military training and schooling in Europe and America. Thus, they were infused with Western culture and political philosophies.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, Sarit and his 1958 clique were "indigenous products."¹⁶⁰ Western ideas of democracy and a constitution were foreign concepts and ideas for Sarit's generation. Thak argues that instead of basing legitimacy and authority on rule of law or popular consensus, Sarit's coup group was "imbued with traditional authoritarian notions of political leadership..."¹⁶¹ Elections and political parties only bred disunity and factionalism. Sarit's Revolutionary Council even went as far as issuing a statement equating democracy to "anarchy."¹⁶² It is important to recognize that Sarit's upbringing and education had a large impact on the way he ran the country, which immensely affected Thai political history. Instead of reforming corruption and refining democratic processes that 1932 had introduced, Sarit would take the country a different direction. The threat of communism would become an excuse for Sarit to impose his own ruling style on the country.

In the name of fighting the modern communist menace, Sarit saw fit to introduce a different system of governance on Thailand than Phibun had. Political infighting and communism were seen as threats to the king, religion, nation, and to the integral unity of Thailand. According to Sarit,

¹⁵⁹ Welch Jr. and Smith, p. 87-88

¹⁶⁰ Thak, 2007, p. 99

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Army Radio "20", August 11, 1965, in *Prachathipatai baeb Thai* [Thai Democracy], p. 38; Thak, p. 102

Western democracy was the cause of division in Thailand's society.¹⁶³ Sarit inaugurated a new form of democracy called Thai-democracy that was based on traditional principles. Thak argued that "...Sarit believed that his return to old concepts of government was a means that would propel the nation toward modernization."¹⁶⁴ In a radio broadcast, the regime stated it would "abolish democratic ideas borrowed from the West" and that "it would build a democratic system that would be appropriate to the special characteristics and realities of the Thai. It will build...a Thai way of democracy."¹⁶⁵ The "Thai way" was based on "political stability, proper social behavior, and strong executive leadership that would 'represent' the popular will and national development" according to Thak.¹⁶⁶ Political stability would be founded on three pillars: king, religion, and nation.¹⁶⁷ The monarchy and the regime filled the role of the "strong executive leadership," while Buddhism was the moral compass. Elections and parliament were of minimal importance because the will of the people was encompassed in the monarch.¹⁶⁸ During his tenure, Sarit ruled with his cabinet and coup group; the parliament was marginalized. By building his new government on Thai principles, Sarit appealed to the masses and won crucial support. Most crucially, however, was that Sarit was seen as a nationalist and truly Thai, which separated him from Phibun, who had more Western influences. The road to modernization would be paved with Thai principles and "indigenous" influences. Western democracy and popular will would be sidelined for the next several decades as a result of Sarit's new political philosophy.

The State Department and U.S. embassy were happy with the anti-democratic Sarit.

Embassy officials expressed positive feelings about backing Sarit by saying that, he was a

¹⁶³ "Telegram from the Commander in Chief, Pacific's Political Adviser (Steeves) to the Department of State", *Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, October 22, 1958, U.S. Government Printing Office, Vol. XV, 1992, p. 1046-47

¹⁶⁴ Thak, 2007, p. 107

¹⁶⁵ Army Radio "20", August 17, 1965; p. 65; Thak, p. 101

¹⁶⁶ Thak, 2007, p. 104

¹⁶⁷ Thak, 2007, p. 108

¹⁶⁸ Thak, 2007, p. 103-104; Jack Fong, "Sacred Nationalism: The Thai Monarchy and Primordial Nation Construction," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 39, No. 4, November 2009, p. 687

Happy medium from the standpoint of U.S. interests as a situation which encompasses a military regime civilianized to the greatest extent possible and headed by a military leader who saw security and development in perspective and thereby evidenced political leadership of the type required in a developing society.¹⁶⁹

U.S. officials seemed to agree that having a strong executive leader like Sarit was fit for Thailand and the lack of democracy was not a big problem. A harsh anti-democratic Sarit was a good trade-off for the United States than a communist or neutralist one. It was better to suppress political freedoms and civil liberties than have neutralist, leftist and communists attacking U.S. foreign policy. Thai-democracy did not contradict the U.S.'s fight against communism but in fact was used to suppress opposition.

As stated earlier, Thai-democracy also translated to a new form of Thai nationalism or Thai-ness. Handley argues that Sarit, with influence from royalists, crafted a definition of Thai-ness around the monarchy.¹⁷⁰ Sarit stressed discipline, harmony, and unity. Buddhism and the nation were included with the king in what it meant to be Thai. The establishment of Thai-ness around these three tenants was first established by King Vajiravudh (who reigned from 1910-1925). He “built three distinct foci of Thai civic identity, i.e. monarchy, nation and religion.”¹⁷¹ In Supamit Pitipat’s thesis, it said that this mantra was “used to suppress opposition....”¹⁷² Handley further cited King Vajiravudh, saying that “Without any one of the three, the people were told, the Kingdom of Siam could not exist.”¹⁷³ The monarchy, Buddhism and the nation were inextricably linked and almost inseparable. Sarit proclaimed,

Most important of all, the Revolutionary Group will always hold that the king and Thai nation are inseparable. The history of the Thai nation from the beginning to the present is founded on the institution of the king as the symbol of the nation and *boon* of the people.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ “Dispatch from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State”, *The Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, Washington, U.S.: Government Printing Office, 1959, pg. 1098

¹⁷⁰ Handley, p. 140

¹⁷¹ Supamit Pitipat, *The Evolution of the Thai Monarchy in the Constitutional Period, 1932-Present*, Masters Thesis, American University, 1990, p. 42-43

¹⁷² Ibid

¹⁷³ Handley, p. 36

¹⁷⁴ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, October 20, 1958. *Boon* translates to virtue or fate. *Siam Rath*, October 23, 1958

To be truly Thai, one had to be loyal to the nation, with the king as its head and live the religion. Outsiders and dissidents were easily distinguished and labeled as un-Thai if they violated one of three mantras. Violations were not explicitly explicated, but minor criticism of the monarchy or the government was considered a form of subversion.¹⁷⁵ An important implication of the new mantra was that Sarit and the regime helped create a permanent place for the monarchy in the fabric of Thai society. Thailand would not be a nation without the king.

Communism was considered a threat to Thai nationalism. As was stated earlier, the main reason for the 1958 coup was to protect the nation and king from communism.¹⁷⁶ In the *Bangkok Post*, the regime said that “loyalty to the King, anti-communism” were important to their new policies.¹⁷⁷ The regime published in the Royal Thai Government Gazette a list of reasons for the seizure and destruction of newspapers. The reasons were: 1) offending the monarchy, 2) offending the Thai people and government...[and] 5) promoting communism.”¹⁷⁸ Anti-communism was linked to protecting the nation and the king. If one was a communist, they were considered dis-loyal to the king and thus not Thai.

Royalist Machinations

Royalists followed Sarit and joined the crusade against communism. First, the palace reified Sarit’s notion of Thai-democracy. Handley cites royalists, Prince Dhani Nivat, and privy counselor Srivisarn arguing that “the monarchy is all the constitution and representation the people require....”¹⁷⁹ The king embodied democracy and was the true representative of the people because of his moral superiority and infallibility. Thanat Khoman, a royalist and Thai Ambassador to the U.S., explained the main tenant of Thai-democracy in the *Bangkok Post*. Khoman stated, “If we look

¹⁷⁵ Handley, p. 154

¹⁷⁶ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, October 20, 1958

¹⁷⁷ *Bangkok Post*, October 22, 1958

¹⁷⁸ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, October 29, 1958

¹⁷⁹ Handley, p. 142; see also, Prince Dhani Nivat, “The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy,” *Journal of the Siam Society*, 36, 2, 1947, p. 95

at our national history, we can see very well that this country works better and prospers under an authority – not a tyrannical authority, but a unifying authority, around which all elements of the nation can rally.”¹⁸⁰ He added, “On the contrary, the dark pages of our history show that whenever such an authority is lacking and divisive elements are set into play, the nation has been plunged into one disaster after another.”¹⁸¹ King Bhumibol did not have any say in this new form of Thai-democracy because as Handley points out, “he was still directed by the privy councilors and the princes, who never objected” to the lack of popular and parliamentary government participation.¹⁸² Thailand did not need a Western-type democracy because all it had led to was dissension and disunity. The monarchy was already democratic according to the palace. King Bhumibol was the epitome of Buddhism and could speak for the will of the people.

Next, the palace used the symbol of its power, King Bhumibol, as a spokesman against communism. According to Handley, “The Cold War became fundamental to the power of the monarchy and its military partners.”¹⁸³ As the United States was pushing the threat of communism onto Thailand, the image and role of the king became more important. Thak argues that throughout Sarit’s tenure, the king “echoed the government’s stress on the great danger of communist subversions—and this naturally” increased “the importance of national security and the military and police.”¹⁸⁴ By sounding the alarm of communism, the army and regime heeded the king’s admonition to protect the monarchy and the country. Royalists used communism as an occasion to increase the importance of the monarchy. King Bhumibol’s role expanded into the political arena and helped sway public opinion in favor of the regime and of U.S. anti-communist policy.

¹⁸⁰ *Bangkok Post*, March 10, 1959

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*

¹⁸² Handley, p. 142

¹⁸³ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁴ Thak, 2007, p. 210

To further build the image and role of King Bhumibol and the monarchy, the royal family toured the United States and further wedded Thailand to the Western camp. During the king and queen's American tour in July 1960, relations between the monarchy and the United States were solidified. American policymakers reassured King Bhumibol that "the preservation of the independence and integrity of Thailand continues to be a matter of the highest concern and importance of the United States."¹⁸⁵ American leaders gave the king and queen the royal treatment by rolling out the red carpet and having a parade in their honor. King Bhumibol addressed congress and lauded the U.S. for their financial aid. He said, "American assistance is to enable the Thai to achieve their objectives through their own efforts. I need hardly say that this concept has our complete endorsement."¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, "President Eisenhower and the king issued a joint communique re-emphasizing the American commitment to defend Thailand and promote its economic and social development."¹⁸⁷ U.S. intervention and aid was welcomed by the monarchy. King Bhumibol's approval would carry power as the U.S. had a pretext and the green-light to involve itself in Thailand's domestic affairs. The king's prestige and role was increasing with more connections with Washington.

American's in Thailand

With the formation of a new coalition, the U.S. presence and political and military intervention in Thailand amplified dramatically so as to ensure communism would not gain a foothold in the country. To stymie the tide of communism, the State Department used multiple avenues and sources, one of them being propaganda. After Sarit's coup the U.S. government continued to intervene and manipulate Thailand's domestic public relations for the regime. The themes were the same as before 1957, the United States aggressively propagated the ideas of

¹⁸⁵ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand", October 9, 1960, *Foreign Relations of the United States: 1958-1960, Southeast Asia*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958-1960 Vol. XV, p, 1141

¹⁸⁶ *Congressional Record, Proceedings and Debates of the 86th Congress*, Second Session, Vol. 106, June 29, 1960, p. 13894-13895

¹⁸⁷ Darling, p. 177

Western democracy, the evils of communism, and the benevolence of the military government. The United States Information Service (USIS) remained the lead in the propaganda campaign. They visited villages to hear people's complaints, provide health care, and most importantly, hand out information about the king, the government, and the United States. USIS officials were to play an observant, consultant, and supportive role.¹⁸⁸ However, Handley argues that Americans were the real power behind the operation by taking "over public relations for the Thai government, heavily funding equipment and programming for television and radio broadcasts with an anticommunist, pro-monarchy theme."¹⁸⁹ The mission of the USIS was to "strengthen the image of the United States as a strong, peace loving...nation which stands ready and willing to aid Thailand to maintain its sovereignty...."¹⁹⁰

To fulfill its job, USIS officials had several goals. First, they were "to establish a bridge of understanding between the Thai government and the people living in remote areas of Thailand, particularly those people in northeast Thailand, who are most likely to be exposed to Communist pressures."¹⁹¹ Second, the USIS was "to gather further information on village needs" so as to inform the Thai government on social-economic policies.¹⁹² Third, the organization was to assist the Thai government in instilling a sense of love and loyalty for the central government and monarchy among the Thai people.¹⁹³ The USIS assisted the Thai government in incorporating and creating a stronger sense of loyalty and nationalism for the nation and its leaders. Films depicting the government protecting the country from subversion, building public works, and carrying out relief efforts after

¹⁸⁸ *Mobile Information Team, Trip 1*, January 22 to February 4, 1962, p. 1; *Mobile Information Team, Trip 14: a report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok*, November 8 to November 28, 1963, United States Information Service: Bangkok, 1963, p. 1

¹⁸⁹ Handley, p. 149

¹⁹⁰ *USIS-Thailand*, Pamphlet from the Agency for International Development, USOM/Thailand, Job 769, Bangkok, April 1964

¹⁹¹ *Mobile Information Team 1, Trip 2: a report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok*, March 15 to April 4, 1962, United States Information Service: Bangkok, 1962, p. 1

¹⁹² *Mobile Information Team, Trip 14*, p. 1

¹⁹³ *Mobile Information Team 1, Trip 3: a report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok*, May 21 to June 4, 1962, United States Information Service: Bangkok, 1962, p. 1; *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, p. 393

natural disasters sculpted a positive image of the leaders. Magazines such as the *Free World* were distributed that glamorized Western society.¹⁹⁴ Winning over the hearts and minds of the people was integral in the psychological battle during the Cold War. In order to deter communist efforts, which were minimal, the people needed to see the Royal Thai Government as the better alternative. Inadvertently, the United States would benefit as the propaganda showcased Western prosperity and its lifestyle. A link between Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the U.S was established. The Thai people saw the cooperation and connection of the three parties. If the Thai people respected and were obedient to Sarit and King Bhumibol – who then supported U.S. foreign policy – there would be fewer backlashes from domestic forces and communism would be halted.

Another primary focus of the USIS was to promote King Bhumibol as an anti-communist. In each of the USIS's area visits, films and literature about the monarchy, developed and produced by the U.S., were shown and distributed. The films and literature contained images and information about “the activities of the King and of the Prime Minister [and] ways in which Northeast Thailand is being helped by the Thai and U.S. government.”¹⁹⁵ The monarchy's “activities” included royal visits, religious festival's and ceremonies, his royal ordination, and images of King Bhumibol among the people.¹⁹⁶ Maps of Thailand and pictures of King Bhumibol were given to every household.¹⁹⁷ These two images were important elements in promoting and building unity and stability. Official national boundaries were still a recent concept in Thai culture. Maps with borders carried with them a message that the people living within them were Thai subjects, thus ignoring ethnic minorities and cultural differences. King Bhumibol was seen as the leader of the people inside the borders. King Bhumibol and the monarchy were crucial to U.S. foreign policy in Thailand. By connecting with the

¹⁹⁴ U.S. *Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, p. 397

¹⁹⁵ *Mobile Information Team I, Trip 8: a report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok*, January 15 to February 4, 1963, United States Information Service: Bangkok, 1963

¹⁹⁶ U.S. *Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, p. 394

¹⁹⁷ *Mobile Information Team I, Trip 7: a report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok*, December 12 to 22, 1962, United States Information Service: Bangkok, 1962

king, it helped not only bolster Sarit's government but also U.S. intervention in the country. The USIS hoped to imprint on the minds of the masses a monarch that was a friend to the West and anti-communism.

To beef up Sarit and the country's security capabilities, the CIA continued to train and participate in covert missions with Thai counter-insurgency groups. Previously, Sarit had felt the CIA was a threat to his power because of its relationship with Phao. However, after 1958, relations improved. During Sarit's time, the CIA heavily funded and trained the Thai Border Patrol Police (BPP) and Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU). To rein in the police from the previous influence of Phao, Sarit established himself as Acting Director of the Police Department on September 9, 1959. Surachart Bamrungsuk noticed another purpose in Sarit's placing the police under his jurisdiction. He argued, "Sarit decided to control the police by himself; he realized that the police represented another means of maintaining his power, since the U.S. was at that time helping to develop major branches in the police department."¹⁹⁸ Each of the two police groups had specific missions. The PARU was a small unit sent into denied areas on clandestine missions outside of Thailand like Laos. During the second Laotian civil war in 1962, PARU units were heavily involved. As for the BPP, other than protecting the borders, they countered "infiltration and subversion..." and operated "as guerrilla forces in enemy held areas" such as the Northeast and Southern Thailand.¹⁹⁹ From 1959 to 1964, U.S. aid to various Thai police units rose to around \$3 million.²⁰⁰ The BPP and PARU were integral in U.S. and Thai counterinsurgency efforts. Thai PARU units, under supervision of the CIA, served in Laos before and after Sarit's coup and helped the Laotian army fight the communist Pathet Lao. Their mobility made them effective in covert missions. The BPP served more domestic purposes as its troops patrolled the borders and the domestic hinterlands

¹⁹⁸ Bamrungsuk, p. 81

¹⁹⁹ *The Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 2, 1971, document 100, p. 645-646

²⁰⁰ Lobe, p. 41

while keeping order and suppressing any signs of opposition. U.S. aid to this panoply of police organizations provided protection for Sarit's regime while simultaneously serving U.S. military goals.

Other than training and equipping the Thai police force, the United States Military Advisory Program (MAP) and Joint United States Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) enhanced the Thai military. In order to keep Thailand stable its military and leadership needed to be well paid and provided with necessary materials to quell opposition. MAP and JUSMAG advisers replaced old, worn out equipment with "modern armament and increase [d] funds outlays were made for training purposes."²⁰¹ The *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand* cites, "All components have been provided with equipment supplied by the United States and are trained in accordance with United States military concepts."²⁰² The Thai air force, navy, and army were almost all built by and modeled after the United States. The army was equipped with mortars, artillery, medium tanks, helicopters, and liaison planes.²⁰³ The Thai navy received one destroyer, several escort vessels, landing ships, patrol boats, minesweepers, and anti-submarine crafts.²⁰⁴ Thailand's economy did not have the capability to adequately supply an army and furnish state-of-the-art weapons. The United States military took over Thailand's armed forces and remade it in their spitting image.

U.S. military logistics was profoundly manifested throughout Thailand. The U.S. Senate allotted funds through MAP to proliferate the building of army, air force, and navy installations. The U.S. Senate issued the building of "Operational and support facilities" in Korat, Takhli, Ubon, Udon, Don Muang, Chiangmai and Khao Khieo.²⁰⁵ An "ammunition/cargo pier" facility was made at the naval base Satthip.²⁰⁶ Eighteen radio communication and twelve utility bases dotted the country. In addition, 8,100 km of all-weather highways was completed and 1,013 new bridges

²⁰¹ *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, p. 543

²⁰² *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, p. 525

²⁰³ *U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand*, p. 553

²⁰⁴ *Ibid*

²⁰⁵ *U.S. Senate, United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Kingdom of Thailand*, November 1969, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969, p. 613-614

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*

traversed Thailand.²⁰⁷ American's became ever more present in the country as a result of the massive building projects. To man each facility, base, and training center, the employment of U.S. armed forces personnel was needed. Thailand was becoming a giant U.S. military base.

In the late 1950s, Thailand was one country in Southeast Asia that did not need to worry about communist infiltration and insurgencies. The influences of the Soviet Union and China in the region, specifically, Viet Nam and Laos were primary focuses of U.S. leaders. Communist power in Thailand was small. However, with pressure from U.S. policy-makers, the fear of a communist take-over was forced upon the country. Anti-communism was a policy and goal that drew Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States together. The fight against communism played well into the hands of each member of the Second Triumvirate. The policy was adopted by both Sarit and the monarchy but not for the same reasons as the United States. Sarit took advantage of U.S.'s domino theory to construct an image of "true" Thai nationalism based on the nation, religion, and king. Communism was inimical to them all. Royalists propped up King Bhumibol as the quintessential anti-communist. They manipulated opportunities to involve the king and themselves in Thai politics. During the early years of Sarit's regime, the monarchy slowly rose to significance by intervening in politics through anti-communist campaigns. A confluence of the Eisenhower administration, CIA, U.S. military, State Department, and USIS increased America's presence in the country. They sought to strengthen the country through police and military training and funding and psychological warfare. In the early stages of Second Triumvirate's relationship, anti-communism was a common point in which all three parties could work together on. The policy helped fulfill some personal interests for Sarit, the monarchy and the United States.

207 J. Alexander Caldwell, *American Economic Aid to Thailand*, D.C. Heath and Company: Massachusetts, 1974, p. 43; Columbia University School of Law, *Public International Development Financing in Thailand*, Public International Development Financing: A Research Project of the Columbia University School of Law, Report No. 4, New York, February, 1963, v+103, p, p. 78, 44

Chapter 4: Transforming the Second Triumvirate in the early 1960s

Anti-communism was a policy and common goal that brought Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States together as the Second Triumvirate. The crusade against communism became an ideal situation where each member of the coalition could pursue its own policies. However, fighting the red menace was only the surface of the relationship. Though Sarit and the monarchy joined the U.S. bandwagon against communism, it was not enough to sustain the alliance. Instead, the trappings and by-products of the anti-communist policies are what helped and allowed the Second Triumvirate to be strengthened and sustained. Sarit, his military clique, and the monarchy profited tremendously from the financial aid and business investments coming from the United States government. U.S. aid was given to Thailand in order to build its economic and physical infrastructure and help alleviate poverty. The aim was to create a capitalist economic system in the country. Western culture and capitalism were mechanisms to deter communism as an economic alternative. Thailand's economy boomed in a short period of time but not without some negative effects. Wealth was dispersed unevenly. Money and business contracts were funneled through Sarit, which gave him enormous power to distribute the benefits and wealth to those who were loyal and supportive of his regime. The military government was the gatekeeper to economic development and financial growth in the country. In the process, the monarchy regained all of its financial assets and was allowed to pursue its own business ventures. Royalists exploited the prestige of the king to gain contracts and build the monarchy's business empire. The advantages and benefits produced by the relationship of the Second Triumvirate grew and drew all three parties closer together. Each member was crucial to one another's growing power and wealth. As the money, fortune, and resources became more readily available and abundant, the Second Triumvirate was solidified. What began as a convenient relationship had transitioned into a powerful alliance.

Another important transformation took place in addition to the relationship of Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States being strengthened. The economic growth helped change the character of the Second Triumvirate. The United States placed a strong emphasis on Thailand as a geo-strategic ally in the region. Communist incursions in Viet Nam, Cambodia, and especially in Laos put Thailand on U.S. policy-maker's radar.²⁰⁸ The United States increased its security measures through defense-development projects. All economic aid and financial activities of the government were controlled by Sarit. In this position, he developed a system of patronage that consolidated the army elite and minimized internal rivalries. The army was growing from a factionalized institution to a more stable union. For the monarchy, King Bhumibol emerged from the shadows of the palace elites. His new enhanced role as an anti-communist, Sarit's legitimizer, and the symbol of the monarchy's power allowed him to have more command of the royal institution. The U.S. wanted to develop the country's infrastructure for security reasons; the Thai military became more of a unified institution and King Bhumibol was his own agent.

By the combined efforts of the Second Triumvirate, more so the United States, Thailand's economy grew dramatically. Beginning in 1958, the gross national product averaged over 6% a year and after 1963 the average was 7.8%.²⁰⁹ Per capita income was 6.2% higher than it was under Phibun (1947-1957).²¹⁰ The annual deficit of the annual balance of trade was offset. The agricultural sector rose 5%, while manufacturing GDP rose 11.4% in 1961.²¹¹ Balance of payments was in surplus and international reserves increased to \$800 million in U.S. dollars.²¹² Thailand became a major exporter

²⁰⁸ Bamrungsuk, p. 96; "Telegram from the State Department to Embassy," Telegram, No. 1076, January 26, 1962, Washington assures Thailand that America will support them from communist invasion.; "Telegram from the State Department to Embassy," Telegram, No. 1080, January 28, 1962, Washington assured the Laotian Royal Government that it would give them political, military and economic support in the event of a communist threat.

²⁰⁹ Fred von der Mehden, "The Military and Development in Thailand," *Journal of Comparative Administration*, Vol. 2, Nov. 1970, pg. 329

²¹⁰ Mehden, pg. 330

²¹¹ Robert J. Muscat, *The Fifth Tiger: A Study of Thai Development Policy*, New York, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994, p. 100

²¹² T. H. Silcock, *Thailand: Social and Economic Studies in Development*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1967, p. 86

of rice and teak. Tourism flourished.²¹³ Thailand's economic infrastructure became more modernized. It was able to participate in the global economic capitalist system. Thailand was becoming a capitalist economic powerhouse in Southeast Asia.

U.S. Money Machine

Part of the U.S.'s anti-communist policy was to implicitly build a capitalist system in Thailand. In order to do so, the country needed some major financial aid and foreign investments. Economic development was part of the Eisenhower Doctrine, originally created for the Middle East but applied globally.²¹⁴ U.S. economic aid totaled \$176 million between the years of 1958 and 1963.²¹⁵ Commerce and businesses received a big boost from foreign investments. Sarit eased trade regulations, limited the creation of state enterprises, and allowed foreign technicians into the country to train the Thai technocrats on economics.²¹⁶ Private enterprises and businesses boomed as U.S. investments and financial aid poured into the country. The number of joint U.S.-Thai firms increased from nine in 1947-1954 to seventeen in 1955-1960 to eighty-eight in 1961-1966.²¹⁷ Major Thai business conglomerates in imports and trade were financed by foreign partners.²¹⁸ Baker and Pasuk cite that U.S. firms were allowed 100% ownership as other foreign businesses were relegated to minority status.²¹⁹ In addition, U.S. leaders established a team of American businesses to advise the Thai government on how to attract foreign investments.²²⁰ Thailand became a safe place to invest as the political situation stabilized under the Second Triumvirate. The country's infrastructure and economy modernized in a manner that enabled it to participate in the global capitalistic system. U.S. leaders were molding Thailand into an image of the West.

²¹³ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 149

²¹⁴ Bamrungsuk, P. 85

²¹⁵ Caldwell, p. 166, Table A-3

²¹⁶ *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, December 5, 1958

²¹⁷ Bamrungsuk, p. 109

²¹⁸ Muscat, 1994, p. 116

²¹⁹ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 151

²²⁰ Silcock, p. 268

In addition to strengthening the private sector, the United States was also engaged in education reform. In concert with Sarit, the United States instituted the Fulbright scholarship program.²²¹ This grant sponsored the education of hundreds of Thai's who returned to their country as technocrats and military leaders.²²² Domestically, the General Education Development program was established in 1958. Twelve educational regions divided Thailand with schools that taught primary to secondary level education. A technical institute that had been formed in 1952 in Bangkok expanded dramatically with 200 faculty members, 34 buildings, and 5000 students by 1960.²²³ Education became another avenue of indoctrination as well. Sarit's military regime used it as a way to socialize the people.²²⁴ Loyalty to Buddhism, king, country, and anti-communism was in the curriculum. Education was part of the economic package given by the United States to transform the hearts and minds of the Thai people.

The Thai countryside was a target area for both U.S. and Thai government economic development projects. The USIS and United States Operations Mission (USOM) organizations teamed up with Thai government officials to build up the poorer regions of the country like the northeast. The USIS provided health care to the poor and built hospital centers.²²⁵ The USOM funded the building of highways, roads and waterways to facilitate travel from the center of the country to the periphery. A Master Plan for Primary Highways was developed in 1957. The plan was to lay 4,760 km of highway down. The biggest transportation project was the Friendship Road that extended from central Thailand to Nong Khai in Northeastern Thailand, which was across the Mekong River from Vientiane, Laos.²²⁶ The USOM trained Thai technicians on running electrical

²²¹ *Bangkok Post*, September 12, 1958

²²² Frank C. Darling, "American Policy in Thailand," *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 1, March 1962, p. 99-100

²²³ Caldwell, p. 47

²²⁴ Mehden, p. 326

²²⁵ *Mobile Information Team I, Trip 2*

²²⁶ Muscat, 1994, p. 116; Randolph, p. 22

power facilities.²²⁷ The Yanhee Dam became a major source of energy for the whole country. Airports in five cities outside of Bangkok were built.²²⁸ Hospitals and health care gave the impression that America and the Thai government cared about the people and wanted to meet their needs. Improved transportation increased the movement of goods and people. Electricity and power sources gave a semblance of modernity. Development initiatives allowed more Thai's to enjoy the conveniences of a Western lifestyle. The countryside was looking more "modern".

Sarit's Pariah System

Sarit was in complete control of economic initiatives for the government. Foreign financial aid for Thailand went through Sarit. To help the economy run more efficiently, Sarit reformed trade policies and bolstered the economic wing of the bureaucracy. He took control of the activities of the bureaucracy and placed the responsibilities of the government's budget under his jurisdiction.²²⁹ To increase foreign investments, he eased trade and tariff regulations. State enterprises ceased and foreign technicians were allowed into the country to help train the government.²³⁰ The country received much guidance and aid from the World Bank and other U.S. agencies.²³¹ To help train economic bureaucrats, from 1958 to 1963, a total of around 5500 students were sent abroad to receive training in civil service and bureaucracy.²³² Upon returning, these technocrats entered the bureaucracy and other government agencies and worked alongside their foreign counterparts in Thailand's government.²³³ In addition, the government formed agencies such as the Board of Investment, the Office of Fiscal Policy in the Ministry of Finance, and the National Economic

²²⁷ United States, United States Operations Mission, *Thai-American Economic and Technical Cooperation*, Bangkok: TAAVS, November 1962, p. PD 18

²²⁸ Randolph, p. 23

²²⁹ Thak, 2007, p. 184

²³⁰ Proclamation No. 33 of the Revolutionary Party, *Royal Thai Government Gazette*, December 5, 1958

²³¹ Muscat, p. 88; Silcock, p. 138

²³² Silcock, p. 87

²³³ Muscat, 1994, p. 7

Development Board.²³⁴ These agencies facilitated the planning of economic projects and the distribution of aid. Organized avenues for proposing projects, accountability for economic spending, and completion of projects improved.

Aid from the United States and the beginnings of a burgeoning economy greatly benefitted Sarit and the military regime. By controlling the distribution of economic aid and facilitating U.S. investments, Sarit used his position as leverage in making friends in the business community. The regime granted monopolies and other business prerogatives to those within the bureaucracy and business elite circles who were loyal to the regime. Sarit and his military group funneled revenue accrued from business investments into their coffers. F. W. Riggs calls this siphoning by Sarit's regime the "pariah entrepreneurship" model.²³⁵ He explains that "individual businessmen would be permitted by influential officials to carry on their activities, provided they contributed financially to the private incomes of their protectors and patrons in the government."²³⁶ Nine members of Sarit's group were on the board of directors of several finance banks.²³⁷ Sarit sat on the boards of 27 companies.²³⁸ By his death in December 1963, Sarit accumulated \$150 million in U.S. dollars.²³⁹ Sarit's cadres were not shy about siphoning funds for personal enrichment. U.S. aid was breeding an environment of corruption. Official government elites in and around Bangkok got their pieces of the prosperity pie with granted monopolies, tax benefits, and control over large business enterprises. Thus, a patron-client relationship ensued. Sarit received aid from the U.S. and then re-distributed the economic privileges to his supporters.

Sarit established a strong base of support among the upper echelons of Thai society with business privileges and revenue. Sarit consolidated "the elites in the *sakdina* and capitalist classes into

²³⁴ Muscat, 1994, p. 91

²³⁵ Riggs, p. 251

²³⁶ *ibid*

²³⁷ Riggs, p. 258-64, Table 6

²³⁸ Riggs, p. 274

²³⁹ Riggs, p. 244 and *New York Times*, December 9, 1963

a single economic ruling class under [the] military hegemony” and the monarchy.²⁴⁰ The *Sakdina* was a social hierarchical system in Thai society that has existed since the time of Ayutthaya (14th – 18th century). *Sakdina* was supposed to be outlawed but still existed in de facto during Sarit’s tenure.²⁴¹ Depending on where a person stood in the *Sakdina*, they would be accorded a certain amount of respect and privilege. Much of the informal power in Thai society rested with the upper affluent in the *Sakdina*, which consisted of royalty, princes, nobles and rich aristocrats. Sarit appeased and won over the upper class within the *Sakdina* to his policies by providing them with more financial opportunities from U.S. business investments.²⁴² Returns from the elites came in the form of financial and political support for Sarit and the regime.²⁴³ A strong business, bureaucratic, and military elite network was in-the-making. Sarit’s role as gatekeeper enabled him to consolidate social elites into his circle.

Royal Wealth and Power

The monarchy’s wealth increased dramatically under Sarit. During Phibun’s tenure, the palace’s budget was severely cut and limited.²⁴⁴ All royal properties came under the control of the state. When Sarit came to power he returned all financial assets, property and control over the palace’s budget to the monarchy. The palace budget went up to almost 28 million baht and grew each following year.²⁴⁵ With more money the monarchy had more freedom to pursue their own business ventures and accrue large amounts of revenue. This also helped Sarit as, according to Handley, the government tapped into the palace’s “private financial resources for use in various projects that would have strained the budget if they had been underwritten with government

²⁴⁰ David Elliot, *Thailand: Origins of Military Rule*, Zed Press: London, 1978, p. 118

²⁴¹ Girling, p. 25; William J. Siffin, *The Thai Bureaucracy: Institutional Change and Development*, Honolulu, HI: East-West Center Press, 1966, p. 17-18, 26

²⁴² Girling, p. 86, 124-125

²⁴³ Girling, p. 130

²⁴⁴ Handley, p. 49 and 57

²⁴⁵ Thak, p. 214

funds.²⁴⁶ Profits from palace projects helped augment Sarit's economic projects. Sarit facilitated the growth of the monarchy's wealth, which brought extra money for government uses.

An increase in the palace's budget allowed the monarchy to pursue interests in the private sector as another source of revenue. Some of the bigger companies within the monarchy's cache were the Siam Cement Company, Siam Commercial Bank, and Crown Property Bureau (CPB). Siam Cement Company became and is still the largest business conglomerate in the nation, according to Handley.²⁴⁷ The most important, and debatably one of the most powerful financial interests in Thailand is the CPB. Its mission is to oversee the royal investments, assets, property, and activities for the benefit of the Thai people.²⁴⁸ Through the maneuvering of King Bhumibol and palace elites, the CPB was the chief choice for joint domestic and foreign ventures. In the 1960s the CPB entered into joint-ventures with Firestone Tires, banks, insurance companies, and leading Thai textile manufacturers.²⁴⁹ These ventures brought large profits to the monarchy and businesses connected with the royal institution. The power of the palace was being augmented by the might of its businesses and financial resources.

Outside of finances, King Bhumibol and the monarchy participated in their own development projects through charity programs. King Bhumibol's involvement with charities began before Sarit came to power but afterwards his participation boomed. He was heavily involved in charities that funded public works projects for the northeast. The *Bangkok Post* stated that King Bhumibol's fundraisers were "[an] extra-budgetary channel" from which the monarchy built "hospitals, and new schools...without draining government funds..."²⁵⁰ The monarchy accumulated funds from donations and charity programs that were then used to support social

²⁴⁶ *ibid*

²⁴⁷ Handley, p. 36

²⁴⁸ Crown Property Bureau website, <http://www.crownproperty.or.th/en/about/obligation.html>, accessed February 1, 2012

²⁴⁹ Handley, p. 174

²⁵⁰ *Bangkok Post*, April 29, 1958

projects.²⁵¹ After natural disasters or epidemics, King Bhumibol and the monarchy collected donations for victims of the tragedies. For a cholera breakout, the king amassed 884,000 baht (U.S. \$44,200) and 10.8 million baht for a huge storm in the south.²⁵² The monarchy also used the money to establish education programs, and construct dams and canals to help farmers. King Bhumibol and the monarchy were slowly gaining more independence to dictate its own activities.

The benefits that came from the Second Triumvirate were great. U.S. economic aid and investments improved the private sector, commerce, and enabled the country to participate in the global economic system. Thailand became more modernized with all the infrastructural projects undertaken by the U.S. Sarit and his regime distributed financial benefits and opportunities to companies loyal to the government. Sarit and his allies lined their pockets handsomely from businesses and foreign aid. Simultaneously, the monarchy profited from foreign investments and businesses. Sarit allowed the palace to build its own economic empire by engaging in joint-ventures. In addition, King Bhumibol supported the government's policy of economic development through charity and social fundraisers. Everyone in the Second Triumvirate gained from the relationship: a capitalist system was growing in the country, Sarit and his allies got wealthier, and King Bhumibol and the monarchy had the freedom to participate in their own business opportunities and accumulate wealth.

Development = Security

Underneath the front of economic development was the Second Triumvirate's growing priority of security. The U.S. General Accounting Office cited a study done in 1961 of aid to Thailand saying, "After the termination of hostilities in Indochina in 1954 and in consequence of United States concern about strengthening independent countries in the area of Southeast Asia,

²⁵¹ Thak, 2007, p. 216

²⁵² Handley, p. 164

economic and technical assistance (to Thailand) was substantially increased.”²⁵³ Communism in Laos was gaining a lot of ground.²⁵⁴ The government in South Viet Nam was deteriorating and its hold on the country was tenuous. Thak argued that “As the country [Thailand] was influenced by international events, Thailand’s own ambitions concerning national development became entangled in the concept of security and the future of Southeast Asia as conceived by Washington.”²⁵⁵ Robert J. Muscat, a former Chief Economist of USAID, agreed with Thak when he argued that infrastructure development had a double purpose of security. Muscat said, “...security dimensions, U.S. military operations and military aid, and the range of regional conflicts and major power interests extend far beyond the content of development aid effort.” Economic development was a façade. The building of physical infrastructure and other projects had the purpose of stymieing communism. Security in Thailand became ever more vital to U.S. policy-makers, the stability of Sarit’s government, and the nascent rise of the monarchy.

Roads were built to easily quell opposition in the countryside. Sarit earmarked \$5.5 million for building “roads in inaccessible districts of the North and Northeast.”²⁵⁶ \$2.3 million went to the Border Patrol Police, and \$1.3 million to the provincial police for road construction.²⁵⁷ Better transportation were said to be built for the purpose of modernizing the infrastructure. However, in reality, they enabled the military to attack any insurgencies promptly and allowed the government and U.S. military to gain more control of the hinterlands and ethnic minorities.²⁵⁸

Airport construction served the primary purpose of airstrikes for the U.S. air force. Airports were built in Korat, Takhil, Udorn, Ubon, and Chiang Mai by February 1960. In his book on policy

²⁵³ The Comptroller-General of the United States, *Examination of Economic and Technical Assistance Program for Thailand, International Cooperation Administration, Department of State, Fiscal Years 1955-1960*, Report to the Congress of the United States, August 1961, p. 2

²⁵⁴ Thak, 2007, p. 165

²⁵⁵ Thak, 2007, p. 167

²⁵⁶ Caldwell, p. 49

²⁵⁷ Ibid

²⁵⁸ Randolph, p. 20-21

studies between the U.S. and Thailand, R. Sean Randolph references an interview with U.S. Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson (1958-1961), where he explains how the airports were used by the United States. The airbase sites in Thailand were originally supposed to be for “post-strike recovery” missions over China, launched from Guam. However, with “the general decline in the security environment in Southeast Asia,” their uses were changed.²⁵⁹ The USOM explains the objectives of the airports more plainly; they were “to provide Thailand with a system of improved airports, located by both economic and military considerations.”²⁶⁰ By the time of the Viet Nam War, the bases saw much use from U.S. air reconnaissance and supply and bombing mission over Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam. Air transportation probably facilitated the movement of trade goods from the periphery to the center but security issues in the region were the main reasons they were built.

Thak makes an insightful analysis of the United States obsession with protecting Thailand. He said, “It is quite clear that the Thai armed forces did not need such elaborate facilities; these construction projects could be only construed as preparations for supplying the needs of the modern American military machine.”²⁶¹ Thak could not have been more truthful in his conclusion. Communism was of no threat in Thailand, and subversion to the government was minimal. U.S. policy-makers, with implicit support from Sarit, went overboard in constructing Thailand into a war machine.

Radio communication helped to incorporate the people in the countryside more fully with the center. For most of modern Thai history, the outer regions were disconnected from the center.²⁶² Radio installations were built all around the country, while the government, with U.S. assistance, distributed free transistor radios to many villages. The Thai government took advantage of this new

²⁵⁹ Randolph, p. 24

²⁶⁰ *RTG/USOM Economic and Technical Project Summary FY 1951-1972*, Program Office, United States Operations Mission to Thailand, Agency for International Development, March 1973, project 493-11-370-103

²⁶¹ Thak, 2007, p. 176

²⁶² *Mobile Information Team I, Trip* 2p. 1

media platform by propagating the military regime and the monarchy's prestige.²⁶³ The USIS was heavily involved with helping the Thai government in this endeavor. USIS officials wrote radio broadcasts to help inform the Thai people about the regime, the monarchy, and the United States.²⁶⁴ Communication enabled the people in the countryside to become more aware of the military regime and the monarchy. Distance was shortened. Most importantly, the United States was fighting a psychological war in Thailand. Anti-communist propaganda was part of the Cold War strategy. Under the guise of modernizing Thailand's communication technology, the USIS used the opportunity to indoctrinate the country.

Special teams were formed to increase the Thai government's knowledge of conditions in the countryside. State agencies such as the Mobile Development Unit (MDU) worked with U.S. officials from the USIS. Sarit established the MDU in 1962 with the purpose of sponsoring "the economic and political development of Thailand" and more particularly "in the areas classified as sensitive and remote."²⁶⁵ According to the plans for the 1963 fiscal year, Sarit wanted the "sensitive and remote" areas to become developed and experience the same prosperous wealth as other regions by 1966.²⁶⁶ The MDU and USIS units traveled the country surveying the needs of the people, giving health care, building schools, and irrigation canals and providing tools to grow crops.²⁶⁷ MDU units were staffed by military and civilian personnel under the command of the army. The MDU and USIS were Sarit's mechanism of surveillance in the outer regions. By engaging in

²⁶³ Handley, p. 149

²⁶⁴ *Review of United States Information Agency Operations, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings before the Subcommittee on State Department Organization and Foreign Operations of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, September 22 – October 6, 1958, 85th Congress, Second Session, p. 40, 48; Mobile Information Team I Trip 3: a report by the United States Information Service, Bangkok, May 21 to June 4, 1962, United States Information Service, U.S. Government Press: Bangkok, 1962, p. 1*

²⁶⁵ James P. Thompson, *The Thai Military: An Analysis of its Role in the Thai Nation*, Dissertation at Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, 1973, p. 112

²⁶⁶ Government of Thailand, Office of the Prime Minister, National Security Organization, "Mobile Development Magazine Quarterly", Translated by JUSMAG, Thailand, October 1963, p. 24

²⁶⁷ *Mobile Information Team I, Trip 3; Mobile Information Team I, Trip 7; Mobile Information Team I, Trip 8*

development projects in the “sensitive regions,” Sarit could incorporate the Northeast and North more fully into the nation-state.

The economic benefits were plentiful for the Second Triumvirate. Each member had the autonomy to take part in activities that increased their individual wealth and furthered their own interests. Frank C. Girling argued, “The American role...was...of stabilization – that is, bolstering and maintaining the power, wealth, and influence of elite leaders...”²⁶⁸ American financial aid and presence in the country provided “a stable situation in Thailand [that] facilitated the economic interests of the Thai elite and of American corporate enterprise.”²⁶⁹ Sarit and the monarchy had vested interests in sticking together with the United States. The United States transformed Thailand into a giant military base. The Thai armed forces, and in particular, the army, became more cohesive through patronage. The monarchy gained more wealth and freedom from the economic boost. King Bhumibol’s prestige superseded the influence and control of palace members. He gained more control of the monarchy’s activities. U.S. policy-makers dictated the economic policies of the country to strengthen regional stability. Sarit consolidated the support of the military and social elites. King Bhumibol’s prestige was strengthened through USIS propaganda. Economic development was a cloak for security. U.S. organizations built and funded infrastructure projects to expedite the logistics of the Thai and U.S. military. The Second Triumvirate gained more together than they could apart.

²⁶⁸ Girling, p. 91

²⁶⁹ Girling, p. 92

Chapter 5: From the Second Triumvirate to the Unshakeable Military-King Bhumibol

Alliance

By the time of Sarit's death in December of 1963, the Second Triumvirate no longer looked like a shaky alliance of convenience in 1957. The military and the monarchy formed an alliance that mutually protected one another's institution and power. Sarit only lasted in power for six years and yet the alliance that he built – with a modicum of help from the U.S. and even royalists – between the military and the monarchy controlled and manipulated Thai politics and survived some 50 years more. Policies and the evolving nature of the Second Triumvirate's relationship created a military-monarchical alliance. The military became more of an enduring institution no longer distinguished by its leader. Instead of being loyal solely to Sarit or a particular general, which it had been, it was now based on the king. One of the army's main duties was to protect the royal institution. As shown in Chapter 4, King Bhumibol had grown into a powerful figure in the monarchy. His main source of support was the army. As the army promoted itself as defender of the monarchy, the king praised it and became its patron. He was no longer a pawn of the royalists but exercised his own agency without royalist dictation. As King Bhumibol gained control over the palace budget and participated in charity programs, it facilitated his ability to build an independent political power base or network of supporters. Only with a network were he and the monarchists able to construct or reconstruct the dhammaraja, or god-king image, that became so important in cloaking the dictatorial military governments from then on. As for the United States, it was getting sucked into the quagmire that was Viet Nam, which made the Thai military-monarchy/King Bhumibol partnership more crucial to U.S. foreign policy in the region. By the early 1960s, the United States was paying more attention to Thailand and had a vested interest in propping up both the royal Thai military and King Bhumibol.

Sarit's legacies

In six years, Sarit transformed the military regime and the orientation of the armed forces dramatically. His clique and others in Sarit's circle were all paid off through financial benefits. They bought in to Sarit's philosophy and system. His style of leadership in politics and in running the country was impressive. Sarit was seen by some as a decisive executive because of his ability to cut through bureaucratic red tape. U.S. Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson (1958-1961) complimented Sarit's handling of domestic affairs. Johnson stated, "Sarit has gathered around him probably the most capable cabinet in Thai history and while Sarit makes final decisions, questions are exhaustively discussed within the cabinet and with others and are generally represent[ing] broad consensus of views." Further, Thai "conservatives are particularly satisfied with Sarit's deliberate enhancement of the prestige of the monarchy."²⁷⁰ The reality behind Sarit's success, however, was not that he was a good politician but that he was surrounded by military leaders and allies who supported his policies. His cabinet was stacked with his cronies and thus, he could pursue his interests with little opposition. The stake-holders within Sarit's power structure had investments that hinged on the regime's success. His military regime was a well-oiled machine that worked according to Sarit's dictates.

To enhance the unity of his government, Sarit created a uniform mindset of Thai governance among the bureaucracy and military elites. Sarit's goal was to limit rivalries and the split between the military and civilian politicians. Thak said, "He [Sarit] wanted...to create institutionalized linkages between the members of the bureaucratic hierarchies so that they would understand the importance of cooperation with each other to realize regime goals."²⁷¹ One way to tie all the cliques together was the National Defense College, which was instituted by Phibun in 1955. According to Thak, the training subjected "bureaucrats to a common institution of learning,

²⁷⁰ "Telegram from the Embassy in Thailand to the Department of State," *The Foreign Relations of the United States: Southeast Asia, 1958-1960*, December 24, 1960, Washington: U.S Government Printing Office, Vol. XV, 1992, p. 1168

²⁷¹ Thak, 2007, p. 187

government propaganda, and personal contacts....”²⁷² Further, Thak says the college resulted in “a high level of bureaucratic solidarity.”²⁷³ The school had classes on varying topics such as political theory, military concerns, bureaucratic protocol, and administrative practices. The indoctrination from the curriculum built “unity and [got] rid of cliques.”²⁷⁴ However, Thak’s final analysis was that the “major purpose of the socialization program was to try to convince civilian bureaucracy of the legitimacy of military supremacy.”²⁷⁵ A tradition of military involvement and dominance in politics was established and endured well after Sarit’s death in 1963. The regime was fitted according to the governing and administrative principles established by Sarit.

The main part of the system that Sarit created was the bond between the military institution and King Bhumibol. Sarit and his military group were different from Phibun’s 1932 military coup group.²⁷⁶ As was said before, they were not educated in the West but in Thailand and had stronger affinities towards Thai culture.²⁷⁷ The king was Sarit’s source of legitimacy instead of popular support through elections. Sarit proclaimed the new mission of the military government during his 1958 coup as being centered on the monarchy by saying,

Most important of all, the Revolutionary Group will always hold that the king and Thai nation are inseparable. ...The Revolutionary Group will preserve the basis of this institution with its full strength and ability and will do everything to keep the king in a revered position, permitting no act tortious to the king....²⁷⁸

Even though this quotation was used in an earlier part of the paper, its application can be meaningful in this context as well. Sarit planted himself on the moral high ground by appealing to one of the most important Thai-cultural symbols, the king. He re-established the preeminent position of the monarchy in Thailand by linking the institution with the nation and the military.

²⁷² Thak, 2007, p. 188

²⁷³ Ibid

²⁷⁴ Ibid

²⁷⁵ Ibid

²⁷⁶ Welch Jr. and Smith, p. 87-89; Thak 1979, p. 310

²⁷⁷ Darlings, 1965, p. 58

²⁷⁸ *The Royal Thai Government Gazette*, October 20, 1958; *Siam Rath*, October 23, 1958

Thailand was truly Thai because of the king. Thai nationalism was now centered on the monarchy.²⁷⁹ Unlike his predecessor, Phibun, Sarit established himself and the military regime as protectors of King Bhumibol and the royal institution. Thus, the army was protecting Thai nationalism. No longer would the military and the monarchy be separated as the 1932 coup was supposed to do.

Sarit promoted the association between King Bhumibol and armed forces through special ceremonies. Soldiers when enlisting made an oath to protect the monarchy. Each regiment received a flag with symbols of the monarchy on them. Handley argues that this act was “a mark of bonding for the king and his soldiers.”²⁸⁰ Another event linking the king and the soldiers was the review of the troops during Army Day.²⁸¹ This occasion was frequently attended by the king and queen.²⁸² King Bhumibol would pay his respects to the ancient Thai military leader and king, Naresaun. The king attended every Army Day from 1959 to 1970.²⁸³ As Sarit came to power and supported the monarchy, the army’s loyalty followed suit. King Bhumibol became a patron of the military. The monarchy supported the armed forces and the power they exuded. After almost two decades of estrangement and competition from 1932 to 1957, the two institutions were now allied together. Sarit’s tenure was the beginning of the military-monarchical alliance, which has controlled and influenced Thailand till this day.

Some paramilitary organizations also fell under King Bhumibol’s circle of sponsorship. Sarit used U.S. aid to strengthen paramilitary groups such as the Border Patrol Police (BPP). Subsequently, with funds from the U.S. Military Advisory Program, the BPP created the Volunteer Defense Corps (VDC), and then in the early 1970s the Village Scouts and the Red Gaur were

²⁷⁹ Toru Yano, “Sarit and Thailand’s ‘Pro-American Policy’,” *The Developing Economies*, 1968, Vol. 6, Issue 3, p. 293; Wilson, 1962, p. 82, Thak, p. 108

²⁸⁰ Handley, p. 144

²⁸¹ Bamrungsuk, p. 79; *Biography and Works of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat: A Cremation Book*, p. 288-290

²⁸² Handley, p. 144

²⁸³ Ibid

formed to supplement protection measures established by the state and the monarchy.²⁸⁴ Katherine A. Bowie, an anthropologist who researched rural state-loyalty movements, concluded that “BPP personnel frequently acted as royal bodyguards, and the king, queen and princess mother usually visited remote hill tribe villages in the company of BPP units.”²⁸⁵ In regards to the VDC, the king signed two royal decrees in 1961 that legitimized the organization. The VDC were royally sanctioned to recruit, train and “supervise volunteers to perform the paramilitary functions of village defense and local intelligence.”²⁸⁶ Northern and Northeastern Thailand saw large establishments of VDC and BPP units. Slowly the BPP and VDC became integral allies of the monarchy. By supporting paramilitary groups, King Bhumibol reached populations at the grassroots-level by establishing loyalty outside of Bangkok. VDC forces, in particular, were enlisted among the villagers and stationed locally. The monarchy’s popularity spread from the center to the outer regions. King Bhumibol’s line of protection now included the paramilitary in addition to the army. The military institution and its auxiliaries’ top loyalty were to the king.

Monarchy

As Sarit’s legitimacy relied on King Bhumibol, the re-growth of the monarchy’s prestige and power was in-part the result of the military’s loyalty. When Sarit’s military group came to power, the policies that stymied the monarchy were reversed. The years 1957-58 were a key turning point in Thai and the monarchy’s history. Instead of fading into the background of politics King Bhumibol and the palace returned to play a central role in Thailand. Duncan McCargo places Sarit as the catalyst for the restoration of the royal institution.²⁸⁷ Handley cites Sarit as one of King Bhumibol’s key allies in the modern history of the monarchy.²⁸⁸ The role of the monarchy was taken from an

²⁸⁴ Thak, p. 177; Handley, p. 222-223; Bowie, p. 55-56; *Mobile Information Team, Trip 14*,

²⁸⁵ Bowie, p. 97

²⁸⁶ Thompson Jr., p. 176

²⁸⁷ McCargo, p. 503

²⁸⁸ Handley, p. 154

archaic institution to a functional political entity in the modern Thai state. Without Sarit, King Bhumibol may have remained outside of politics and relegated to a mere figurehead. Chapter 4, we saw that Sarit gave more freedom to King Bhumibol and the monarchy to have more public exposure and engage in its own economic activities. The wealth and public prestige accrued, massively strengthened King Bhumibol's ability to build alliances throughout Thai society, which established his dhammaraja image.

The monarchy's return to the financial community became an avenue to enlarge the king's influence. King Bhumibol used the economic might of the Crown Property Bureau to gain access to many revenue building opportunities. King Bhumibol made connections and recruited allies among business elites.²⁸⁹ Tax benefits and special business preferences were given to companies owned completely or jointly by the palace.²⁹⁰ Business tycoons and elites became essential players in the king's circle of friends. Much like Sarit, King Bhumibol and the monarchy had a system of patronage. Those loyal to the king received royal support, access to capital and joint-ventures, and were preferred companies for business contracts.²⁹¹ King Bhumibol was in a powerful position as the CPB was the center of huge business transactions and activities. Business favors were distributed in return for loyalty and support for the king.

The king's network of allies grew into a formidable force. Patronage became an economic and political weapon for the monarchy to build alliances with rich elites, a growing middle-class and business owners, government elites, and palace members were consolidated into a powerful social group.²⁹² By the 1970s the king's circle of supporters was approximately 6,000 strong.²⁹³ Duncan McCargo wrote a strong piece on the monarchy's web of alliances or what he calls, "Network

²⁸⁹ Handley, p. 174-175

²⁹⁰ Ibid

²⁹¹ Ibid

²⁹² Thak, 2007, p. 213

²⁹³ Kevin Hewison, "A Book, the King and the 2006 Coup," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 38, No. 1, February 2008, p. 206

Monarchy.”²⁹⁴ McCargo argues that through a network of alliances throughout Thai society and government, King Bhumibol and palace allies were able to participate indirectly and directly in politics.²⁹⁵ Some elites took advantage of the name of the king by pretending to speak for him. Most of the time, King Bhumibol did not object. Patronage brought the monarchy back into the commercial sector and elite circles. By gaining access to business elites and those with money, the power and legitimacy of the king was bolstered.

In addition to regaining control of his own financial activities, King Bhumibol returned to his position as main-patron of Buddhism, which brought him more connections throughout society. The primary purpose of religious festivals and events for the king was to show his religious piety as a dhammaraja king but it was also an opportunity to win allies. The financing of religious festivals came from businesses and community organizations. In return for their good deeds, companies received appreciation and merit from the community, and more importantly, from the king. State officials and companies were eager to gain merit and public support from sponsoring the important religious ceremonies like *Kathin*.²⁹⁶ Handley cites how the monarchy took advantage of this money-for-merit system. The monarchy farmed “out the royal *kathin* to...lesser royal temples to wealthy non-royal Thais willing to spend their own money to advance royal prestige in exchange for palace connections and a share of royal merit.”²⁹⁷ Religious events brought King Bhumibol and the role of the monarch back to the center of Thai religion. By relinking the king with Buddhism, the people’s reverence and support for the monarchy increased. Handley argues aptly that donations in return for merit was “arguably...the single most important factor in the Bhumibol restoration, as it rendered

²⁹⁴ McCargo, pg. 499-519

²⁹⁵ McCargo, p. 503

²⁹⁶ Riggs, p. 104; Handley, p. 164; Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 178; In the ceremony the king replaces the robes of the monks.

²⁹⁷ Handley, p. 176; Gray, p. 611

him the undisputed master of social welfare and the absolute paragon of selfless sacrifice.”²⁹⁸ The idea of a dhammaraja was solidified by adherers and those who sponsored religious ceremonies for the king. In the meantime, buying the king’s patronage through sponsoring the religious events made him into a powerful political figure. Businesses and elites were willing to pay the king for his support.

Much like religious events, donating to the king’s charities resulted in more popularity for the king. There was a belief that when people contributed to the monarchy’s social programs they gained merit in return, just like the religious ones.²⁹⁹ However, the king’s selfless example also affected the people. Handley argues that as people saw King Bhumibol giving money for charity programs “the more they were willing to give him, [King Bhumibol], in exchange for a share of his great merit.”³⁰⁰ Donors received good karma and also established connections with the monarchy. King Bhumibol’s participation in religious ceremonies and fundraisers for the poor reified his image as a dhammaraja or god-king. He set the pattern for how all Buddhists should live: attending to religious duties and being charitable.

Throughout King Bhumibol’s reign the palace and later those aligned with the monarchy, created and reinforced the idea of the king being a dhammaraja or god-like king. Jack Fong, writing about the connection between Thai nationalism and the king, quotes a scholar named Michael K. Connors saying, “The God-like status of Bhumibol was...something he and hundreds in the palace and other agencies have contrived to create.”³⁰¹ As King Bhumibol made connections through business contacts, religious ceremonies, and charity programs, the idea of the dhammaraja grew, proliferated and endured. Some truly believed the narrative while others bought into it because it

²⁹⁸ Handley, p. 130-131

²⁹⁹ Thak, 2007, p. 214; Handley, p. 149

³⁰⁰ Handley, p. 164

³⁰¹ Fong, p. 676

benefitted them. In advertising King Bhumibol as a dhammaraja, it sanctioned the actions of those associated with the monarchy.

King Bhumibol became politically active through the support of the regime and its future policies. Public support for the government's policies was garnered with his royal voice. During Sarit's tenure, King Bhumibol and the monarchy laid the foundation for the royal institution's networks. Alliances with businesses, religious leaders, and the military gave the king the tools necessary to manipulate and influence Thai politics.

The U.S.'s Thailand

In the eyes of U.S. policy-makers, by the early 1960s, communism seemed to be gaining more ground in Southeast Asia. The Communist Pathet Lao in Laos controlled two large provinces in the country. Southern Viet Nam was in turmoil and unstable with Ngo Dinh Diem's regime. Communism seemed to be "winning". With the region's stability in question, the Kennedy administration saw fit to maintain Thailand's security and government. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, in a meeting with defense and foreign policy specialists, stated that Viet Nam and Thailand would be the best places to fight against communism.³⁰² Even with little threat of communism in Thailand, U.S. leaders felt a sense of urgency in protecting and placing more focus and attention on it.

President Kennedy's approach to maintaining the stability of the country and its leaders was to support the counter-insurgency and psychological warfare. Responses to insurgencies were to be based on minimal military thrusts and large support for the funding and training of local counterinsurgency, paramilitary groups. As a result of success in the Philippines against communist forces, the building of counterinsurgency forces was implemented in Thailand.³⁰³ Kennedy stated,

³⁰² "Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: Laos," April 29, 1961, *United States Foreign Relations: Laos Crisis, 1961-1963*, Vol. XXIV, 1994, p. 151

³⁰³ *The Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 2, 1971, List of Documents 107, p. 660-661

He continued, "...the main burden of local defense against overt attack...must rest on local populations and forces." "...we must be prepared to make a substantial contribution in the form of strong, highly mobile forces trained in this type of warfare..."³⁰⁴ As said before, some U.S. aid went to training and funding counter-insurgency/ para-military organizations such as the BPP, PARU, VDC, and MDU.³⁰⁵ USIS units traveled throughout Northeast and North Thailand building bridges of loyalty between the people in the rural areas and the government.³⁰⁶ U.S. presence and military influence, in Thailand, grew from Eisenhower's tenure to Kennedy's. The United States had a vested interest in buttressing the military regime and the monarchy.

Sarit and King Bhumibol were two pillars on which U.S. foreign policy in Thailand rested. As the military government and King Bhumibol's power grew, U.S. efforts to stabilize the region would be secured. Instability in the region made U.S. leaders pay more attention to the political situation of Thailand. The military regime and King Bhumibol kept the country from falling to communism and established a semblance of steadiness in the region. Baker and Pasuk, two scholars of Thailand, cite the role the U.S. played in the military-monarchical alliance. They said,

The U.S. brought together the military, businessmen, and royalists – the three forces tussled since 1932 – in a powerful alliance. Together they resurrected and embellished the vision of a dictatorial strong state, demanding unity in order to achieve development to fight off an external enemy... – communism.³⁰⁷

Baker and Pasuk summarized plainly the profitability of the union of the Second Triumvirate by saying, "the U.S. secured a [military] base [,] the monarchy [was] revived [and] the generals enjoyed power and profit."³⁰⁸ The United States played a crucial role in welding the military and King Bhumibol and the monarchy as allies. Sarit was the catalyst by turning to the monarchy for support, but U.S. aid enabled the relationship to progress well after Sarit's death in 1963. Sarit stabilized the

³⁰⁴ *The Pentagon Papers*, Vol. 2, 1971, Public Statements 6, p. 800

³⁰⁵ Refer to chapters 3 and 4 for a refresher

³⁰⁶ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Thailand," *Foreign Relations of the United States, Southeast Asia, 1961-1963*, July 8, 1961, , Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, Vol. XXIII, 1994, p. 875-876

³⁰⁷ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 168. Though businessmen were not analyzed as a separate group, in this paper they were seen as part of the alliances created by Sarit and King Bhumibol. See Chapter 3 for more details.

³⁰⁸ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 180

domestic scene that allowed U.S. policies to be implemented. King Bhumibol gave his royal sanction to both Sarit and the U.S., thus further strengthening their ability to pursue anti-communist policies and secure the country from subversion. The United States and Sarit's support of the monarchy became a large factor in the institution's re-ascension to political power. By leaning on one another, members of the Second Triumvirate pursued endeavors that benefitted themselves and each other concurrently. Together, all three parties gained what they wanted and what they desired, surprisingly, coincided; Thai political stability through stymieing communism, legitimacy for the military government and the restoration of the monarchy.

Thailand came under the protective umbrella of the United States through the Rusk-Thanat Communiqué on March 6, 1962. The Communiqué stated that it was the "firm intention of the United States to aid Thailand, its ally and historic friend, in resisting Communist aggression and subversion."³⁰⁹ In short, the communiqué created a bilateral alliance that was stronger than the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) agreement, which required consensus from all parties before acting militarily.³¹⁰ This new pact bypassed the clause in the SEATO treaty and allowed the U.S. and Thailand more freedom to take forceful action against communism bilaterally. As a result of the communiqué, the number of U.S. troops stationed in the country increased.

The first test of the communiqué came after a conflict in Laos re-escalated in 1962. 1,800 marines were immediately sent to the Thai-Lao border. Later a force of 10,000 troops were moved into the country, and the U.S. 7th fleet was stationed in the Gulf of Thailand.³¹¹ The *New York Times* published an official U.S. government statement regarding the move. It stated that American troops

³⁰⁹ "Secretary Rusk, Thai Foreign Minister Discuss Matter of Mutual Concern," *Department of State Bulletin*, March 26, 1962, Vol. XLVI, No. 1187, p. 498; see also, Darling, 1965, p. 208

³¹⁰ Randolph, p. 41-42. The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization was established in 1954 that included Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States. It was a security alliance that called for a united response to communist threats. All nations had to ratify a military action before any force was used.

³¹¹ Randolph, p. 43

were sent “to help ensure the territorial integrity of this peaceful country.”³¹² Troops withdrew after several months. However, in the wake of the Viet Nam War, U.S. military forces returned and peaked at 47,600 while the number of Thai nationals employed by the military reached 43,750.³¹³ U.S. military aid climaxed at \$123 million dollars, which exploded Thailand’s military budget from \$20 million a year to \$250 million a year.³¹⁴ Thailand was a strategic military base for U.S. activities against communism in the region and specifically in Viet Nam and Laos. The Communiqué of 1962 gave the U.S. an ability to increase their presence and intervene in Thailand’s domestic affairs. Sarit relinquished part of Thailand’s sovereignty to the United States, but in return, U.S. money and military presence helped to stabilize the country for Sarit and King Bhumibol. Thailand became the U.S.’s “unsinkable aircraft carrier” against communism in Southeast Asia.³¹⁵

Military-Monarchical Alliance

Sarit in six years groomed the military into a unified institution that based its legitimacy on protecting the nation and specifically the king. The bureaucracy and military echelons bought into Sarit’s policies because of the monetary benefits and indoctrination efforts of the regime. Loyalty and the legitimacy of the armed forces in controlling politics were in large measure based on the monarchy. Sarit wedded the military to King Bhumibol, and he accepted the proposal and became a patron of the institution. A strong relationship between the institutions of the monarchy and the military ensued. Paul Chambers wrote an article about the role of the military in Thai politics. Along with Thak and Handley, Chambers sees 1957-58 as the time when the monarchy’s power was reestablished, with the help of Sarit and the military. Chambers shows the strong connection of the monarchy and military by arguing, “The clout of Thailand’s military cannot be understood without

³¹² *New York Times*, May 16, 1962

³¹³ *ibid*

³¹⁴ Baker and Pasuk, 2005, p. 149

³¹⁵ Randolph, p. 49; United States MACT Public Affairs Office, Bangkok: Foreign Military Sales and Assistance Facts Data Systems & Reports Division, Comptroller, DSAA, April 1974, p. 17 and 19

examining its relations to” the monarchy and its auxiliaries.³¹⁶ The converse is also true. The power and influence of the Thai military in the country’s history is inseparably connected with the king and the monarchy. The military’s responsibility and loyalty was with the king and the monarchy and not to democratic ideals or any other political leader.³¹⁷ The military-monarchical alliance was crucial to Sarit, to future political-military leaders, and to King Bhumibol’s success in controlling Thai politics. Sarit and other generals could justify violating human rights and freedom of speech in the name of protecting the king. In the future, the king would intervene openly or work covertly through intermediaries to change governments and policies. King Bhumibol interceded with little fear of negative repercussions because of the protection of the army and other allies. Democracy and political development were stymied because of the confluence of these two institutions. This military-monarchical alliance has persisted throughout Thai history and continues to influence politics today.³¹⁸

King Bhumibol’s renewed political, economic, and religious prestige provided Sarit and the military regime with the necessary support it needed to run the country as a dictatorship. King Bhumibol frequently spoke on behalf of the regime. One of King Bhumibol’s roles was to legitimize Sarit’s military government and its policies both domestically and abroad. The good image of the king helped deflect attacks from the international and Thai community.³¹⁹ Supamit Pitipat argued aptly the importance of the monarchy’s political role in the military government.

Pitipat stated,

At the beginning, it was possible for the 1957 coup group leaders to base their claim to power solely on the fact that it had responded to the public demand that the corrupt Phibun regime be replaced; but this could by no means be used as its long-term basis for its authoritarian rule and the suspension of the constitution and free election.³²⁰

³¹⁶ Chambers, p. 837

³¹⁷ Chambers, p. 838

³¹⁸ Chambers, p. 856-858; Connors, p. 355

³¹⁹ Thak, 2007, p. 206-207

³²⁰ Pitipat, p. 66-67

The monarchy's support would give Sarit the essential "long-term" power and legitimacy to be a dictator and implement his policies. Speeches given by the king "reinforced Sarit's national development policy and indicated the importance of the military role in national administration."³²¹ In one address in 1961, King Bhumibol encouraged the people to "cooperate with the government" because by doing so "then would the nation profit."³²² As a result of his royalty, good karma and prestige, King Bhumibol's words carried with them power to sway public opinion for the military government.³²³ The king's sanction of Sarit's regime had serious implications for the country and future of Thailand. Sarit had almost free-reign to oppress the development of democracy, violate human rights, and restrict political freedoms in Thailand. King Bhumibol was propping up a dictatorship that was friendly with the United States, which brought more U.S. aid and influence into the country. More importantly, the military, and the monarchy formed an alliance that mutually protected one another's institutions and power.

From 1958 to 1963, Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States influenced and changed Thai politics. Sarit transformed the armed forces into a cohesive institution. The army was no longer seen as a tool in the hands of a certain leader but now as defender of Thai nationalism and in particular, the king. King Bhumibol rose to preeminence politically. He became an agent unto himself and more independent from princes and palace elites. The king used his newfound political and economic freedoms to build strong networks and alliances with business leaders, military brass, and influential politicians. All those incorporated into the monarchy's circle allowed the king to pursue activities to support his prestige and religious piety. In addition, King Bhumibol was a strong advocate of the military and the regime. As for the United States, Thailand's security was a concern

³²¹ Pitipat, p. 68

³²² Thak, 2007, p. 209

³²³ Ibid

to U.S. geo-strategic interests. U.S. leaders and organizations turned the country into a giant war headquarters for U.S. operations. King Bhumibol and the military regime were good allies for the United States and its anti-communist agenda. Both incorporated anti-communism in their rhetoric and policies. Most important of all the changes is the relationship established between the military and King Bhumibol. The bond between these two would be unshakeable. The two parties sanctioned and supported one another's actions and policies. The army's legitimacy and *raison d'Être* was primarily based on the king. King Bhumibol's royal blessing emboldened the army to intervene in his behalf and protect the institution. The king's clean image as a "dhammaraja" shielded the military government from internal and foreign criticism. King Bhumibol became a strong supporter of the military and the regime.³²⁴ The king sanctioned Sarit's harsh rule and his dictatorial policies. The Second Triumvirate created a relationship between the military and the king in Thailand that would endure even until today.

³²⁴ Thak, 2007, p. 206

Conclusion

The pairing of Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States almost never came to pass. Sarit was not well known or even liked by neither many U.S. leaders nor the king. The CIA and U.S. embassy did not pay attention to Sarit because Phao looked like he would be Phibun's successor. As for the monarchy, its role in politics was nominal and King Bhumibol was still a puppet in the hands of palace elites. The 1957 coup changed the face of Thai politics by removing Phibun and Phao from the picture and brought Sarit, the monarchy, and the United States into a fragile relationship.

The Second Triumvirate transformed into a formidable alliance. For the United States, Sarit and King Bhumibol were a great package. Both Sarit and King Bhumibol were staunch anti-communists. Unlike Phibun, Sarit did not waver in his anti-communist stance after 1958. Sarit attacked all opposition and public dissent, even going so far as to violate human rights and civil liberties. Sarit needed the king's support against Phibun and to legitimize his regime. A military government alone would not have gained enough support from the Thai people and the international community.³²⁵ Without U.S. funding, Sarit would have been unable to pay for his military and the support of his allies. U.S. aid and investments helped build the economic infrastructure of Thailand. Subsequently, many of the businesses established benefitted Sarit and his constituents. Without Sarit and the United States, King Bhumibol may have remained in obscurity. Instead, the monarchy was revitalized and became one of the central powers in Thai politics. King Bhumibol provided the spiritual sanction for all of the growth in Sarit's regime. Thak said that the monarchy "performs the function of helping [to] consolidate a complex of alliances between political, royal, bureaucratic, and business families."³²⁶ King Bhumibol was a propaganda tool for the United States in its fight against communism in Southeast Asia. The king and queen's good image

³²⁵ *Siam Rath*, October 27, 1958

³²⁶ Thak, 2007, p. 213-214

amassed support from policymakers in the U.S., which brought more funding for the military regime. The shotgun wedding of the Second Triumvirate turned into a lasting relationship. Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States needed one another to bring to pass the goals and policies each member pursued.

During the years of 1957 to 1963 Sarit, King Bhumibol, and the United States left many legacies behind that can be seen today in Thai politics. Sarit set a pattern for military intervention in politics and based the institutions legitimacy on the king. On December 8, 1963, Sarit Thanarat died and his underling, Thanom Kittikachorn took his place. It was apparent from the beginning of Thanom's term that he would keep Thailand in-line with Sarit's policies of supporting the United States and the monarchy.³²⁷ In a memo from the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Hilsman to Secretary of State Rusk, Hilsman assessed the situation after Sarit's death. He said, "The present political structure, i.e., a working relationship among the military, the civil bureaucracy, and the monarchy and its supporters with the Army predominating, will continue."³²⁸ The government system and alliance Sarit established with King Bhumibol and the monarchy would not skip a beat under Thanom. Thailand would remain pro-American and anti-communist. Members of Sarit's military group continued to run the government up until 1972.³²⁹ The military's role and presence in Thai politics would not stop in 1972, however. From 1972 to 2006 the army repeatedly undertook coups and intervened to produce outcomes friendly to the status-quo, the military-monarchical alliance.

³²⁷ Yano, p. 298; Thak, 2007, p. 218

³²⁸ "Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Acting Secretary of State (Rusk)," December 9, 1963, *The Foreign Relations of the United States, Southeast Asia, 1961-1963*, Washington: Government Printing Office, Vol. XXIII, 1994, p. 1002

³²⁹ Muscat, 1994, p. 86-87

Another long term effect of the Second Triumvirate's relationship was the restoration of the monarchy. Handley's controversial book, *The King Never Smiles*, chronicles the evolution of King Bhumibol's reign from a mere figurehead to arguably one of the most dominant political figures in Thailand. Sarit's reign was the pivotal moment in Thai political history as the king returned to power.³³⁰ From 1957 onwards, King Bhumibol's ability to wield political clout and sway public sentiments grew tremendously. The years 1973, 1976, and 1992 are three examples of overt royal intervention to control events to protect the status-quo. Covertly, the monarchy's large network of allies has proliferated and continues to protect the monarchy from harm and criticism. Lese-majeste laws have become a powerful tool used by the monarchy and its allies to protect themselves from criticism, blame and defamation.³³¹ Few dare to oppose King Bhumibol and those speaking for him. The military continues to be a strong supporter of King Bhumibol and the institution. Sarit and the United States opened the door for King Bhumibol to re-establish the influence and prestige of the monarchy in Thailand.

U.S. imprint on Thailand and its politics is tremendous. Today Thailand still has one of the most advanced economies in Southeast Asia. Foreign investors flooded the country to take advantage of the resources available in the 1960s. The economic boom was influential in bringing the middle-class out of its nascent state. Modernization came quickly to the country because of U.S. economic and social aid. The countryside is dotted with bridges, highways, railways, airports, power plants and radio stations funded and built by the United States. During the Viet Nam War, U.S. policy-makers propped up the military regimes and the monarchy and supported their oppressive policies. U.S. leaders looked the other way when the military governments harshly suppressed its own people.

³³⁰ Fong, p. 679

³³¹ Thongchai, p. 375; BBC, "Thailand Activist Jailed for Royal Insult," February 28, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17187559>;

Another significant legacy left over from the Second Triumvirate that has continued to affect Thailand today is the military-monarchical relationship. Paul Chambers wrote an article in 2010 arguing that the military-monarchical relationship was an obstacle to the establishment of democracy in recent years. Chambers argued, “In Thailand, three political domains exist beyond the control of elected civilians: the monarchy, the monarch’s Privy Council, and the military.”³³² Elections may take place but the real power and influence is with the military-monarchical union. Chambers attributes the lack of democracy in Thailand to “a long tradition of military influence in Thai politics [that] continues to hinder political development” and the monarchy can be included.³³³ The monarchy and military together have colluded to stymie democratic progression for over half a century. From 1957/58 to 1973, the military and monarchy aligned together. Then from 1976 to 1988, Prem Tinsulanond, a former military general, controlled the government and later became Prime Minister. Prem was a royalist and an avid supporter of protecting the monarchy. McCargo asserts that King Bhumibol’s partnership with Prem was comparable to his previous relations with Sarit.³³⁴ The year 1992 marked a supposed turning point for the military after a massive civilian uprising and royal intervention drove the army back to its barracks. An interlude of civilian governments existed from 1992 to 2006, until the military-monarchy coalition intervened in 2006 to oust the elected Thaksin Shinawatra civilian government.³³⁵ Benedict Anderson summed up the relationship well when he said that, “we need not be surprised, therefore, that in some ways the monarchy became more ‘sacred as the dictatorship [(Sarit-Thanom regimes)] entrenched itself.”³³⁶ The combination grew together and became almost unstoppable. It looked like after 1992, when the military receded into

³³² Chambers, p 837; The Privy Council can be considered an auxiliary of the monarchy. It is not given much attention in this paper because the Privy Council does not become a potent political power until the addition of former General and Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond and the 2007 amendment that gives the council a stronger role during an interim between one monarch and the next. McCargo, p. 506 and Chambers, p. 838

³³³ Chambers, p. 836

³³⁴ McCargo, p. 506

³³⁵ Chambers, p. 840

³³⁶ Benedict Anderson, “Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 9, No. 3, July-September 1977, p. 22; Pitapat page 74-75

the background, that political freedoms were making progress. However, the status-quo was threatened by previously marginalized domestic forces and a civilian government. Military elites, the monarchy, and their allies had their monopoly over military, economic, and political power at stake. Democracy seemed inimical to the power structure created around the military and King Bhumibol.

The political state of Thailand today is tense. A rupture occurred when Thaksin Shinawatra became prime minister in 2001. Thaksin was premier from 2001 to 2006 until the military, with palace backing, ousted the civilian government.³³⁷ Many in the military and palace circles came to fear Thaksin because of his growing popularity, which coincided with the declining health of the king, the symbol of the military and monarchy's power. In typical Thai fashion, Thaksin was deposed in 2006 in a military coup. Today, Thailand sits in a very precarious position. There is a battle between the military-monarchical group and its allies and Thaksin's party. Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, is prime minister, and it is only a matter of time before King Bhumibol passes away. Thaksin is still seen as a threat to the military-monarchical power.³³⁸ The king's heir, Vajiralongkorn, does not have the same prestige and reputation as his father. In fact, he is quite unpopular. Questions linger, especially about what will happen to Thailand when King Bhumibol dies. It is unclear whether Vajiralongkorn has the ability and popular support to take control in Thailand, and if so, that he will be able to hold the military-monarchical alliance together. James O'Key, a political scientist of Thailand, has said that if the monarchy, as a politically active institution is to remain, it will be difficult for the next monarch to have the same prestige as King Bhumibol.³³⁹ Further he said, the "informal power of the monarch," that has persisted since 1957 "must be earned."³⁴⁰ Whoever replaces King Bhumibol needs to gain respect and legitimacy from a whole host

³³⁷ Chambers, p. 840

³³⁸ Nicholas Farrelly, "Thaksin's Freedom: The Price of royalist-military dominance," *New Mandala*, April 18th, 2012, <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2012/04/18/thaksins-freedom-the-price-of-royalist-military-dominance/>

³³⁹ O'Key, p. 124

³⁴⁰ Ibid

of groups if they are to rule in the same capacity as their predecessor. In addition, the heir must compete with a strong civilian constituency under Thaksin. Business, military, and palace elite's loyalty to the persona of a king figure must be regained. Vajiralongkorn is far from the person his father was and is.³⁴¹ Will the political alliances created by King Bhumibol with the military, business community and monkhood continue? If the palace cannot produce a strong heir, perhaps the military will step in and push the surging Thaksin-civilian government out of power. Will the military reaffirm its allegiance to the monarchy or find another avenue of legitimacy? One scholar wonders if the military coup of 2006 marks the moment of the army's return to politics since 1992 when it was pushed out.³⁴² There is also the question of what role the United States will play in Thai politics. Currently U.S. policy-makers are worried about the growing power of China and terrorist cells in southern Thailand and Malaysia.³⁴³ Thailand was one country in which the U.S. held torture camps against al Qaeda.³⁴⁴ Sources are scant about whether U.S. sentiments fall on the side of the military-monarchical alliance or the civilian government. The king is the crucial factor holding the country together. So many competing forces are ready to collide. Thaksin's allies, palace elites, the army, and the crown prince are all vying for political power. The military-monarchical relationship, established in 1957, may be seeing its last days.

³⁴¹ Andrew MacGregor Marshall, *Thailand's Moment of Truth: A Secret History of 21st Century Siam*, Prologue: "The Dysfunctional Family Panic," Part 1 of 4, Version 1.3, p. 6

³⁴² Thongchai, p. 33

³⁴³ Marshall, p. 13

³⁴⁴ Ibid

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