

A Paradigm Shift in Policy-making: The Evolution of Thailand's Anti-Communism Strategy through Prime Minister's Office Order No. 66/2523

การเปลี่ยนกระบวนทัศน์ในการกำหนดนโยบาย: พัฒนาการนโยบายต่อต้านคอมมิวนิสต์ของไทยผ่านคำสั่งสำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี ที่ 66/2523

Warangkana Nibhatsukit

วารางคณา นิพัทธ์สุกิจ

Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, Thailand

Corresponding author

e-mail: karakaew@gmail.com

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คำสำคัญ: หลักนิยมทางทหารไทย, การต่อต้านการก่อความไม่สงบ, พรรคคอมมิวนิสต์แห่งประเทศไทย, สงครามเย็น, ความสัมพันธ์พลเรือน-ทหาร คำสั่ง 66/2523

Abstract

Background and Objectives: This article studies the historical and political significance of the Prime Minister's Office Order No. 66/2523, a landmark directive that transformed Thailand's approach to communist insurgency. This study analyzes how international geopolitical shifts, particularly in Sino-American relations and regional dynamics, combined with domestic factors to catalyze a fundamental change in Thailand's counter-insurgency strategy. The order marked a crucial transition from military suppression to a more nuanced "politics leading military" approach that recognized communist sympathizers not merely as security threats but as citizens influenced by political ideologies and state-induced grievances.

Methods: Utilizing historical research methodology and drawing on both primary and secondary documents, this article traces the evolution of Thai anti-communist policies from the 1960s to the early 1980s. The research particularly focuses on how external factors - including the U.S. strategic realignment in Asia, China's pragmatic turn under Deng Xiaoping, and Vietnam's regional ambitions - interacted with domestic political developments to create both the necessity and opportunity for making the unprecedented policy in anti-communism.

Results: Key findings demonstrate that Order 66/2523 represented more than a tactical shift in counter-insurgency; it reflected Thailand's growing diplomatic maturity in leveraging changing international dynamics to address domestic challenges. While the order facilitated the reintegration of former insurgents and their sympathizers, it also served broader strategic purposes in Thailand's regional positioning. This analysis contributes to understanding how domestic policy innovation can emerge from the intersection of international pressures and local imperatives, offering lessons for contemporary approaches to political reconciliation and security challenges.

Application of this study: This analysis provides insights into the development of Thai military doctrine and civil-military relations. It demonstrates how external and internal factors combine to drive policy evolution, with implications for understanding modern counter-insurgency approaches.

Conclusions: While Order 66/2523 marked an important shift in official policy, its success built on pre-existing conditions. The study challenges the superficial perspective about the order's impact while acknowledging its significance in Thai military concepts about political solutions to the security challenge problem. This analysis not only contributes to a deeper understanding of Thailand's political maneuvers during the critical Cold War juncture but also underscores the complex interplay between domestic policies and international relations. The study demonstrates how a successful and creative policy often emerges from a combination of international opportunities with domestic imperatives, offering the thoughts that can be adapted to contemporary challenges in political reconciliation and security policy.

บทคัดย่อ

ที่มาและวัตถุประสงค์: บทความนี้ศึกษาความสำคัญทางประวัติศาสตร์และการเมืองของคำสั่งสำนักนายกรัฐมนตรีที่ 66/2523 ซึ่งเป็นคำสั่งสำคัญที่เปลี่ยนแปลงแนวทางการรับมือกับการก่อความไม่สงบของคอมมิวนิสต์ในประเทศไทย การศึกษานี้วิเคราะห์ว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางภูมิรัฐศาสตร์ระหว่างประเทศ โดยเฉพาะในความสัมพันธ์จีน-อเมริกาและพลวัตในภูมิภาค ผสานกับปัจจัยภายในประเทศอย่างไร จนนำไปสู่การเปลี่ยนแปลงพื้นฐานในยุทธศาสตร์การต่อต้านการก่อความไม่สงบของไทย คำสั่งนี้เป็นจุดเปลี่ยนสำคัญจากการปราบปรามทางทหารสู่แนวทาง "การเมืองนำการทหาร"

ที่มีความละเอียดอ่อนมากขึ้น โดยมองผู้เห็นอกเห็นใจคอมมิวนิสต์ไม่ใช่ภัยคุกคามความมั่นคง แต่เป็นพลเมืองที่ได้รับอิทธิพลจากอุดมการณ์ทางการเมืองและความเดือดร้อนที่เกิดจากรัฐ

วิธีการศึกษา: ใช้วิธีวิจัยทางประวัติศาสตร์และอาศัยหลักฐานทั้งเอกสารชั้นต้นและเอกสารชั้นรอง บทความนี้ศึกษาวิวัฒนาการนโยบายการต่อต้านคอมมิวนิสต์ไทยตั้งแต่ทศวรรษ 2500 จนถึงต้นทศวรรษ 2520 โดยมุ่งเน้นศึกษาว่าปัจจัยภายนอก รวมถึงการปรับยุทธศาสตร์ของสหรัฐอเมริกาในเอเชีย การหันมาใช้แนวทางปฏิบัตินิยมของจีนภายใต้การนำของเจียงเสี่ยวผิง และความทะเยอทะยานในภูมิภาคของเวียดนาม มีปฏิสัมพันธ์กับพัฒนาการทางการเมืองภายในประเทศ จนก่อให้เกิดทั้งความจำเป็นและโอกาสในการสร้างนโยบายที่ไม่เคยมีมาก่อนในการต่อต้านคอมมิวนิสต์

ผลการศึกษา: ผลการศึกษาที่สำคัญแสดงให้เห็นว่าคำสั่ง 66/2523 มิได้เป็นเพียงการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางยุทธวิธีในการต่อต้านการก่อความไม่สงบเท่านั้น แต่ยังสะท้อนถึงวิวัฒนาการทางทฤษฎีที่เพิ่มขึ้นของไทยในการใช้ประโยชน์จากพลวัตระหว่างประเทศที่เปลี่ยนแปลงเพื่อจัดการกับความท้าทายภายในประเทศ ในขณะที่คำสั่งนี้เื้อออำนาจให้เกิดการกลับคืนสู่สังคมของผู้ก่อความไม่สงบและผู้เห็นอกเห็นใจ คำสั่งนี้ยังรับใช้จุดมุ่งหมายเชิงยุทธศาสตร์ที่กว้างขึ้นในการวางตำแหน่งของไทยในภูมิภาค การวิเคราะห์นี้ช่วยให้เข้าใจว่านวัตกรรมทางนโยบายภายในประเทศสามารถเกิดขึ้นได้จากจุดตัดระหว่างแรงกดดันระหว่างประเทศกับความจำเป็นในประเทศ ซึ่งให้บทเรียนสำหรับแนวทางร่วมสมัยในการสร้างความปรองดองทางการเมืองและการรับมือกับความท้าทายด้านความมั่นคง

การประยุกต์ใช้: การวิเคราะห์นี้ให้ข้อคิดเชิงลึกเกี่ยวกับการพัฒนาหลักทางทหารของไทยและความสัมพันธ์พลเรือน-ทหาร แสดงให้เห็นว่าปัจจัยภายนอกและภายในผสมผสานกันอย่างไรจนขับเคลื่อนให้เกิดวิวัฒนาการทางนโยบาย ซึ่งมีนัยสำคัญต่อความเข้าใจแนวทางการต่อต้านการก่อความไม่สงบในปัจจุบัน

บทสรุป: ในขณะที่คำสั่ง 66/2523 ถือเป็นจุดเปลี่ยนสำคัญในนโยบายของรัฐ แต่ความสำเร็จของคำสั่งนี้ได้ต่อยอดจากเงื่อนไขที่มีอยู่ก่อนแล้ว การศึกษานี้ท้าทายมุมมองที่มองความสำเร็จของคำสั่งแบบผิวเผิน แม้จะยอมรับความสำคัญของคำสั่งนี้ในแนวคิดทางทหารไทยเกี่ยวกับการแก้ปัญหาความมั่นคงด้วยวิธีทางการเมือง การวิเคราะห์นี้ไม่เพียงช่วยให้เข้าใจการเคลื่อนไหวทางการเมืองของไทยในช่วงสำคัญของสงครามเย็นได้ลึกซึ้งขึ้น แต่ยังชี้ให้เห็นความสัมพันธ์อันซับซ้อนระหว่างนโยบายภายในประเทศกับความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประเทศ การศึกษานี้แสดงให้เห็นว่านโยบายที่สร้างสรรค์และประสบความสำเร็จมักเกิดจากการผสมผสานโอกาสระหว่างประเทศเข้ากับความจำเป็นภายในประเทศ ซึ่งให้ข้อคิดที่สามารถนำมาปรับใช้กับความท้าทายร่วมสมัยในด้านการสร้างความปรองดองทางการเมืองและนโยบายความมั่นคง

Introduction

Prime Minister's Order 66/2523 marked a significant turning point in Thailand's approach to communist suppression. This order represented a fundamental shift from military force to political solutions, recognizing that communist sympathizers were not enemies but citizens with different political ideologies (Yongchaiyudh & Dongbangsathan, 2019). Many who joined the communist movement were driven into the jungle due to state-induced grievances and injustices, rather than ideological commitment (Srinara, 2005 : 45). As Chutima (1990) argues, this policy shift initiated the resolution of Thailand's long-standing communist security concerns.

The order reflected a significant evolution in military and government perceptions of communism (Suma, 1985). This transformation was largely influenced by Thailand's close alignment with United States foreign policy during the Cold War era (Chinwanno, 2005). The policy of military suppression continued until significant changes occurred in U.S. policies toward Southeast Asia and the People's Republic of China. These international shifts prompted Thailand to reconsider its approach, leading to the adoption of the "politics leading military" strategy formalized in Order 66/2523.

The order represented a broader recognition of changing global political, economic, and social dynamics affecting Thailand. While external factors were crucial in prompting this policy shift, internal developments within the Communist Party of Thailand also played a significant role, particularly the growing disillusionment among party members and allies (Charoensuk, 2019). However, as Cui (2017) emphasizes, the international context, especially the evolving policies of the United States and China, was particularly influential in shaping Thailand's new approach to communist insurgency.

Literature Review

The example of the study of communist movements and state policies in Thailand has evolved significantly over time, revealing four distinct groups of scholarly work.

The first group focuses directly on communist movements. Mongkolworawan's work (2005) analyzes activities in the Phu Phan area between 1961-1982, emphasizing how local communities adapted to the movement. Meanwhile, Suma's research (1985) examines both the ideology and activities of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), alongside government suppression policies during 1957-1980.

The second group concentrates on state prevention and suppression policies. Phuengkhanthai (1978) studies the development of communist ideology and counter-policies from King Prajadhipok's reign through Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram's administration. Uttho's work (1993) analyzes growth factors of the movement and state measures in northeastern Thailand between 1965-1980.

The third group examines internal conflicts and the movement's decline. Srinara's research (2005) analyzes ideological conflicts within the Communist Party of Thailand during 1976-1982. Chutima (1990) and Thomas (1986) study factors leading to the movement's decline, with particular attention to withdrawal symptoms, counter-insurgency strategies, and organizational failures that led to student disillusionment.

The final group represents modern critical scholarship. Pawakapan's work (2021) challenges traditional interpretations of Order 66/2523, arguing that its success has been exaggerated to legitimize the military's expanding influence in Thai society.

This evolution in scholarship reflects how understanding Thailand's communist history has transformed over time. Early studies focused on descriptive accounts and fact-gathering, while contemporary research offers critical analysis that connects with current political issues and policy developments. This shift demonstrates a deeper engagement with the complex interplay between historical events and their modern implications, moving beyond simple narrative accounts to more nuanced interpretations of Thailand's political and social development.

This progression of scholarship not only enriches our understanding of Thailand's communist period but also provides valuable insights for contemporary policy-making and political analysis. The transition from descriptive to critical approaches has opened new perspectives on how historical events continue to shape modern Thai society and politics.

Objectives and Methods

The study had two primary objectives: 1) to investigate the evolution and relevance of the Office of the Prime Minister Order No. 66/2523, and 2) to comprehend the political changes that led to its issuing. This article applies a historical research approach, using both primary and secondary sources, and the information acquired is analyzed and synthesized to generate the article.

Research Results

The history of communism in Thailand predates the official formation of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in 1942 (Phuengkhanthai, 1978). In its early phase, the CPT operated as a legal political party before being forced underground. The party's ideology drew from a synthesis of Marxist-Leninist principles and Maoist philosophy, with its

core mission focusing on socioeconomic equality and opposition to capitalism. (Ratamarit, n.d.) According to Suma (1985), the CPT developed a distinctive strategy that combined urban organization with rural-based operations, particularly in forested regions.

In the early 1920s, Chinese communist influence began taking root in Thailand through political refugees seeking sanctuary from persecution (Hiranto, n.d.). While the initial movement primarily comprised Chinese and Vietnamese expatriates, it gradually expanded to include Thai workers of Chinese descent. The movement gained momentum during World War II, when multiple Marxist-Leninist groups emerged in response to Japanese occupation. (Nissayan, 2019). A crucial development occurred on December 1, 1942, when these groups unified to establish a formal political party structure, using anti-Japanese resistance as their rallying point (Phuengkhanthai, 1978).

Thailand's relationship with communism underwent significant changes in the post-war period. As Nissayan (2019) describes, in 1946, Thailand suspended its anti-communist legislation to secure Soviet support for its United Nations membership bid. However, this period of tolerance was short-lived. Following the 1947 coup d'état, Suma (1985) notes that the government launched an intensive anti-communist campaign, culminating in the 1952 Communist Prevention and Suppression Act, which criminalized the CPT and forced it underground. According to Thomas (1986), this period marked the CPT's transition toward supporting grassroots insurgencies in rural areas.

The CPT's ideological and organizational evolution occurred through three significant congresses before the outbreak of armed conflict. Mongkolworawan (2005) documents that in 1942, the party established a 10-point policy opposing both Japanese occupation and the Pibulsongkram regime. A decisive shift occurred in 1952 when, as analyzed by Cui (2017), the party adopted Chinese revolutionary principles and began focusing on rural mobilization. During this period, the CPT sought to build a coalition between workers and peasants while initially avoiding armed confrontation.

Before 1961, the CPT concentrated on utilising rural areas for resistance and the preparation of military troops. Charoensuk (2019) attributes a major tactical shift to the execution of Ruam Wongphan, which prompted the party to relocate its leadership and cadres to rural areas to avoid government suppression. This relocation to the Phu Phan region, as documented by Mongkolworawan (2005), set the stage for the outbreak of armed conflict four years later.

The pivotal '7 August Event' occurred in 1965 at Ban Na Bua, Renu Nakhon Sub-district, That Phanom District, Nakhon Phanom Province (Uttho, 1993). While scholarly debate continues about the precise date¹, the significance of this event lies in it being the first armed confrontation between the CPT and government forces. This marked a dramatic shift from the CPT's previous strategy of peaceful rural mobilization.

The Cold War: Spreading Intensity in Southeast Asia

The post-World War II era saw the emergence of a bipolar international order dominated by the ideologically opposed United States and Soviet Union (Eueraksakul, (n.d.). The Cold War manifested not only as a geopolitical struggle but as a comprehensive competition spanning military power, technological advancement, and ideological influence. The rivalry extended into space exploration and nuclear arms development as key proxies for demonstrating superpower capabilities.

The United States' post-war strategy centered on containment, formalized through the 1947 Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction. According to Chinwanno (2005), these initiatives contributed to Europe's division into distinct spheres of influence: a U.S.-aligned Western bloc and a Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc. This division would significantly influence U.S. policy toward Asia, particularly regarding communist containment.

¹ This historical debate is extensively discussed in recent scholarship, including works by Mongkolworawan (2005) and Charoensuk (2019).

The Communist victory in China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 fundamentally transformed U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. These events, alongside growing independence movements in former European colonies, particularly French Indochina, led to an unprecedented expansion of American political and military influence in the region (Schellhorn, 1992). This period marked a crucial shift in U.S. strategy, as Washington began viewing Southeast Asia as a critical frontier in its global containment policy. The United States' growing involvement reflected both its Cold War imperatives and its aim to shape the post-colonial order in Southeast Asia (Carter, 2019).

Following China's transition to communism, the United States intensified its containment efforts in Southeast Asia (Schellhorn, 1992). According to Carter (2019), both the Soviet Union and China provided significant support to North Vietnam's communist regime, leading to heightened U.S. concerns about regional communist expansion. These fears centered on the possibility of communist dominance across Southeast Asia without direct American intervention.

The United States' commitment to countering communism in Vietnam stemmed from fears of Chinese regional hegemony (Chinwanno, 2005). While Soviet and Chinese support strengthened the North Vietnamese resistance, Thailand emerged as a crucial U.S. ally, providing military bases for American operations. The United States' strategy included the 1954 division of Vietnam and extensive support to South Vietnam starting in 1961, though these efforts ultimately failed with communist victory and reunification in 1975 (Carter, 2019).

The 'Domino theory' formed the intellectual foundation of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia (Samudavanija, 1978)². As Schellhorn (1992) explains, this theory posited that communist success in one country would trigger similar transitions in neighboring states. The theory gained particular significance after France's withdrawal from Indochina in 1954 leading to increased American intervention in the region.

Thailand emerged as a key U.S. ally during this period, with Thai leaders actively embracing the domino theory and implementing comprehensive anti-communist measures. The alliance manifested in multiple forms: Thailand's participation in the Korean War, its signing of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, and crucially, the Thanat-Rusk joint agreement that allowed the establishment of U.S. military bases in Thai territory (Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, n.d.)

Economic and military assistance from the United States between 1950-1988 totaled approximately \$3 billion, which Suma (1985) identifies as crucial for both Thailand's security infrastructure and the stability of its government. Furthermore, alongside providing military support since 1957, the United States has offered additional aid to the Thai government. Thailand receives significant security aid from the United States. We intend to utilize this tool in the domains of military, law enforcement, economic, and social advancement. Domestic terrorism is eliminated. During that period, aligning with the United States also ensured the Thai administration's stability.

Despite substantial U.S. investment in the region, the situation in Indochina deteriorated dramatically by 1975. Carter (2019) details how North Vietnamese forces captured Saigon on April 30, 1975, following the earlier fall of Phnom Penh to communist forces. According to Schellhorn (1992), these events triggered a cascade of political transformations across the region, including Cambodia's transition to the Democratic Kampuchea regime and the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic by December 1975.

The collapse of U.S. strategy in Indochina precipitated a fundamental realignment of regional politics. Chinwanno (2005) documents how the United States adopted a new approach toward Asian countries, particularly in its relationship with China. A critical development occurred on January 1, 1979, when, as analyzed by Kruearattikan (2019), the

² The domino theory's implications for U.S. foreign policy are extensively analyzed in multiple sources, including Eueraksakul (n.d.) and Schellhorn (1992).

deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations created new strategic opportunities in Southeast Asia. This diplomatic rupture, according to Carter (2019), profoundly impacted regional politics and insurgency movements, ultimately influencing Thailand's approach to its domestic communist insurgency.

The Strategic Realignment of Southeast Asian Politics

The period leading to Order 66/2523 was characterized by fundamental shifts in Southeast Asian geopolitics. As Chinwanno (2005) documents, the complex relationships between the United States, China, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam created unprecedented strategic challenges for Thailand. The deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship, which Schellhorn (1992) identifies as intensifying through the late 1960s and 1970s, forced China to reassess its regional priorities.

According to Samudavanija (1978), the Soviet Union's robust support for Vietnam created a power dynamic that concerned both Bangkok and Beijing. This Soviet-Vietnamese alliance presented what Carter (2019) describes as a dual challenge: threatening China's southern border while intensifying Thai concerns about Vietnamese expansionism. The situation became particularly critical as Vietnam consolidated its position in Indochina following the American withdrawal.

A pivotal shift occurred with the United States' strategic realignment, formalized in the Nixon Doctrine of 1969. This policy shift, signaling a reduced American military presence in Asia, combined with the historic 1972 Shanghai Communiqué between the US and China, necessitated Thailand's reconsideration of its uncompromising anti-communist stance. As American security guarantees became less certain, Thailand found itself compelled to develop more nuanced approaches to regional security challenges.

ASEAN's role gained new significance during this period. The organization, founded in 1967 partly as a bulwark against communist expansion, evolved into a crucial framework for its members to maintain diplomatic flexibility while reducing dependence on any single great power. For Thailand, ASEAN provided an essential platform for enhancing regional cooperation and balancing relationships with major powers in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape.

China's transformation under Deng Xiaoping's leadership proved particularly consequential for Thailand's strategic calculations. Beijing's reorientation toward economic modernization and away from supporting revolutionary movements manifested in decreased support for communist insurgencies throughout Southeast Asia, including the CPT. China began viewing regional stability as fundamental to its development objectives and increasingly recognized Thailand as a potential partner in maintaining regional equilibrium. (Chinwanno, 2008)

According to Chinwanno (2008), the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 catalyzed these regional realignments. This development fostered an unprecedented convergence of Thai and Chinese interests, united in their opposition to Vietnamese expansion. This alignment of interests facilitated Thailand's transition away from purely military solutions to its communist insurgency, as Beijing's diminishing support for the CPT created new opportunities for political accommodation.

This evolving international context created both the imperative and the opportunity for Thailand to fundamentally reconsider its approach to domestic insurgency. The changing global environment, particularly China's strategic reorientation and America's reduced regional presence, enabled Thailand to develop a more sophisticated response to its internal challenges, ultimately contributing to the formulation of Order 66/2523.

These international transformations directly influenced both the Communist Party of Thailand and the government's counter-insurgency approach. As external support for Southeast Asian communist movements declined and regional relationships evolved, Thai authorities began to critically examine whether CPT supporters were ideologically committed

communists or citizens driven by addressable local grievances. This fundamental reassessment would prove crucial in shaping the government's changing approach to the insurgency, culminating in the issuance of Order 66/2523 and its emphasis on political solutions over military force.

CPT: The More Suppressed, the More They Grow

One important question is: Are some of the Thai people who aligned with the CPT really committed to communism?

The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) developed a distinctive ideological framework that adapted Marxist-Leninist and Maoist principles to Thailand's specific socio-political context (Cui, 2022). According to Charoensuk (2019), the party's analysis characterized Thai society as semi-feudal and semi-colonial, where the ruling elite maintained power through their alliance with foreign imperialist forces and domestic feudal land ownership systems.

The CPT aimed to build a united front comprising various socioeconomic groups - workers, peasants, small bourgeoisie, progressive intellectuals, and even sympathetic national capitalists - who suffered from exploitation (Lertthamtaewee, 2023). This understanding shaped their revolutionary strategy, which emphasized rural-based revolution to encircle the cities (Cui, 2022).

Charoensuk (2019) notes that the party's concrete objectives focused on three interconnected goals: dismantling the feudal land ownership system, liberating the Thai economy from imperialist dominance, and establishing state-led industrialization.

The CPT's organizing efforts led to a significant expansion of its support base throughout the 1960s (Suma, 1985). Meanwhile the Thai government strategically aligned itself with the Western Bloc. This alignment proved particularly consequential during the military dictatorships of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1959–1963) and Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (1963–1973), when Thailand received approximately 2 billion US dollars in military and economic assistance from the United States (Carter, 2019). The government's intensified suppression efforts, as analyzed by Sophee (2022), often failed to distinguish between actual communist sympathizers and those merely accused of communist leanings.

During Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's premiership, the government implemented an aggressive anti-communist suppression policy (Sophee, 2022). This campaign led to the arrest of over 40 people, including students, journalists, workers, and teachers, primarily in the northeastern region. One particularly significant case involved Mr. Supachai Srisati, whose execution order in 1959 exemplified the regime's harsh approach to perceived communist threats (Government of Thailand, 1959). Similarly, as documented by Sophee (2024), the case of Kru Khong Chandawong, who established the 'Samakkhitham' society and was executed under Article 17 without trial in 1961, demonstrated the government's willingness to use extreme measures against political dissent.

The authorities accused him of communist activities that threatened the kingdom's stability and treason, and they sentenced him to death under Section 17's jurisdiction, bypassing the legal system. This is evidenced by the Prime Minister's July 6, 1959, order to execute Mr. Supachai Srisati:

"On June 20th of this year, the police, who have been making investigative efforts for a long time, arrested Mr. Supachai Srisati and his associates, along with many tools for committing crimes. Senior police officers conducted a careful and fair investigation into the accused. I participated in the investigation, questioning myself along the way. It appears without doubt that Mr. Supachai Srisati is a communist representative in Thailand. Mr. Supachai Srisati has taken on important duties and is prepared with all the necessary tools, as the Communists have arranged for him to hold positions in the Communist Command

Committee. These individuals are responsible for carrying out orders from foreign Communist organizations to undermine the security of the kingdom and the throne, commit an act of violence, and threaten peace within Thailand. All circumstances indicate that this is treason, and if left unchecked, it could potentially lead to outside powers interfering within Thailand.

The Cabinet's resolution and Section 17 of the Kingdom's Constitution ordered the Minister of Interior to arrange Mr. Supachai Srisati's execution as soon as possible. The goal is not only to uphold the stability of the kingdom and the throne but also to lead by example and avert actions that could potentially endanger the country in the future.

The execution was to take place anonymously in the Bang Kwang prison area. When executed on any day at any time, report me immediately." (Government of Thailand, 1959)

Another significant case was that of *Kru Khrong Chandawong*, who, with his colleagues, established a secret society called "*Samakkhitham*" to oppose Field Marshal Sarit's dictatorial power and educate the suffering populace about working-class issues (Sophee, 2024). They sought to explain their understanding of communism, which differed from the government's propaganda version. *Kru Khrong's* resistance ended with his arrest on May 6, 1961, and like Supachai, he was sentenced to death under Article 17 without trial (Sophee, 2024).

The government's increasing repression and public announcements about communist suppression had an unintended effect (Suma, 1985). Rather than containing the movement, these actions drove many villagers and intellectuals who faced injustice to seek refuge with the CPT. This pattern confirmed the adage "The more you fight, the more they grow," as repression led to increased armed resistance against the government (Charoensuk, 2019).

During the reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, royal development initiatives focused on addressing rural poverty and dissatisfaction that the CPT often exploited (Khampa, 2019). The government established the Accelerated Rural Development Office (ARD) with U.S. financial support to implement large-scale development projects including infrastructure and public facilities.

According to Carter (2019), development efforts produced mixed results. While some villages received substantial support for infrastructure improvements, including 500,000 baht grants for road construction, the ARD's approach proved inconsistent. Khampa (2019) documents how projects like the Nam Phong Dam, while providing electricity to urban centers in Khon Kaen and Udon Thani, failed to address the irrigation needs of local farmers who constituted the majority of the area's population.

Lady Suprapada Kasemsan Na Ayutthaya, the royal secretary to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, her records as analyzed by Khampa (2019), provide crucial insights into rural responses to these development efforts. It is because Her Majesty the Queen convened with locals to collect examples of regional fabric from the northeastern countryside, which she subsequently delivered to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit. It mirrored the peasants' dissatisfaction and animosity against the outcomes of the expedited rural development initiative in the mid-1960s. Her observations from Sakon Nakhon Province revealed local frustrations with uneven development, where some villages received basic utilities while others remained without essential infrastructure.

These developments prompted many peasants to align themselves with resistance movements, a phenomenon linked to the limitations of state rural development initiatives. A significant illustration of this dynamic came from His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great's address to the "Chulalongkorn Law Day" organizing committee on March 13, 1969, where He discussed the case of villagers who had relocated from Nakhon Si Thammarat to the periphery of a

forest reserve in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province (Khampa, 2019). Despite their harmonious coexistence with the environment, these peasants faced expulsion by authorities for technical violations of forest reserve regulations.

His Majesty used this case to illustrate a crucial point: while the state aimed to prevent the spread of communism, its actions were paradoxically driving impoverished and struggling people toward communist ideology. The harsh suppression measures employed by state authorities and military forces since the 1950s, combined with officials' tendency to broadly label dissent as communist activity as a self-fulfilling prophecy. This administrative approach, where officials failed to distinguish between actual communists and citizens seeking basic justice, ultimately strengthened the very movement they sought to suppress.

The tragic events of October 6, 1976, marked a watershed moment in Thailand's communist movement. The violent crackdown at Thammasat University catalyzed an unprecedented expansion of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), as thousands of students, intellectuals, and activists fled to the countryside seeking refuge and resistance (Yongchaiyudh & Dongbangsathan, 2019). According to Morell & Samudavanija, (1981), this exodus brought approximately 3,000 new members into the CPT's ranks, fundamentally altering both its composition and capabilities.

The influx of middle-class recruits - children of civil servants, merchants, and professionals - introduced a new social dynamic to the movement (Charoensuk, 2019). Unlike the CPT's traditional rural base, these educated urban recruits brought not only intellectual resources but also created what Yongchaiyudh & Dongbangsathan (2019) describe as an unexpected challenge for the government. This transformation of the CPT's membership base had far-reaching implications, both strengthening the movement's operational capabilities and complicating the government's ability to maintain its hardline stance.

The presence of these middle-class recruits meant that any further military action against the CPT would now directly affect families with significant social and political influence, inadvertently creating pressure for political solutions rather than continued confrontation (Yongchaiyudh & Dongbangsathan, 2019)

Policy Transfer and Adaptation: The Path to Order 66/2523

The complex interplay between international changes and domestic policy development during this period provides a clear example of policy transfer and adaptation. The evolution toward Order 66/2523 demonstrates how international changes can catalyze domestic policy innovation. Several key mechanisms facilitated this process:

1. Direct Learning: Thai military leaders, particularly those like General Prem Tinsulanonda, learned from battlefield experiences that pure military solutions were ineffective (Yongchaiyudh & Dongbangsathan, 2019). Their firsthand observations of the limitations of military force in countering insurgency led to the recognition that political solutions were essential for lasting peace.

2. External Pressure: Changes in Chinese and American policies created both opportunities and imperatives for policy reform. China's pragmatic approach and America's strategic realignment offered Thailand both a necessity and an opportunity to reassess its domestic policies. (Chinwanno, 2005).

3. Regional Demonstration Effects: The failures of purely military approaches in neighboring countries provided important lessons (Yongchaiyudh & Dongbangsathan, 2019). The fall of South Vietnam, despite massive American military support, demonstrated the limitations of purely military solutions to political challenges.

4. Institutional Adaptation: Thailand's security apparatus gradually developed new capabilities for implementing political solutions alongside military operations. This evolution reflected a growing understanding that effective counter-insurgency required a more nuanced and comprehensive approach.

This process of policy learning and adaptation created as the intellectual and institutional foundations for Order 66/2523. The policy transformation demonstrated how external factors can shape domestic policy innovation through multiple pathways, particularly during periods of regional strategic realignment.

Global Politics Change: Ideas Change - The Path to Order 66/2523

The early 1970s marked a watershed in Thai foreign policy development (Chinwanno, 2008). This transformation began with the United States' strategic pivot in Asia, exemplified by the Nixon Doctrine of 1969 and culminating in the 1972 U.S.-China rapprochement. These developments fundamentally altered Thailand's strategic environment and catalyzed a reassessment of its rigid anti-communist stance.

The U.S. policy shift manifested most dramatically in its withdrawal from Vietnam, leading to the fall of Saigon in 1975. This event, coupled with communist victories in Laos and Cambodia, created new security imperatives for Thailand. The Thai government, recognizing it could no longer rely solely on American security guarantees, began exploring alternative approaches to regional security and domestic stability.

Thai-Chinese Relations and Regional Dynamics

China's evolving position proved particularly crucial in this transformation (Chinwanno, 2005). Thailand's stance began to shift as Beijing itself underwent significant changes. The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's subsequent rise to power marked what Nathan (1997) identifies as China's transition from revolutionary fervor to pragmatic modernization. This shift had direct implications for Thailand, as China began viewing regional stability, rather than revolutionary change, as crucial for its economic development.

The Thai-Chinese diplomatic breakthrough came with Prime Minister M.R. Kukrit Pramoj's historic visit to Beijing from June 30 to July 6, 1975 (Chinwanno, 2005). The establishment of diplomatic relations on July 1, 1975, represented more than just a formal agreement; as Carter (2019) notes, it signaled Thailand's recognition that the regional landscape had fundamentally changed.

However, this diplomatic momentum temporarily stalled during Thanin Kraivichien's administration (October 1976 - October 1977). Thanin's hardline anti-communist stance and domestic repression, according to Kruearattikan (2019), drove more Thai citizens into the communist movement, demonstrating the limitations of purely coercive approaches.

Policy Implications and Regional Security

The Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 (Samudavanija, 1978) accelerated the evolution of Thai policy. This event created what Chinwanno (2005) describes as a *de facto* alliance between Thailand and China, united in their opposition to Vietnamese expansionism. China's subsequent decision to reduce support for the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), as documented by Thomas (1986), created new opportunities for Thai policymakers to pursue political solutions to the insurgency.

Under General Kriangsak Chamanan's leadership, Thailand began transitioning from severe right-wing policies toward political liberalization (Yongchaiyudh & Dongbangsathan, 2019). This shift gained further momentum under General Prem Tinsulanonda, who recognized through his experience as Commander of the Second Army Region that military

suppression alone could not resolve the insurgency. The concept of "politics leading the military" emerged from this understanding, aligning domestic policy with the changing international context.

These converging factors - the U.S. strategic realignment, China's pragmatic turn, Vietnam's regional ambitions, and Thailand's own experience with failed suppression - created both the necessity and opportunity for a new approach to the communist insurgency. Order 66/2523, issued in April 1980, describes as the culmination of this learning process, institutionalizing the understanding that political solutions, rather than mere military force, were essential for addressing the root causes of insurgency.

However, while the order achieved significant success, it's crucial to examine how such policies can be implemented without inadvertently strengthening institutional power structures that might hinder democratic development. The order's legacy continues to offer valuable lessons for contemporary approaches to political reconciliation and security challenges in Thailand.

Conclusion and Discussion

Order 66/2523 represented more than a policy aimed at addressing communism; it embodied a fundamental paradigm shift in Thailand's approach to complex political challenges. The order's success stemmed from its recognition that sustainable solutions require addressing root causes rather than merely suppressing symptoms. Three key principles emerged from this historical moment: the importance of political solutions over purely military approaches, the value of creating space for diverse political voices, and the critical role of international dynamics in shaping domestic policy outcomes.

These principles remain strikingly relevant to contemporary Thailand. Today's political landscape, while markedly different from the 1980s, continues to grapple with questions of reconciliation, inclusion, and balanced development. The order's emphasis on understanding grievances rather than simply labeling opposition as threats offers valuable insights for addressing current social and political divisions. Its success in integrating international diplomatic opportunities with domestic policy innovations provides a model for managing today's complex regional dynamics, particularly as Thailand navigates relationships between major powers.

The historical experience of Order 66/2523 also illuminates current debates about security and development. Just as the order recognized that security challenges often stem from social and economic grievances, contemporary approaches to national stability must consider the interplay between security measures and social justice. The order's success in creating political space for former opponents while maintaining national security frameworks offers lessons for modern efforts at political reconciliation.

Looking forward, this historical analysis suggests that effective responses to political challenges require multi-dimensional approaches that balance security concerns with political inclusion and social development. As Thailand faces new forms of social and political tensions, the lessons from Order 66/2523 remind us that sustainable solutions often emerge from policies that address underlying grievances while adapting to changing international contexts. The order's legacy thus continues to offer valuable insights for contemporary policymakers seeking to navigate complex political landscapes while maintaining social harmony and national stability.

This historical experience underscores a timeless truth: that successful policy innovation often emerges from the careful alignment of domestic imperatives with international opportunities, guided by a commitment to addressing root causes rather than merely managing symptoms. As Thailand continues to evolve, these insights remain relevant for understanding how to approach contemporary challenges while maintaining the delicate balance between security, development, and political inclusion.

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