

CHAPTER IV

THAILAND'S DOMESTIC CONDITIONS

One part of this thesis' hypothesis is that Thailand's domestic affairs are a set of factors, which led the conflicts and confrontations with Myanmar. There are three internal problems, which the government could not handle and had an impact on bilateral relations. One is the ineffectiveness of the government in implementing its security policy. The second is the narcotic threat. This was severe enough to be an urgent national agenda of the Thaksin government and soured relations between the two countries as well. This was evident from the reaction of Myanmar's authority after the Muang Yawn issue had been raised in the counter-drug meeting in the north of Thailand in 2001. The third is nationalist sentiments in Thailand. Perceptions of Myanmar as a common enemy, which have once been used to help promote Thai national unity, are still in the people's mind and have contributed to the worsening of the conflicts.

Ineffectiveness of the Government

In the early of 2001, Thailand had a new Prime Minister whose party, the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) won a landslide election. This could be considered as the new era of Thai politics because the government led by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra gained seats in parliament enough to establish a dominant government without any coalitional parties from the first moment. In legal terms, the government did not need to establish the government by allying any political parties. However, as the constitution requires two fifths (200) of members of parliament to propose a no-confidence debate against the Prime Minister, TRT sought to eliminate this possibility by inviting New Aspiration Party and Seri Dhama to join in the coalition government of over 300 seats in. Not surprisingly, the Premier would wish to play a crucial role himself in policy-making and -implementation in every aspect.

After the government took power, Thai foreign minister Surakiart Sathirathai talked about a policy of “forward engagement”,^{*} re-establishing personal ties with Rangoon and promoting democracy there in the Asian way.¹ It meant that Thailand intended to adopt a softened approach towards Myanmar, unlike the previous government. However initial efforts to bring about normalized relations with the neighbor failed because of the government’s ineffectiveness in the implementation of its policy. The election brought into being the first government under the 1997 so-called “people’s constitution”, which paved the way for a strong government having a strong grip of power. If so, why was the government ineffective during the first two years of its office?

Problems along the Thai-Myanmar border between 2001-2002 were the consequences of the government’s inability to impose its policy at all government levels, or more specifically, on government mechanisms, which had direct contact with Myanmar. Of these, the Royal Thai Army (RTA) was the most important. It was the RTA’s duty to deal with such problems as border intrusion and cross-border drug trafficking.^{*} Despite the fact that the government initially adopted a softer policy towards Myanmar instead of the strong stance like the previous government, RTA did not abandon its tough stance and directly conveyed it to Myanmar, particularly in the drug issue.

While the government was trying to settle its internal interest groups, the role of Army became more and more eminent in early February 2001. The conflict arose when Myanmar planned to occupy a strategic hill near Ban Pang Noon of Thailand in order to counter an ethnic insurgency group, the Shan State Army (SSA), but their access was denied.² Myanmar troops allegedly took a contingent of Thai rangers hostage.³ Later,

* Further details concerning Thai foreign policy, Forward Engagement, will be explained in a later chapter of the thesis.

¹ Aung Saw, “Pushing The Envelope,” *The Irrawaddy* [Online]. 2001.

* During the previous government, the problems occurring with Myanmar particularly drug issues as well as border conflicts were given to the duty of army. Therefore, the role of Thai army especially the Third Region Army had a direct engagement with Myanmar.

² Aung Saw, “Pushing The Envelope,” *The Irrawaddy* [Online]. 2001.

fighting broke out. The incident allowed the Army to have a prominent place in the eyes of the Thai public.

This circumstance can be explained as a consequence of democracy. Naturally, a most evident characteristic of a democratic system is that the system comprises lots of parties and interest groups. Therefore, it was plausible that the conflicts and confrontations with Myanmar were caused by the fact that policy formulation and policy implementation did not respond to each other. The government still had a problem in allocating power to many factions in the party as well. A further complication was that the defense and foreign ministry portfolios were held by different parties. Defense Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was head of the New Aspiration Party, while Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai was from Thai Rak Thai party.⁴ The interesting point is that the two groups have also different bases, which had tried to compete with each other. The overlaps of the national and personal interest can be seen easily.⁵ The fact was that there were many alternative sets of foreign policy towards Myanmar in the first two years of the Thaksin government. Not only Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai, but also Defence Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh was trying to initiate a new alternative way in engaging Myanmar. Different directions and perceptions among the government leaders allowed the army to have a free hand.

Another explanation of this circumstance is that the army maintained continuity in the implementation and management of the policy inherited from the previous government. The new government was ineffective in imposing its policy on the army because it was a transitional period from the Chuan Leekpai government. The Chuan government raised the flag of democracy as its prominent characteristic. Therefore, the policy-making and policy implementation processes had to revolve around this core perception of the government. Moreover, there was effective coordination in the policy-

³ Ibid.

⁴ John S. Moncreif, "Back to Market Place," The Irrawaddy [Online], 2001. Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=2206&z=104>

⁵ Ibid.

making process among the National Security Council, the Foreign Ministry, and the military.⁶ There were collective points of view towards different issues, including those related to Myanmar, such as human rights, humanitarian assistance to those displaced by the fighting in Myanmar and drugs. These collective viewpoints were strengthened by the influence of the US, which conceived its Myanmar policy in the framework of its own concerns with these very issues.* One result of this coordinated policy process was that different government mechanisms were allowed freedom to perform their respective tasks within the framework of the overall government policy. The foreign ministry was given the sole responsibility of conducting diplomacy with Myanmar, and the military were given a relatively free hand at the operational level to deal with all problems affecting Thailand's security, including those related to this neighboring country. In other words, the RTA could perform its functions and address security challenges when the need arose, without having to consult the government first. Two high military official rankings played crucial roles in dealing with Myanmar. One was General Surayut Julanond, the army chief; the other was Lt-Gen Watanachai Chaimuanwong, commander of the 3rd Army Region, which was responsible for the security of Thailand's northern and northwestern borders. Both usually criticized the Junta as an uncooperative partner in dealing with drug suppression. It was not surprising that, during the period of transition to the new government, the army continued to deal with security problems in the same way as it had done during the previous government, thus making it difficult for the new policy initiative to work.

After the confrontations in February 2001, tension was eased by the one-day official visit of Thai Prime Minister to Myanmar on 19th June 2001. The visit was aimed at repairing the damaged relations between the two countries. They discussed issues, which affected both countries, and reached an agreement to reopen the Mae Sai-Tachilek

⁶ Kavi Chongitavorn, "Thai-Myanmar relations," in Challenges to democratization in Myanmar: perspectives on multilateral and bilateral response, pp. 126-128.

* One of the main factors that we have to be concerned with is that Thai policy-making process was influenced by the west particularly the US. Due to the condition under the IMF, Thailand has to establish the policy which mostly relied on the suggested direction of IMF dominated by the US. All economic assistance and cooperation inevitably have moved towards the US which has democracy and human rights as its major concern.

border checkpoint which had been closed for months. Four agreements were signed under the memorandum of peaceful-coexistence between the two countries, covering cooperation in suppressing drug activities, non-interference, trade, and border demarcation.⁷ Concerns with the army's role were reflected in what the Prime Minister said before the trip: "there are two parts of the policy-the first is security along the border and the second is international relations. They should be turned so that they move in the same direction."⁸ Thailand's gesture was returned by a high Myanmar official, foreign minister Win Aung, who visited Thailand right after the Thai Prime Minister's trip. He discussed with the Thai Foreign Minister the issues of culture, technical co-operation, road links, preparations for the drugs summit in Kunming, and the Joint Border Committee.⁹ With the hope for effective personal relationships between the military leaders of the two countries, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh visited and met with Senior General Than Shew and other top military officials on 23-24th July 2001 to strengthen bilateral ties and secure a promise that regime would lift its ban of 15 Thai products. General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh confirmed with Myanmar leaders Bangkok's policy of non-intervention in Rangoon's internal affairs as well.¹⁰

In spite of the efforts to lessen the tension by Thai leaders' visits to Myanmar, confrontations between Thailand and Myanmar took place again in 2002. The domestic problems of the government have still not been resolved: it could not directly impose its policy on the military because the army still persisted with its own role in countering security problems related to Myanmar. The border tension in 2002 occurred when the Thai Army decided to move thousands of troops to the northern border provinces and launched an operation against the United Wa State Army (UWSA) troops, who were

⁷ Pornpimon Trichote, "Myanmar," *Asian Yearbook* (2002): 174.

⁸ Myanmar Times (28 May-3 June 2001).

⁹ The sixth meeting of the Thailand – Myanmar Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation, press release, *the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand*, (<http://www.mfa.go.th>).

¹⁰ Pornpimon Trichote, "Myanmar," *Asian Yearbook*: 174.

involved in unlimited drug activities on the border.¹¹ The operation was launched during the seasonal war between the Junta and armed ethnic groups. Accusations of Thai involvement in Myanmar's internal conflict were immediately conveyed throughout the Myanmar media.¹² The swift operation, of course, irritated both Rangoon and the Thaksin government. In response to the border clashes, Myanmar authorities closed all four major border checkpoints with Thailand, bringing to an end the improved relations between the two countries under the government of Thaksin Shinawatra.¹³ Similarly in Thai domestic affairs, the relations between the government and the Army were intensified when the Premier mentioned that he had assigned General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh to talk to the Thai military and ask them not to overreact to the situation.¹⁴ He also dismissed the clashes along the northern border as "minor" and stemming from Myanmar's internal dispute with its minority groups, and said that he would like the Army to pull back.¹⁵

Tension continued, intensified by a war of words in the two countries' media. Almost half way through of his administration, Thaksin could not show his capability for solving bilateral problems with Myanmar. Issues such as border demarcation, drug activities, and Myanmar's wars against ethnic minorities, which inevitably affected Thai security, still remained. Diplomatic measures made no progress.

Tension was abated, not by diplomatic breakthroughs, but by the news of a military reshuffle instead. At this point, one could see the government's effort to impose its policy on government mechanisms at lower levels because it failed to ameliorate the conflicts by only using bilateral measures. From the government's perspective, as long as the government could not control its military, the softer approach of the government would not be successfully implemented. General Chavalit, who is close to the Rangoon

¹¹ Don Pathan, "Border blow out," The Irrawaddy [Online]. 2002. Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=2618&z=102>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Nation (23 May 2002).

¹⁴ The Nation (30 May 2002).

¹⁵ The Nation (4 June 2002).

the government could not control its military, the softer approach of the government would not be successfully implemented. General Chavalit, who is close to the Rangoon generals, had not been happy with General Wattanachai's handling of recent border conflicts. During Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's highly publicized trip to Myanmar in mid-June, the Third Army Commander was told not to make any sensitive comments regarding Myanmar.¹⁶ Therefore, after months of confrontations and unsuccessful use of personal diplomacy, we could see a connection between the problems with Myanmar and the military reshuffle.

In August 2002, almost all of the Thai news agencies reported a military reshuffle. The majority of Thai news analysts and political observers criticized this move by pointing out the connection between this reshuffle and tensions with Myanmar.¹⁷ The annual reshuffle was one of the government's measures to control its own operational units so that the government could directly implement its policy in the same direction towards Myanmar. As General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh said after the reshuffle, the goal of the selection process was to pick the candidate who would best adhere to government policy.¹⁸ A very interesting comment about such a move was that the conflict in policy management allowed the government to interfere with the military reshuffling process.¹⁹ Another political observer said that the reshuffle, which was done earlier than it should have been, was a means used by the government to eliminate the previous government's heritage.²⁰ After the announcement from the Prime Minister's office concerning the military reshuffle, two hard-line high military officials were, unsurprisingly, moved out of the roles and duties in directly engaging Myanmar, both in terms of policy-making and military operations. In the reshuffle, General Somdhat Attanand was selected army chief over General Wattanachai Chiamuanwong as the next army chief, and General Surayut Julanond was moved to the position of Supreme Commander.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Matichon Weekly* (9 August 2002): 9.

¹⁸ *The Nation* (13 August 2002).

¹⁹ Panitan Wattanayagorn, cited in *Matichon Weekly* (9 August 2002): 9.

²⁰ Anek Laothamathat, cited in *Matichon Weekly* (9 August 2002): 9.

The consequence of the annual military reshuffle in 2002 showed the stability of the government, wielding great power over political, military and bureaucratic institutions, and capable of playing a crucial role in such a military reshuffle.²¹ From that moment on, one can see that the Thai government could proceed to implement its policy towards Myanmar. Many projects and forms of assistances as well as cooperation were offered to Myanmar. The apparent turning point of the role of engagement between Thailand and Myanmar was acknowledged when the newly appointed army commander in chief, General Somdhat Attanand said that the military would act under the policy of the government.²² The duty of the military to counter drug activities along the frontier would also be transferred to the police and civilian units instead.²³ After the reshuffle, with the army now an instrument of the new government policy, tension decreased, cooperation increased and relations were normalized.

Domestic Drug Issue

Another crucial internal factor heating up the relations between Thailand and Myanmar was Thailand's internal drug problems. The problems were raised publicly when the Prime Minister Thaksin held a workshop at Chiang Rai on 10-11th March 2001 concerning the drug issue as an urgent national agenda. Drug activities and production in the northern area of the Shan States were brought up in the meeting, as well as the name of Muang Yawn and the UWSA autonomy. Once the problems received such public attention, the government had to consider several conflicting options to deal with drug production and the Myanmar government. The situation was complicated by a trilateral relationship involving Thailand, Myanmar and the UWSA, controlling a special autonomous region in agreement with the Junta government. Thailand had to deal with both. The question was how, because the Myanmar and the UWSA were closely associated.

²¹ Ukrit Patamanand, "Thailand," *Asian Yearbook* (2002): 36.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ukrit Patamanand, "Thailand," *Asian Yearbook*: p. 45.

The drug issue was not new for Thailand. The Thai people had been exposed to drugs for a long time. But in the past, the problems were relatively confined. At first, drug activities within the country were mainly focused on opium plantations and heroin abuse in the later period. The problem was not such a severe situation as in the present. As such, opium was legalized by the King Rama IV and allowed the Chinese to control opium distribution.²⁴ It meant that the abusers of opium had to be registered by the state so that the state could easily control the number of opium users. The negative consequences of opium use began to be considered by Thai government and people during the period of King Rama VI. At the time, opium was sold back to the state so as to have a direct control over the situation. Limited areas of opium selling during the King Rama VIII led drug producers to develop products such as kratom and marihuana into society.²⁵ However, the first and concrete effort by the government to combat the drug problem was initiated by the Government of Revolutionary Party under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat in 1958. The eradication of opium fields and the abolition of opium smoking and selling, again, programs were launched. As a result, the abolition of opium smoking and selling created a new trend of drug abuse and trafficking within the country. Other drugs such as morphine, heroin and later, metamphetamine were included. In more recent times, Thailand was a country of transit for heroin and other narcotics from the Golden Triangle area to consumers in the west.

It was not until the mid-1990s that the Thai society, particularly its teenaged members, became a major consumer of narcotics, with rapidly increasing illicit drug production, illicit drug trafficking and illicit drug epidemic. The turning point was drug producers' success in developing a new line of drugs, which was less complicated to produce, less bulky to transport and cheaper to sell than heroin. These were Metamphetamine, called Yama (horse pills), later Yaba (crazy pills), which became very popular with the Thai people, especially the younger ones. The drug produces have developed their new product to attract to the consumer constantly, particularly Thai

²⁴ Col. Chanchai Sountirkade, Seminar on "Drug Problems: Do and Don't," in Thailand – Myanmar: Do and Don't, 5 Area Studies Project No. 2, ed. Umporn Jiratikorn (Bangkok, 2001), p. 48.

²⁵ Ibid.

teenagers. Over the last ten years, Yaba has become a major security threat in Thailand, which all governments had to be concerned with.

Metamphetamine or Yaba abuse increased drastically in Thailand since 1997. According to the Office of Narcotic Control Board of Thailand (ONCB), the approximate number of arrested drug abusers in 1995 and 1996 are 20,000 and 42,000 respectively.²⁶ The number of cases increased to 80,000 (approx. 32 million pills) and 130,000 (approx. 38 million pills) in 1998 and 1999 respectively.²⁷ Moreover, if one compares Yaba abusers to other kinds of illicit drug abusers, we found that the dramatic increase of metamphetamine abusers from 1 % in 1993 to 58.39 % in 1999.²⁸ In addition, the statistics of drug abusers who went to the rehabilitation center reported that there were 43,191 people in the center in 2000. Among these numbers, there are 34,154 people in the age range of 15-24 and there are 49.99 percent of patient who used Yaba before admitting to the center.²⁹ Thai national security was threatened because of Yaba's destruction to the country's human resources. Recently, the figures of arrested cases remained high with 6,612 recorded cases in the first half year of 2004.*

This was the situation that stimulated the Thaksin Government to initiate an urgent policy to overcome drug problems immediately after his new Government took office in 2001. This urgency could also be considered Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party's attempt to implement an important part of its election platform, which won over people's hearts and minds in a landslide victory. The urgency, with which the government's war on drug program was raised, also meant that, in the initial stages, there was insufficient

²⁶ Statistic Page, [The office of the Narcotics Control Board](#) [Online].

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

* The trend of drug activities has been continually decreasing after the government had proclaimed the war on drug campaign. However, the campaign has been criticized by society because of human rights violations particularly the extrajudicial killings were almost 3000 people were killed without any investigation.

consideration made as to how the war on drug campaign would affect relations with neighbors.

In early 2001, the government held a two-day drug workshop in Chiang Rai. This took place amid the sour relations with Myanmar due to the confrontation along the border. Workshop delegates were impressed by a slide show and photographs presented by the Thai Army as evidence to back up its critical comments about the increased production of speed pills and heroin in the Shan States in Myanmar.³⁰ The name of Muang Yawn* and the rapid growth of the town with a dam, hospital, hotels and modern houses with satellite dishes caused a great deal of attention.³¹ After the meeting, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra revealed plans to monitor the Thai-Myanmar border with satellite surveillance in its war against drugs, in order to analyze the latest developments in drug production and trafficking across Thailand's borders. The name of Myanmar had been directly mentioned in the meeting. The mechanism to counter drug activities across the border was also to involve cooperation with the US.³² These developments were perceived by the Myanmar government to have an impact on its security and to interfere in its internal affairs. Not long after the workshop, the Myanmar Government replied by launching many anti-Thai campaigns through government-controlled publications and media.

How do Thailand's domestic drug problems affect the relations between Thailand and Myanmar? Firstly, mentioning the name of Myanmar and drug activities inside the country was perhaps perceived by Myanmar to be a threat to its national security. One

³⁰ Aung Saw, "War on Drug Hots Up," The Irrawaddy [Online]. 2001. Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=3390&z=21>

* Mong Yawn, just 30 kilometers north of Chiang Mai province, is now controlled by Wa rebels known as the United Wa State Army [UWSA]. The UWSA entered a cease-fire agreement with Rangoon in 1989 and its autonomy was given in return since then. The town used to be inhabited by Tai people of Shan State until the Myanmar government adopted relocation policy to move the Wa in the northern area of Shan State to come down and live in this new area.

³¹ Aung Saw, "War on Drug Hots Up," The Irrawaddy [Online].

³² Ibid.

prominent factor that one has to consider is that Myanmar, from her historical inheritance, has always had security as the primary concern. The political development of the country led the country to adhere strictly to the non-intervention principle, and any suggestion of intervention was always received with great concern. Thus, no matter what evidences Thailand came up with, there was little likelihood of Myanmar's accepting them. This could be seen in different ways, such as using government's publications to counter accusations and moving troops along the border. These factors could and did directly and indirectly lead to worsening relationships between Thailand and Myanmar.

Secondly, the meeting in Chiang Rai gave the green light to the army to deal with drug activities along the border. It was not surprising to see fighting between Thai drug counter forces and the UWSA during the time. But why did the Thai operations against the UWSA along the border lead to confrontations with Myanmar troops despite the fact that the military government had promised to control its domestic drug activities? Pornpimon Trichote pointed out that there was a bilateral agreement between the Junta and the UWSA allowing the latter autonomy in the northern area of Shan States.* Thailand was later one of the actors playing in the quadrilateral relations in the fighting between the Myanmar government, the UWSA, and the Shan State Army (SSA). In the area during the time, there was a fight between the SSA and the UWSA. This fight led to the SSA's involvement in a fight with the Junta because the Junta was helping the UWSA destroy the SSA stronghold according to Col Yord Serk.³³ The alliance between the Myanmar's central government and the UWSA was a factor, which led to the confrontation between Thai drug-counter troops and the Junta.³⁴ Moreover, the connection between Myanmar's government and the UWSA was mentioned by Col Yord Serk, when he said that "It is 100 percent sure that they are involved in drugs.... The

* Pornpimon Trichote, The Myanmar government and the ethnic minority groups, p.166. A prominent circumstance that conveys the Myanmar government's perception towards drug activities in the country is the relocation policy of Wa people in the northern region of Shan State downward to the area adjacent to Thai border. Further details concerning such policy will be further explained in the next part of the thesis.

³³ Ibid. Col Yord Serk is the commander of the Shan State Army-South.

³⁴ Ibid.

UWSA made a cease-fire, and is under the SPDC. Whenever Khin Nyunt travels to UWSA or Sai Lin area, he always gets something for his pocket. Wei Hseuh Kang is also still doing business. This is the proof that they are involved from the top. At the mid-level, such as Division commanders and Brigade commanders, officers get bribes from drug dealers, cultivation tax from poppy fields, tax from drugs traders, and protection fees. This is done without direct knowledge from the top. Mid-level officials try to hide this from the top level. But they know what is happening at the mid-level, and also the mid-level knows what is happening at the top.”³⁵

Again, the confrontation was lessened when the government realized the ineffectiveness of its previous approach. The previous government gave the responsibility to the army in dealing with drug problems, which irritated Myanmar. On the contrary, the present government’s perspective strongly insisted that economic cooperation could help improve and eradicate drug problems in Myanmar. Therefore, the counter-drug policy was turned up side down. Although Thaksin had blamed Myanmar and Myanmar’s UWSA for being a major source of drugs, particularly amphetamines, during the National Workshop in Chiang Rai province, his decision to go to Myanmar in the middle of 2001 effectively ended the neighboring country’s displeasure over his blunt remarks. Moreover, the government’s initiative in offering drug assistance to Myanmar was later made after the several visits of high-ranking officials, Myanmar’s Intelligence Chief Lt General Khin Nyunt in September 2001 and General Chavalit Yingchaiyudh in July 2001. One of the concrete mutual agreements between the two neighbors was Thailand’s 20-million baht drug assistance to Myanmar.* Programs like Yong Kha crop substitution project under the cooperation of the Royal Project at Doi Tung were initiated in 2002

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An interview with Col Yord Serk, “Suspicious in Shan State”, [The Irrawaddy \(Online\)](http://www.irrawaddy.org)
Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=236&z=6>

* However, Thai society as well as academics has been still criticizing the project as to whether it will be effective or not. Moreover, there are some views from Tai Yai people who live along the border reflecting on the cooperation between Thailand and Myanmar in Yong Kha. Chaisam who fled from Myanmar many years ago due to the political situation said that this program is not useful for the people in the city because the efficient cooperation needed to involve the Myanmar government. Even now, the Myanmar government has still limited the assistance particularly in education in this area. He thinks that Thai assistance and cooperation will not be achieved unless the Myanmar has willingness to solving the problem. Most of the administrative control was held by the UWSA.

under the 20 million baht assistance. The program is intended to be a pilot project for a couple of years and has been modeled after the successful implementation in Doi Tung. The objective of the program is to offer the Wa people an alternative income from growing many crops such as soybean, maize, cassava and cotton instead of growing opium according to M.R. Disnadda Diskul, the Doi Tung chief executive.³⁶

Thai domestic drug problems became the problems that affect the relationships between Thailand and Myanmar when the Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra put the narcotic issue as one of the country's urgent agenda. Drug workshop in earlier 2001 caused a bad impact on the relations. Mentioning the narcotic trade and drug activities inside Myanmar in the conference aroused emotions and gave the green light to the army to launch an attack on drug trafficking in the border area where the tension was already serious. Of course, the two national armies confronted with each other. Domestic drug problems, the government's drug policy, and the role of the RTA caused sour relations between the two countries. However, tension concerning narcotic problems was abated by newly implemented drug policy of the government, the war on drug campaign. Inward-looking drug eradication was implemented to avoid conflicts with Myanmar.

Thai Nationalism

The conflicts and confrontations in the early 2001 arose from and are intensified by Thai nationalism. The sense of nationalism in the country is an issue that one has to explore when we analyze conflicts between Thailand and Myanmar. The part one should focus on is the socialization process, which permanently affects the Thailand's knowledge and perception of Myanmar. Historical enmity between Thailand and Myanmar has in the past been used in Thailand's socialization process to serve internal purposes, yet it only increased the sense of animosity towards Myanmar. Not enough attention has been paid to this factor. Its existence meant that Thai relations with Myanmar have been conducted on the basis of perceptions, and not reason or facts.

³⁶ Marwann Macan, "Anti-Opium Campaign Wins Overseas Coverts," *The Irrawaddy* [Online]. 2003. Available from: <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=83&z=100>

Initially, the image of Myanmar, Burma or Bama as an enemy was used to serve Thai domestic political purposes since the Thonburi period and the beginning of Ratanakosin era. Defeat in the hands of Burma in 1757 and long years of war in the decades following identified Burma as the main external threat. But sustained perceptions of Burma's threat, while contributing to changes in Thai military perspectives and policies, also enhanced the positions of Thai kings as the nation's protector and helped to legitimize the throne.³⁷

An antagonistic attitude towards Myanmar was more fully integrated into Thai interpretations of history from the reign of King Rama IV. During the period, the Kingdom of Siam faced a new world order of colonial expansion. In order to deal with the new threat, there had to be an adjustment of law manuscripts and a reorganization of the government, partly to forge unity of the country and mold a sense of the so-called Nation-State or Modern State. These were considered vital for maintaining the country's independence. The tasks were continued by the King Rama V and his successors and it was during the Reign of King Rama VI that the sense of being a nation state and having Burma as the nation's enemy was strongly emphasized.³⁸ History became a nation-building measure of the government.

Dr. Sunait Chutintaranond said: "After the Burma sack of Ayuddhaya in 1757, Thai leaders thought that Burma was the sign of evil who had tried to destroy Buddhism and the peaceful of the people. But in a changing political arena of the Nation-State, the leaders' historical dimension was not solely limited in the relations of the royalty, the court and the central and capital principality. Burma was newly reinterpreted as the enmity of Thai nation as a whole."³⁹ From this point, the knowledge of common history was interpreted publicly by using Burma as the common enemy so as to establish the sense of unity instead. Burma became the major actor in Thai nationalism since then.

³⁷ Sunait Chutintaranond, Burma battling Thailand : The war between Thailand and Burma (Bangkok: Matichon, 1994), p.19.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 31

³⁹ Ibid.

During the later periods, such perceptions of Burma were disseminated among the Thai people at large through an historical study masterpiece, namely *Prince Damrong Rachanubhab's Thai Rob Bama* (Our Wars with the Burma). Many incidents were re-explained by using normal people as the main actor in some incidents. Using normal people in historical scenes provided the evidence that wars were not only affairs of the King and his Royal Court, but also critical issues for the people as a whole. The dissemination of such interpretations of history widely touched the people's sense of nationalism. They were encouraged to have a collective perception of national unity. Such perceptions and sentiments do not easily disappear and inevitably have an impact on the present.

Scientific explanation of Price Damrong Rachanubhab in his *Thai Rob Bama* additionally found, whether intentionally or not, one strong fundamental knowledge and perception towards Myanmar or Burma in the socialization process. Due to the scientific work and the requirements of nation-building, Thai leaders such as Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram used the reinterpretation of Myanmar in order to serve their nation-building policy. History textbooks became the government's mechanism to implement this policy. The important factor of this measure is that the sense of nationalism, which portrayed Myanmar as a main enemy, was transferred to new generations of Thais. Whenever Thais were called on to express sentiments of loyalty to their country and to demonstrate concerns about security from external threats, somehow Myanmar always became involved. Moreover, the strong sense of nationalism in textbooks influenced historical novels and movies as well. For instance, a novel called *Bangrachang* was composed on the basis of observations in historical texts, mainly *Thai Rob Bama*.⁴⁰ The novel was popular among Thais because the author usually used emotional wording, which immediately touched the people. Lots of historical novels and movies used wars and incidents with Myanmar in the ancient times as contexts for creating heroes and heroines. Myanmar's image as a permanent enemy and the looter of Thai independence was rooted

⁴⁰ Ibid.

in Thai people's perceptions via mass entertainment productions.⁴¹ Now, if one asks Thai students about their country's history, they would all precisely and unwaveringly remember what has been done by the Burmese, pointing out specifically as examples the two sacks of Ayuddaya, rather than what has been done by Thai Kings.

Nationalism via socialization has been one of the domestic problems affecting Thai-Myanmar relations. It might have led the country to directly confront Myanmar, but its continued existence, as expressed in the *Bangrachan* movie, helped increase the degree of confrontation in some respect.

This problem has appeared frequently. As we can see from the confrontations between Thailand and Myanmar in the last few years, the degrees of conflicts between the two countries have always been stimulated by our sense of nationalism. Therefore, our sense of nationalism rapidly resulted in the objection of Myanmar whenever the confrontations occurred. Sometimes nationalism can also lead the country to militarization. Surachart Bamrungsuk used the word "Bangrachanization" to explain what was happening during the early 2001. He said, "The deep-rooted problems were intensified right in the period of time when *Bangrachan* was shown. The movie spurred the abhorrence of Myanmar and emphasized that Myanmar is our absolute enemy which later legitimized the armed conflict resolution by Thai authority towards the problems."⁴² Sometimes acts of the military became acts of heroes in the people's opinion. Therefore, *Bangrachanization* can be used in the same context of militarization when we deal with Thailand and Myanmar's relations as the armed resolution of military who fight Myanmar for sake of the country. This emphasized yet again that the feelings towards the movie called *Bangrachan* was a consequence of our socialization process, which affected our perceptions of Myanmar unavoidably. An old foe of our traditional state was reinterpreted as the present enemy of our modern country. The story of the movie was not just narrated as a process of historical development or the historical incident. Instead, it reflected the problem that allowed people to fulfill their nationalism by having Myanmar

⁴¹ Ibid., p.41

⁴² Surachart Bamrungsuk, *Matichon Weekly* (4 June 2001): 30.

as the “bad guy”. Nationalism is not the cause of the conflicts but it can either support or intensify the conflicts to become more serious between Thailand and Myanmar.

In conclusion, Thailand's domestic problems have played a significant role in conflicts and confrontations between Thailand and Myanmar, particularly the role of the RTA. The role of the army emphasized the unsuccessful policy implementation of the government. Despite the Prime Minister's and his cabinet's generosity towards Myanmar, border tensions occurred for the first two years of this administration. Furthermore, the border clashes were supported by the Thai people, when the government put narcotic problems on the national agenda. The drug workshop in early 2001 brought the tension to touch the highest point because it gave the green light to the army to fight against drug troops on the border. In addition, the Thai people's concern with drug problem legitimized the role of the Thai army to counter and fight against drug trafficking along the border. Of course, a battle between the two national armies is an unavoidable incident because we have to consider the close association between the Myanmar central government and the UWSA troops. If the Thais had to deal with the narcotic problems with troops, then they had to confront the UWSA and later the Junta inevitably. More importantly, the tension between Thailand and Myanmar was not limited the level of government-to-government relations, but the ordinary people got involved with the incident also. Though our nationalism through our socialization did not cause direct confrontations between the two countries, it made these confrontations worse.

However, of the greatest importance was the fact that problems between Thailand and Myanmar resulted from transformation of the policymaking process. In the first two years of this government, Prime Minister Thaksin was not able to implement his policy on the government mechanisms. Apparently, we can see the differences between the policy towards Myanmar of the previous government and the present one. Prime Minister Chuan adhered to the principle of democratization along with concerns for human rights and narcotic problems. As such, these principles could be able to cause conflicts with Myanmar. Interestingly, the present government suddenly turned its foreign policy towards Myanmar up side down by initiating an economic integration as the country's first priority and putting democratic issues aside. Prime Minister Thaksin had his strong

determination to have a good and warm association with Myanmar. But the army had yet to adjust itself to the new policy. Thus, the main cause of conflicts and confrontations with respect to Thailand's domestic conditions was the problem of policy transformation from the previous government to the present. What the Thaksin government had to face was the heritage of policy implementation of the previous government.