

Why Do Small States Adopt Divergent Alignment Policies? : The Alignment Policies of Indonesia and Thailand in the Early 1950s

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Abstract

The purpose of my study is to address the question of where the discrepancies in the alliance policies of the weaker countries emerge in the context of great power competition. Existing theory indicates that the weaker states' autonomous foreign policies are constrained by the distribution of power in international politics. There is also a view that the domestic political structure and ideology are also significant. This paper examines the divergent diplomatic and security policies of Indonesia and Thailand during the early 1950s. Both countries needed foreign economic help and faced security difficulties, but Indonesia adopted a non-aligned attitude rather than forming an alliance with the United States. Thailand, on the other hand, continued to cooperate with the US despite domestic political debate. This research demonstrates that these discrepancies are a result of the two countries' domestic political power structures and ideology.

Keywords : Weak States, Alignment Policy, Cold War, Domestic Politics, Ideology, Indonesia, Thailand

I . Introduction

The development of Great Power competition poses a severe threat to weak states. Above all, rival Great Powers attempt to coerce weak states into choosing a side because they strategically desire to form such a coalition in order to win the power struggle. Even though weak states often lack the ability to sway the balance of power on their own, their active or passive engagement on one side or the other of such power struggle may nonetheless assist in developing an advantageous position in such fight between the Great powers. Weak states are desired by contending Great Powers not only because they frequently supply the land and infrastructure necessary to position a military base offensively or defensively, as well as logistical assistance and men, but also because they may provide ideological support. Selecting one side can assist both the exterior and internal security of weak states. Choosing sides, on the other hand, might constitute a serious threat to weak states' external security as well as their internal development and stability, as they risk becoming severely entangled or driven into direct armed confrontation. As a result, weak states confronted with Great Power confrontation may seek to remain nonaligned in order to avoid such consequences.

My paper will aim to answer the following questions. (1) How do tiny states react when confronted with a Great Power competition? For instance, do they form an alliance with one Great Power against another or remain neutral? (2) What are

the variables that explain why one country allies with one Great Power while another remains nonaligned in similar circumstances? To address these questions, my research focuses on Indonesia and Thailand's early Cold War foreign policy decision-making. I examine why two countries choose divergent courses in the face of a similar external security threat: Indonesia pursued a strategy of non-alignment, which culminated in the Bandung Conference in 1955, whereas Thailand pursued a policy of closer alignment with the US, which resulted in Thailand's entrance to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954. While both Indonesia and Thailand were in a similar situation in which they sought military and economic assistance from the US, my study argues that their distinct domestic political factors, such as nationalism and anti-colonialism, had a different effect on their foreign policy toward the US.

This article strives to overcome deficiencies in earlier studies on weak country alignment strategies. While much of the existing literature on alliance formation has concentrated on structural variables and the behavior of great powers, many studies have overlooked the importance of contextualizing domestic politics. Given this, my paper details how disparate strategic considerations and threat perceptions among diverse domestic political parties result in disparate alignment policies. Additionally, my research contributes to a better understanding of Indonesian and Thai foreign policy in the early phases of the Cold War.

II. Theories of Weak State Alignment and Domestic Political Explanations

The existing body of knowledge on weak state alignment policy can be classified into two types. The first group of studies is concerned with the international system. Assuming states are rational and unitary, their behavior is dictated by their amount of power within the international system. In that sense, weak states prefer to stay nonaligned in the face of Great Power war and would join the bandwagon if compelled to do so (Fox 1959; Rothstein 1968; Schweller 1994; Walt 1981). This group of experts contends that weak states will gravitate toward the winning side due to their limited ability to influence the result. However, the mechanisms underlying such states' decisions remain unknown, as does why states belonging to the same group react differently. If one of the weak nations advocates for nonalignment, how come the other weak state joins on the alliance?

The second line of research examines disparities in states' unit-level characteristics, such as their political system types or specific foreign policy objectives. While these researchers concur with systemic realists in asserting that weak governments have limited capabilities and poor state-society interactions, they address which domestic factors should be included in explaining weak nations' foreign policy (Elman 1995; David 1991; Barnett & Levy 1991).

While previous study advances our understanding of the

factors that influence weak states' alignment choices, a puzzle persists: why does one weak state remain unaligned despite a Great Power's promise to provide security and economic assistance? Which considerations preclude weak states' elites from forming a complete alliance with a great power? To account for unresolved discrepancies in the pattern of weak states, it is necessary to explain the interaction between domestic power structures and ideological elements.

According to my research, inequalities in domestic power distribution cause elites to place a varied priority on exterior alignment. The greater absolute influence a single political group wields in internal politics, the more options they can have to adopt unilateral alignment policies, resulting in bandwagoning. By contrast, when a single political group lacks absolute domestic control, it is forced to consider the preferences of its competitors for a certain alignment strategy and so chooses to stay nonaligned.

According to Reiter, small countries' alliance decisions in the twentieth century were mostly determined by lessons learned from national experiences, rather than by fluctuations in the intensity of external threat (Reiter 1994). History demonstrates that in weak states, sensitivity to sovereignty and autonomy has always been a major issue (Kahin 1953; Weinstein 1976; Acharya 2009). In this view, if rivals exploit these concerns to attack the incumbent, and the incumbent's power is relatively susceptible to criticism, they will avoid relying on a single Great Power. Naturally, elites in fragile governments will continue to seek external assistance in order to achieve internal development and stability. However,

bandwagoning may not be the preferable choice, given that opposition forces continue to pursue a leadership role in domestic politics; they continue to attack, seeking external alignment as a form of compromise and submission. By contrast, if one force seizes the initiative in domestic politics, it can pursue any foreign policy it wishes despite objections from rival forces and ideological reasons.

The theoretical premises outlined above will be examined through a comparative case study of Southeast Asian states' responses to the early 1950s Cold War. Both nations had external and internal vulnerabilities throughout the period in issue, having only recently attained parliamentary democracy and independence at the time of their decision to align or not align. From 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, to September 1954, when SEATO was established. Indonesia first became a player in international politics during this period, as Thailand struggled to create post-independence foreign policies. It was also a time when the US began to express genuine concern about the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia in the aftermath of Communist China's establishment in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, and thus the US sought to respond to these shifts by entering a phase of heightened tensions with the Communist bloc.

My study examines the motivations for these nations' foreign policy indirectly through an examination of both official records from the US State Department, which had diplomatic contacts with two states at the time, and secondary sources.

III. Indonesia's Non-Alignment Policy Decision

External assistance was vital for Indonesia, a newly independent nation, to stabilize domestic politics. Economic and military assistance were not only for economic gain, but also for the nation's existence. Initially, Indonesian authorities sought to create the country alone, without relying on external assistance. For example, under the Natsir administration in 1951, the Economic Urgency Plan was implemented with the purpose of minimizing economic dependency. However, after six months, this plan failed due to a lack of foreign investment and finance (Glassburner 1976: 85-86). In that sense, the leaders of each of the governments that ruled into the mid-1950s highlighted the critical role of foreign credits and investment (Sutter 1959). A fascinating phenomenon was that a broad range of pro-western Masjumi officials, including the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), acknowledged the importance of foreign funding in achieving economic success. While there was considerable debate about the conditions under which foreign capital should be authorized, the majority of Indonesia's political parties agreed that foreign resources were necessary to satisfy pressing domestic needs (Weinstein 1976, 208). Sukarno also declared that he would gladly accept American support to Indonesia (FRUS 1950, Vol. 6, p.976). This reveals that Indonesia is a weak state that relied on outward alignment to deal with internal dangers and achieve societal wellbeing.

The time from December 1949, when Dr. Mohammed Hatta

became Prime Minister, and June 1953, when Mr. Wilopo's cabinet fell, is referred to as "the Masjumi period." The period following the demise of the Wilopo administration is referred to as "the Indonesian National Party (PNI) period" and is characterized by the dominance of "the less tolerant ultra-nationalist and socialist politicians" in attitude (Sutter 1959). Following the demise of the Wilopo cabinet, Indonesia's foreign policy gradually shifted away from a pro-western orientation toward one of nonalignment. This begs the question of what component of Indonesia's domestic power distribution hindered its access to the United States. How did ideological factors connect with domestic politics during this process?

As numerous scholars have noted, the early 1950s were a period of experimentation in Indonesia with Constitutional Democracy (Feith 1962). Each of these political factions has a unique perspective on domestic policy and foreign relations. In a multiparty system, each political group contended for power and was forced to form a coalition at some point. During that era, no single party was capable of seizing power on its own. Following the demise of pro-western Natsir, PNI forces speculated on the possibilities of forming a cabinet on the basis of the smaller nationalists party and the PKI. The PNI and PKI had adopted an outspoken position on the Netherlands and West Irian affairs. As will be explained in greater detail below, the West Irian question was not merely a territorial dispute. It was inextricably linked to the Indonesian people's general attitude toward "foreign influences" and internal power allocation. However, following a succession of

failed attempts by the PNI to establish a coalition with other groups, the PNI was left with little, if any, choice than to join a coalition with Masjumi. Additionally, Masjumi leader Dr. Sukiman was appointed Prime Minister (Feith 1962, 177-187). Even if Masjumi was appointed to a crucial post in the coalition government, this did not mean they could lead foreign policy alone without the consent of their coalition partners. Sukiman's attempt to identify with the US in this setting inevitably drew hostility from his adversaries and coalition allies.

A 1951 "Mutual Security Act Agreement Crisis" demonstrates convincingly how a balanced domestic power structure can prevent a single political entity from adopting a unilateral alignment policy. Sukiman's ministry implemented a series of pro-Western reforms after assuming power in 1951. While the former Hatta-Natisir government took a hard line on Communists, they did not deem their activities illegal. Sukiman, on the other hand, pursued strong anti-Communist actions, notably the August 1951 mass arrest of Communists (Goscha & Ostermann 2009, 57-58). Along with its dramatic efforts against local Communists, the Sukiman cabinet took a series of moves to strengthen its ties with the United States. To begin, they maintained a buffer zone around a Communist China by increasing restrictions on Chinese officials' diplomatic interactions with Indonesia. Second, Sukiman signed the Japanese Peace Treaty, breaking with India and Burma despite their shared nationalist sentiments and otherwise nonaligned stance in international affairs (Archarya 2009).

These pro-US measures were applauded by US authorities.

It was an unavoidable fact that the United States' economic and military assistance to Indonesia were inextricably tied to their strategy regarding Communist forces. Beginning with the first stage of Indonesia's conflict with the Netherlands, the US repeatedly emphasized to Indonesia the critical nature of adopting an anti-Communist posture in order to gain US backing. In response to Musso's and Communist troops' rebellion, US Consul General Livengood informed Prime Minister Hattat that Indonesia's efforts to repress Communists would aid the US in mediating between Indonesia and the Netherlands. Indeed, as Hatta played a leading role in the Communist struggle, the US began to view Indonesia favorably. In a September 1948 internal note, US officials analyzed the effect of Indonesia's crushing of the rebellion and suggested that it exerted pressure on the Netherlands to accept the US recommendations for Indonesian independence (FRUS 1948, 364).

Additionally, the US was obligated to economically help Indonesia as long as it maintained its non-Communist nature. In the early 1950s, Indonesian elites ranging from nationalist to pro-Western groups were well aware of the connection between US economic assistance and their support for the US Cold War policies. In this setting, it was a rational strategy for Indonesian elites to chose the United States as an external ally in order to deliver economic and military benefits to their political followers as well as to the general public. If so, what factors contributed significantly to Indonesia's enmity against the US?

To understand why, one must first grasp a fundamental

factor that contributed to widespread anti-American sentiment. It is worth noting that, parallel to the US-Indonesia relationship, a confrontation with the Netherlands continued to be a source of anxiety in Indonesia. Indonesia's principal ambition as a weak state was to unite as a country. Regardless of their differing views on foreign policy and economic development, the majority of Indonesia's political parties shared a commitment to the inviolability of West Irian as an integral part of Indonesia. This unifying ideology was enshrined in law in December 1939 and reaffirmed in the Declaration of Independence in 1945 (Bone 1958, 24-49). During a meeting with State Department officials, a delegation seeking independence claimed that New Guinea under the Netherlands would be nothing more than another Dutch colony. It was not merely a matter of regaining their nation for them; it was a symbol of the vestiges of Dutch colonialism (FRUS 1949, 485).

Obviously, the US recognized the Irian crisis's sensitivity. The State Department concluded in a July 1950 review of US policy toward Indonesia that Indonesian political leaders did not feel their country had gained total independence and would launch a systematic political campaign to conquer Irian. Additionally, they determined that the US would be prudent to take into account the high level of sensitivity around Indonesia's sovereignty (FRUS 1950, 1041~1043). The US, on the other hand, cannot fully consider Indonesia's sovereignty concerns because doing so might damage its relationship with the Netherlands, a crucial European partner. Additionally, the Netherlands considered West Irian as a symbol of their Indonesian supremacy and pressured the US to support their

position (FRUS 1949, 489~492).

Indeed, the US' unclear stance on anti-colonialism and nationalism in Asia during the Cold War's early years was significant not only for West Irian but also for other South East Asian nations. However, as Cold War tensions increased during the Korean War and Indochina crisis, the US began forcing South East Asian countries to choose between the Western and Communist blocs. The United States' respect for nationalism's significance and the delicate nature of sovereignty had eroded. In this setting, the US maintained complete neutrality in the Dutch-Indonesian dispute over West Irian. PNI and PKI forces, on the other hand, considered the US's absolute neutrality as a support for colonialism.

In summary, the US's ambiguous support for territorial integration and diverse political strife inside Indonesia precluded Indonesia from allying with the US in the 1950s, culminating in the country's non-alignment policy.

IV. Thailand's Decision to Pursue a Policy of Pro-US Alignment

In comparison to the situation in Indonesia, ideological factors did not serve as a basis for deciding on an alignment policy in Thailand. Even if nationalism and anti-colonialism persisted in Thailand throughout history, their influence on foreign policy was limited by internal power distribution. In comparison to Indonesia, Thailand's domestic political atmosphere favored pro-western political groups substantially.

Additionally, it should be highlighted that Communists in Thailand lacked political clout in comparison to Indonesian Communist forces, which wielded influence in Parliament. In comparison to Indonesia's Communist forces, Thailand's spontaneous Communists were few in number and poorly organized. According to a November 1951 CIA study on Communists in South East Asian countries, Thailand's Communist movement was numerically limited (Interagency Working Group 2001, 6~7).

Two major forces were at odds at the time over diametrically opposed political ideologies. Initially, liberal and left-wing forces such as the Pridi and Free Thai existed. Academics, journalists, and commercial interests comprised this group, which symbolized liberalism and parliamentary democracy. Additionally, its foreign policy priority was to reestablish traditional neutrality in order to avoid an alliance with either the US or China (Kobkua 1996, 170). Pridi's foreign policy was defined by a desire for solidarity with other South East Asian countries in order to win support for territorial conflicts with France. In contrast to Pridi and his allies, Phibun and his army alliances advocated for pro-Western policies, anti-Communism, and authoritarian rule.

In common cause with Indonesia, the US tied aid to Thailand directly to its anti-Communist stance. Stanton, Ambassador to Thailand at the time, suggested that as the US would not strengthen its commitment to Thailand unless Thailand took a strong pro-Western position against Communism (FRUS 1949, 50~53). Indeed, numerous academics assert that the US not only paid little strategic attention to

Thailand, but also delayed economic assistance (Tuttle 1982; Fineman 1997). In comparison to Indonesia, the US did not prioritize allying with Thailand during the Cold War's early stages. If that is the case, why would Thailand abandon its customary policy of neutral alignment despite the risk of conflict with its Communist neighbors?

In 1947, a military revolution by Phibun and his allies radically altered Thailand's internal power distribution. In domestic politics, rival forces such as Pridi and the Free Thai movement lost influence. Although a series of counter-coup and uprising attempts were made, Phibun effectively quashed them. In 1949, Phibun faced a difficult choice between overtly aligning with the US or remaining neutral. In a developing rivalry in Indochina between the nationalist movement and the Western-bloc, Thailand's support of the pro-US Bao Dai administration signaled a strong allegiance to the US. Not only could Communist China, which had backed Ho Chi Min, view this as an act of hostility toward them, but Ho Chi Min forces could also view it as Thailand's clear pro-Western attitude. Indeed, US and British officials were fully aware of the dangers facing Thailand if it picked sides. In a review of Thailand's reluctance to recognize the Bao Dai administration, US and British diplomats stated that their reluctance was motivated by the risk of a riot by pro-Ho Chi Minh supporters (FRUS 1949, 115).

As was the case with the MSA crisis in Indonesia, the Bao Dai controversy sparked a bitter debate inside Thailand's domestic politics. The opposition was based on two main arguments: the danger of becoming embroiled in a battle

between Great Powers. The foreign ministry and civilian members of Phibun's cabinet maintained that the Bao Dai administration lacked Indochinese support and that the French army would leave Indochina (Fineman 1997, 105). Without a proactive and clear security commitment from the United States, Thailand may find itself directly involved in a military battle with nationalists and Communists.

Despite the strategic challenge and domestic disagreements, what distinguished this case from Indonesia was the already lopsided domestic power allocation in favor of Phibun and pro-Western domestic political groups. By 1950, pro-Western military organizations, such as Phibun, had established a foothold in foreign policy. For them, the only option to find a balance between private and public interests was to align with the US. Phibun's principal adversarial forces, with their diametrically opposed foreign policy perspectives, were already excluded from the 1947 coup in terms of power distribution (Goscha & Ostermann 2009, 284). If these rival factions exerted their influence over Thai domestic politics, Thailand might have remained neutral, as tradition dictates. Indeed, China proposed in December 1951, following Bao Dai's recognition, that the two countries form a "secret pact" to neutralize Thailand. However, Phibun and his military coalition rejected China's offer (Goscha 1999, 318).

Thailand's instance demonstrates how an imbalanced power distribution in internal politics has a significant impact on a weak state's decision to join the bandwagon notwithstanding the risk of entrapment. Obviously, anti-colonialism and nationalism were not as strong in Thailand as they were in Indonesia.

V. Conclusion

The article's research question examined the effect of domestic power distribution and ideological components on how a weak state's policy of alignment is determined. One may infer the following conclusions. To begin, elites with complete control over internal politics can overcome ideological barriers and domestic political opposition, resulting in the formation of a bandwagon with the external partner. Second, elite foreign policy autonomy may be constrained by the distribution of domestic political power and its relationship to ideological problems. As a result, they determine that nonalignment is the best course of action to avoid conflict with other internal political groups. The early 1950s alignment strategies of Indonesia and Thailand vividly illustrate the domestic political factors that underpin their alignment policies.

In addition, the policy implications of small-power countries' behavior during the Great Power Competition can be discussed in my research. Not just in Northeast Asia, but also in Southeast Asia, the US and China have recently engaged in strategic competition. True, the scope of action of relatively weak countries is confined by the strategic struggle between the US and China. The weak countries' foreign policies, however, are influenced by the domestic political power balance and ideological orientation, as this study shows. In the middle of the strategic competition between the US and China, as well as the recent confrontation between the US and

Russia, countries with a non-aligned diplomacy tradition, such as Indonesia and India, maintain a neutral stance. As Korea expands its economic ties with these ASEAN nations, it is critical to keep a close eye on and forecast their domestic political trends.

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투고일 : 2022년 3월 14일 . 심사일 : 2022년 3월 28일 . 게재확정일 : 2022년 4월 12일

* 진활민은 텍사스 A&M 대학교 정치학을 전공하였으며, 현재 텍사스 A&M 대학교 Instructor로 재직중이다. 주요 논문으로는 Hwalmin Jin, Matthew Fuhramann, Kyung Suk Lee, and James D. Kim, "Nuclear Weapons and Low-Level Military Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly*, 2022. 등이 있다.

<논문요약>

약소국 동맹정책의 차이는 무엇인가? :
1950년대 초반 인도네시아와 태국의 동맹정책

진활민

(텍사스 A&M 대학교)

본 논문은 강대국 경쟁 하에서 약소국들의 동맹 전략의 차이는 어디에서 발생하는가에 대한 해답을 추구한다. 기존 국제정치 이론은 약소국들의 자율적 외교 정책이 제한되어 있으며 국제정치에서의 힘의 배분이 약소국들의 외교정책을 추동한다고 설명한다. 또 한편으로 국내정치의 구도와 이데올로기, 민족주의의 국내 정치적 요소 또한 중요하다는 논의 또한 존재한다. 본 연구는 많이 주목받지 못했던 1950년대 초반 냉전의 형성 당시 인도네시아와 태국의 각기 다른 외교안보전략을 국내 정치적 비교연구를 통해서 분석한다. 두 국가는 모두 외부 경제적 지원의 필요성, 안보 위협에 직면했으나 동맹전략에 있어서 인도네시아는 미국과의 동맹이 아닌 비동맹 전략을 취한다. 반면 태국은 국내정치적 논란에도 불구하고 미국과의 협력을 취한다. 본 논문에서는 이러한 차이가 이 두 국가의 국내 정치적 세력 구도의 차별성에 기인하고 있음을 밝힌다.

주제어 : 약소국, 동맹정책, 냉전, 국내정치, 이데올로기, 인도네시아, 태국