Weaker States under the Shadow of Great Powers:

Foreign Policy Choices of Southeast Asian States

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SOAS, University of London, UK

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Abstract

With the United States and China competing for influence in Southeast Asia, how weaker states in the region make their foreign policy choices has come under more scrutiny in recent years. The conventional International Relations literature tends to focus on how great powers influence or even dictate weaker states' domestic politics and foreign policies, yet pays little attention to the weaker states' agency. There has not been enough study focusing on what conditions enable weaker states to maximize their own national interest. Why are some weaker states more capable of resisting demands made on them by the great powers? Why can some weaker states get more aid than others even though they are located within one geographic region? To explain how weaker states achieve their national interest, this paper offers a theoretical framework to analyze how the interplay between level of international competition and weaker states' foreign policy choices can explain weaker states' ability to realize their national interest. The paper then offers three paired comparisons of two weaker states in Southeast Asia — Thailand and Myanmar (Burma) — in their relations with the U.S. and China throughout the Cold War and post-Cold War periods to illustrate the logic of the theoretical framework.

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Introduction

The rise of People's Republic of China (PRC) in recent decades has generated tremendous strategic anxiety among myriad concerned parties. The exiting hegemon, the United States, which is concerned with maintaining its primacy in Asia Pacific region[1], has sought to strengthen existing security alliances while building new economic and trade ties potentially intended to exclude China, such as the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP).[2] While the U.S. continues to reject accusations that it intends to contain China, its rhetoric and actions as part of the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia have undoubtedly generated a strong perception of geostrategic competition with China for influence in the East Asia region.[3] In particular, many of the weaker member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have increasingly faced such competitive pressure from the two great powers. Such pressure on one hand makes foreign policy decision-making more complicated, because it is often difficult to balance between economic and military concerns, as well as competing domestic and international special interests. On the other hand, such competitive pressure can potentially create more opportunities as well as challenges for the weaker states[4] in optimally achieving their security interests.

The conventional IR literature overall has not paid enough attention to weaker states' foreign policy making. Instead, it tends to emphasize on the great powers and how they achieve their foreign policy goals, by influencing or even dictating weaker states' domestic politics and foreign policies. Especially in the realist tradition, the agency of the weaker states in the international system has been mostly dismissed, and there have not been enough studies focusing on how weaker states deal with the great powers. If we assume weaker states have their own national security interests, then how can they achieve those interests amid competition among great powers? Why are some weaker states more capable of resisting great powers' demands on them while others capitulate more easily? Why can some weaker states get more aid than others even though they are located within the same geographic region? Why do some weaker states get more security protection than others from great powers? How can we explain such variations in foreign policy choices and their consequences for weaker states' security interests?

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[1] For example, see Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, 1 edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012); Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why We Should Share Power*, Reprint edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013); Thomas Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power*, 1 edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015).

[2] Adrian Hearn and Margaret Myers, "China and the TPP: Asia Pacific Integration or Disintegration?," *The Dialogue*, accessed January 25, 2016, http://www.thedialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CLA-TPP-Report-final-web.pdf.

[3] Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (October 1, 2005): 7–45; Thomas J. Christensen, "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and U.S. Policy toward East Asia," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (July 1, 2006): 81–126.

[4] "Weaker state" is defined here as a relative category relative to the great powers. It is done to avoid a more rigid, "objective" categorization that often can be difficult to pinpoint empirically. The paper also avoided the usage of "small state" for the same reason.

To undertake such an endeavor, the paper first forwards a theoretical framework to explain the conditions under which weaker states can achieve optimal outcomes in pursuing their security interests. It proposes that we need to look at both the level of international competition the weaker states are subject to and the particular foreign policy choices weaker states take to engage the great powers[5]. The paper argues that when there is moderate competition among great powers, a weaker state is more likely to maximize its security interest if it tries to engage both, which is the so-called hedging strategy.[6] However, if the competition among great powers becomes intense, then the weaker states' best strategy is to engage only one great power by seeking a close alliance.

The paper test the theoretical framework on a set of comparative case studies, focusing on foreign policy choices and their consequences of two weaker states in Southeast Asia – Thailand[7] and Myanmar (Burma)[8] – in their dealings with the U.S. and the PRC since the end of WWII as paired case studies. There is a number of reasons why these two countries were chosen. Both are neighbouring states with very similar geographic and demographic sizes: Thailand is about 513k square kilometres with a population of about 70 million, while Myanmar is about 677k square kilometres with a population of around 56 million.[9] They also both have long historical relationships with China as they lie in China's immediate vicinity on the Southeast Asian mainland.[10] Although neither country has on-going territorial disputes with China, their bilateral relations with it have undergone many changes since the PRC's founding. Both countries have also experienced different levels of engagement with the United States since the start of the Cold War.

By looking at the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, we can see that the level of international competition in Southeast Asia between China and the U.S. varied from intense to more moderate level from the early- to late-Cold War periods (demarcated by the Sino-U.S. rapprochement in 1972), and then remain so in the post Cold War periods. What is significant in the comparison of Thailand and Myanmar is how these two countries vary quite differently in their

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[5] The paper only pays attention to scenarios where there are predominantly two great powers for more theoretical parsimony and clear empirical testing.

[6] Of course, the concept of hedging also does not have a universally agreed-upon definition. For a discussion on whether weaker states in East Asia are in fact practicing the hedging strategy, see Darren J. Lim and Zack Cooper, "Reassessing Hedging: The Logic of Alignment in East Asia," *Security Studies* 24, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 696–727.

[7] The name of the country was changed from Siam to Thailand after the abolishment of the absolute monarchy in 1932, although it got changed back to Siam during the WWII period before it changed to Thailand again in 1948. To have consistency, the paper uses the name Thailand throughout, except in direct quotations. See David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 2nd Revised ed. edition (Yale University Press, 2003).

[8] The country changed its name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. In this paper, I use Burma for the period before 1989, and Myanmar thereafter. For the controversies in the name change, see Lowell Dittmer, ed., *Burma or Myanmar? The Struggle for National Identity* (Singapore ; Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2010).

[9] The CIA World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

[10] Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, First Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1977); Edward Harper Parker, *Primary Sources, Historical Collections: Burma with Special Reference to Her Relations with China, with a Foreword by T. S. Wentworth* (Primary Sources, Historical Collections, 2011).

foreign policy choices. In the case of Thailand, the country engaged only with the U.S. in the first half of the Cold War by forming a close alliance. After the Sino-U.S. rapprochement, Thailand started to engage both great powers in its foreign policy, which it has continued to do ever since. In the case of Myanmar, the country's foreign policy has changed from relatively open neutralism in the 1950s, to self-isolation from the early 1960s till the late 1980s, to compelled engagement with China in the 1990s and 2000s, and finally to active engagement with both the U.S. and China since 2010. Furthermore, for the sake of contrast, Myanmar and Thailand have undergone different forms of regime changes recently, whereby the former has opened up democratically since 2010 while the latter had a military coup in 2014. Such changes of fortunes in their respective domestic political systems also provide an interesting comparison of the role of regime types on foreign relations.[11]

The structure of the paper is as follows. It reviews the existing literature on weaker states in IR, and then it proposes a theoretical framework of weaker states' foreign policy choices and their implications under different levels of international competition. It examines six theoretical scenarios of how a weaker state would fare in its dealings with great powers. Then the paper proceeds with a set of paired comparisons to demonstrate how the interplay between international competition and weaker states' foreign policy choices can produce different outcomes in realizing their security interest, for which the paper focuses specifically on three core aspects - prosperity, physical integrity, and autonomy – and the effects different foreign policy choices can have on them. The first set of comparisons is during the early Cold War when there was intense competition in Southeast Asia between the PRC-led communist forces and U.S.-led anticommunist bloc.[12] Here the paper first examines how, by engaging closely with the U.S., Thailand reaps handsome benefits by receiving generous economic and military assistance from Washington. On the other hand, the open neutralist stance taken by the Burmese government did not enable the country to obtain as much economic and military assistance from the U.S. The second comparison is on how effectively the two weaker states maintained physical integrity in their dealing with domestic communist insurgencies from the mid 1960s onwards. Here the paper compares how subsiding U.S.-China competition in the early 1970s had different implications for both countries, whereby Thailand has actively reached out to China since 1975, while Burma decided to self-isolate since the 1962 coup by Ne Win in his pursuit of the "Burmese Way to Socialism."[13] The third set of comparisons focuses on the post-Cold War period and how both states aim to maintain autonomy from external great power pressures. Here the paper first examines how Myanmar's foreign

[11] Jonathan W. Keller, "Leadership Style, Regime Type, and Foreign Policy Crisis Behavior: A Contingent Monadic Peace?," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (June 1, 2005): 205–32; Bethany Lacina and Charlotte Lee, "Culture Clash or Democratic Peace?: Results of a Survey Experiment on the Effect of Religious Culture and Regime Type on Foreign Policy Opinion Formation," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 143–70.

[12] This paper does not directly discuss the role played by the former Soviet Union, because the PRC was much more of a central figure in the communist movement in Southeast Asia than the soviets.

[13] Richard Butwell, "Ne Win's Burma: At the End of the First Decade," *Asian Survey* 12, no. 10 (1972): 901–12; ibid.; Maureen Aung-Thwin, Thant Myint-U, and Thant Mynt-U, "The Burmese Ways to Socialism," *Third World Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1992): 67–75.

policy change from engagement only with China to engagement with both China and the U.S. since 2011, and the subsequent improvement in its ability to maintain its autonomy from excessive Chinese influence. Then the paper looks at how Thailand's engagement with China and the U.S. has made it relatively immune from U.S. political pressure despite its recent political instability and a military coup. The paper then concludes with a discussion of the theoretical contribution of the paper on how we should approach weaker states' foreign policy behavior in international relations.

How Weaker States Achieve Their Security Interests

The mainstream IR literature tends to overwhelmingly focus on the great powers. As one commonly cited Thucydides' adage says, "The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must."[14] Great powers, with their greater capabilities, historically have exerted preponderant influence at the international system level. Given their power and influence, the conventional IR literature, especially the realist tradition, tends to focus more on the great powers.[15] However, the vast majority of countries in the world are not great powers. The IR literature derived mainly from the experiences of great powers might not be the most suitable to explain comparative foreign policy of weaker states. Instead, we would need approaches that are more attuned to specific circumstances of weaker states who are more constrained by their general lack of power capabilities.[16]

Much of the literature on weaker states tends to focus on a few aspects of their foreign policies, such as their alignment behavior, measures to mitigate their lack of power capabilities, and their attachment toward international regimes.[17] More specific to our interest is how weaker

[14] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War; Translated by Rex Warner*, Rev. ed., Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Eng, Baltimore Penguin Books 1972, 1972), 402.

[15] For example, see Bear F. Braumoeller, *The Great Powers and the International System: Systemic Theory in Empirical Perspective* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (January 1, 2016): 7–53; Daniel W. Drezner, "Bad Debts: Assessing China's Financial Influence in Great Power Politics," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (September 30, 2009): 7–45; Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, "Graceful Decline? The Surprising Success of Great Power Retrenchment," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (March 18, 2011): 7–44; John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated Edition edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014); Benjamin Miller, *States, Nations, and the Great Powers: The Sources of Regional War and Peace* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sebastian Rosato, "The Inscrutable Intentions of Great Powers," *International Security* 39, no. 3 (January 1, 2015): 48–88; Jack Snyder, "Trade Expectations and Great Power Conflict—A Review Essay," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (January 1, 2016): 179–96.

[16] For a good review of the literature on weaker states, see Christine Ingebritsen et al., eds., *Small States in International Relations* (Seattle & Reykjavik: University of Washington Press, 2006).

[17] There are also attempts to offer an additional category of middle powers, but to me the logic is similar to one used here to describe the weaker states. Bruce Gilley and Andrew O'Neil, eds., *Middle Powers and the Rise of China* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

states respond to great powers in times of peace and war in terms of their alignment behavior.[18] Particularly, the neorealist approach puts the emphasis on structural constraints on foreign policy choices, although they also disagree among themselves in terms of whether balancing or bandwagoning are more likely choices for weaker states.[19] On the other hand, there are others who draw attention to domestic factors in explaining foreign policy choices. For example, Annett Baker Fox, in her seminal work on neutrality of several small European states, argues how geo-strategic factors as well as diplomatic skills together explain how these states managed to resist pressure of great powers and stay neutral during WWII.[20] Putting emphasis on domestic factors as well, Miriam Elman points out how rules and structures of presidentialism influenced US military strategies in the 19th century.[21]

In the Asia Pacific context, recent scholarship has put forward the concept of hedging to explain several Southeast Asian states' foreign policy options in the context of U.S.-China strategic competition. Instead of the dichotomous choices of balancing or bandwagoning, increasingly scholars have noticed that many Southeast Asian states have tried to engage with two great powers without necessarily committing to either one.[22] Differentiable from balancing and bandwagoning, hedging by weaker states entail the use of an ambiguous positioning with mixed signals to both great powers, and approach both with selective deployment of power acceptance and power rejection.[23] Essentially, it means a relatively open engagement with both great powers.

Therefore, when alignment policies are concerned, we can conceptualize that there are three main foreign policy choices for a weaker state, assuming there are mainly two great powers competing for influence in a specific region. The first is to seek alliance with only one great power, no

[18] Robert L. Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1968); David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A Study of He Small Power in International Relations.* (Oxford, Clarendon P, 1967); August Schou and Arne Olav Brundtland, eds., *Small States in International Relations* (John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1971).

[19] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley Series in Political Science (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley PubCo, 1979); Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2006).

[20] Annette Baker Fox, *The Power of Small States: Diplomacy in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

[21] Miriam Fendius Elman, "The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard," *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (1995): 171–217.

[22] Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007): 113–57; Denny Roy, "Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2005): 305–22; Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's Response to a Rising China," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2008): 159–85; Rosemary Foot, "Chinese Strategies in A US-Hegemonic Global Order: Accommodating and Hedging," *International Affairs* 82, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 77–94.

[23] Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior towards China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (July 3, 2016): 502.

matter whether it is balancing against or bandwagoning with a particular one. The other two options are to stay overall neutral but differentiate in levels of openness. One is to stay isolationist, without engaging either great powers. The other is to engage with both great powers, aiming for open and active engagement that balances the one against the other.

The other crucial dimension that the existing literature on weaker states' foreign policies tends to focus on is the effect various types of international systems have on weaker states foreign policy choices.[24] Robert Rothstein, for example, distinguishes between three types of international systems: "conservative" balance-of-power systems; fluid and competitive balance-of-power systems; and bipolar-bloc balance-of-power systems. He argues that in the conservative system, weaker states can achieve security at the expense of influence, while the fluid and competitive system offers the weaker states more room for maneuver, and the bipolar-bloc system presents weaker states opportunities to maneuver but at the cost of security.[25] Michael Handel makes a similar argument that weaker states' foreign policy maneuverability is largely a function of the nature of the particular international system they are in. In a competitive system, the weaker states have the chance to manipulate the great powers to advance their interests, while in a hegemonic system the weaker states are dominated by a great power in its own sphere of influence, thus lacking autonomy.[26] Indeed, it would seem that levels of international competition are closely related with how weaker states can realize their security interests.[27] Thus, in order to understand how they can do so,[28] we have to consider the interplay between the level of international competition and the particular foreign policies they choose.[29] To simplify theorization, this paper demarcates two main levels of competition among great powers: one as intense competition, i.e. as experienced during the Cold War period, and other is moderate.[30] By juxtaposing the three foreign policy choices with two levels of great power competition, a theoretical framework on weaker states' satisfaction of their security interests can be proposed, as shown below in Table 1.

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[24] Robert O. Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics," *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (1969): 299.

[25] Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers*, 186–91; Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas," 299.

[26] Michael I. Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London, England ; Totowa, NJ: FCass, 1981), 171–72.

[27] Vital, *The Inequality of States*; Keohane, "Lilliputians' Dilemmas," 300.

[28] There is also the possibility of abandonment by the great powers, see Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, 1 edition (Cornell University Press, 2007), 180–85. In fact, great powers such as the United States abandon their allies quite regularly, see Michael Beckley, "The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts," *International Security* 39, no. 4 (2015): 7–48.

[29] In a different approach, Lin looks at how different competitive dynamics influence the great power's approach toward the smaller states. See Kuen-Da Dalton Lin, "Buying Your Way to Periphery Influence: Patronage Politics at Great Power's Peripheries" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015).

[30] Of course, there is another scenario where there is no or little competition between the great powers, but that is outside this paper's focus on great-power competition, which has already been assumed to be present. In addition, such competition levels perhaps should be better understood as a spectrum rather than a binary categorization, but for the purpose of theorization, they are treated in this way.

Table 1. Great Power Competition, Weaker States Foreign Policy Choices, and Probability of Security Interest Satisfaction

	Moderate Competition	Intense Competition
Engage Two Great Powers	High	Medium
Engage One Great Power	Medium	High
Engage Zero Great Power	Low	Low

When there is intense competition between two great powers, it would be very difficult for a weaker state to manage engaging both. In such a competitive environment, a "you're either with us or against us" mentality on the part of the great powers will deter attempts by weaker states to try to engage both. Even if a weaker state manages to do so, the payoff for its security interest would not be high, because of both great powers' general intolerance of ambiguity under such intense competition. Instead, the best option for the weaker states is to engage with only one great power by forming a close alliance. Under such an arrangement, the weaker state will be able to benefit from the great power's protection and economic assistance. However, if the weaker state decides to isolate itself and engage neither great power, it runs the risk of being abandoned by the outside world or punished by the great powers. Therefore, the probability for a weaker state to maximize its security interest will be high if it engages with only one great power, medium if its engages with both, but low if it engages with neither.

However, if competition between two great powers subsided to a moderate level, for example when two great powers are no longer enemies but remain competitors, then the benefits for weaker states' foreign policy choices will change. Here, the best scenario for the weaker state to engage with both great powers, so that the weaker state can take advantage of the healthy competition between the two great powers and play one against the other. If the weaker states can manage to have "eggs in each basket" then it is the best strategy to realize the highest level of their security interests. Nonetheless, if the weaker state decides to engage with only one great power, then it will not benefit from dealing with the other great power, and the one-sided relationship might become overbearing for the weaker state. Thus, in this scenario the weaker state has a medium probability of realizing its security interests. Finally if a weaker state still prefers isolation and not engaging with either great power, then it has a low probability of realizing its security interests.

Comparative Case Studies of Myanmar and Thailand

Historical Background

As the only country in Southeast Asia that escaped colonization, Thailand has often been described as deft in its diplomatic maneuvering among great powers – "bending like bamboos".[31] Facing pressure from Britain and France's in their respective imperial expansions in Southeast Asia, the Thai kingdom managed to stay sovereign by granting extraterritoriality for the Europeans, taking advantage of the rivalry between the British and French as well as ceding large areas of peripheral territories that it used to claim suzerainty over.[32] Thailand's independence was seriously threatened when the Japanese empire expanded its military reach toward Southeast Asia. Under a Japanese ultimatum for the Thai government to surrender, the Phibun Songkram government capitulated by allowing Japanese troops to occupy Thailand and pass through Thai territory. The collaborating with the Japanese kept the Phibun government alive. Thailand allied with Japan and declared war on the allied powers.[33]

After Japan's defeat in WWII, Thailand faced punitive pressure from the allied powers as Japan's ally. French demands forced Thailand to return territories it gained on the east side of the Mekong River. Britain, holding a grudge against the Phibun government's military actions in the Burmese Shan States as well as in Malaya, demanded more stringent punitive measures. Sensing the more sympathetic U.S. government as the emerging superpower, and through actively courting it, the Thai government under the leadership of Pridi Banomyong managed to come out the shadow of the war relatively unscathed.[34] However, Thailand's domestic political instability, manifested through the power struggles between Phibun and Pridi in a series of coups and countercoups, meant that both parties sought international support to consolidate their domestic position.[35]

In contrast to Thailand, Burmese kings were not as resourceful in dealing with the British, and after defeats in three Anglo-Burmese Wars, the country was taken over as colony in three

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[31] Astri Suhrke-Goldstein, "Thailand: Trapped in the Bamboo Image," *Australian Outlook* 22, no. 3 (December 1, 1968): 334–46.

[32] Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy.* (White Lotus Press., Thailand., 1994); Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, First Edition edition (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

[33] With the Japanese help, Thailand gained territories from British Malaya and eastern part of the Shan States of British Burma. R. Sean Randolph, *The United States and Thailand: Alliance Dynamics, 1950-1985*, Research Papers and Policy Studies ; 12 (Berkeley, Calif: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1986).

[34] Thailand's post-WWII peace settlement was relatively lenient, despite the fact that Thailand was an ally of Japan. Citing the Seri Thai underground resistance movement under the leadership of Pridi Banomyong, with the support of the allied powers, the United States government pressured the British to agree to leniency. Bruce Reynolds, *Thailand's Secret War: OSS, SOE and the Free Thai Underground during World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Daniel Fineman, *A Special Relationship: The United States and Military Government in Thailand, 1947-1958*, 1st edition (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 18.

[35] Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 54–63.

stages and eventually became a province of British India.[36] Japan's 1942 invasion of Burma interrupted British rule. Initially supported by Japan, but later turning against it, nationalist groups under the leadership of Aung San demanded independence from Britain when the latter returned following Japan's defeat. After achieving independence, the Burmese government faced tremendous challenges in consolidating its control over the country due to militarization of the society during the Japanese occupation[37] as well as conflict between strong Bamar (the main ethnic group) nationalism and restive ethnic minorities fearing Bamar domination and seeking self determination.[38]

Burma's political geography – situated between China, India and Thailand – also made the newly independent government extremely wary of its international position. Particularly when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won China's civil war, Burma faced the challenge of dealing with the communist giant to its north, with which it shares a border more than 2000 km long. Trouble quickly emerged, as thousands of defeated Chinese Nationalist (KMT) troops fled the Communist People's Liberation Army (PLA) and entered Burma's Shan states. With covert support from the CIA and the Thai government, the KMT occupied large areas of Burma in preparation for retaking the Chinese mainland.[39] The KMT presence also worried the Burmese leadership about how they should approach the PRC lest the latter use military means to pursue the KMT in Burmese territory.

Therefore, since the end of WWII both Thailand and Burma were faced with internal challenges and strong divisions of power as well as the looming communist threat in Southeast Asia as a result of the communist victory in China. With the U.S. directed its attention toward countering the spread of communism in Southeast Asia to prevent "dominos" fall in the region, Thailand and Burma responded quite differently toward the American position. Thailand chose to engage closely with the U.S. by forming an alliance early in the Cold War period, and only started to engage both China and the U.S. after the Sino-US rapprochement. On the other hand, the Burmese government initially tried an open neutralist foreign policy to balance the two great powers, and later switched to self-isolation away from the competition between the two since the early 1960s.

Prosperity: Game of Aid during the Cold War

After Phibun ousted Pridi to become Thailand's Prime Minister again, his power base within the army propelled him to seek international support to beef up the position of the army against other competing power bases. He actively lobbied for American support in the form of military aid to

[36] Fred W. Riggs, "Ethnonationalism, Industrialism, and the Modern State," *Third World Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (December 1994): chapter 1.
[37] Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Cornell University Press, 2005).
[38] Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of Conflict*, Reprint edition (Abingdon, Eng.: Routledge, 2008); Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnic Conflict* (Zed Books, 1999); Mary P. Callahan, *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation, and Coexistence*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore : Washington, D.C: East-West Center Washington, 2007).
[39] Kenton Clymer, "The United States and the Guomindang (KMT) Forces in Burma, 1949–1954: A Diplomatic Disaster," *The Chinese Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (April 26, 2014): 24–44.

strengthen the power of the army that supported him. By publicly declaring himself a staunch anti-communist strongman, Phibun succeeded in winning over the Americans by presenting Thailand as the ideal base for US anti-communist activities in Southeast Asia.[40] By engaging closely with the only one great power the U.S., Thailand received a tremendous amount of aid. For example, after Phibun's government recognized the Bao Dai regime in South Vietnam to satisfy the request made by the Americans, it received $10 million in U.S. military aid, as well as $11.4 million economic and technical assistance.[41] When the Korean War started, Phibun's government once again quickly pledged support for the Americans, first by announcing the delivery of rice and then by sending troops to Korea.[42] In return, in August 1950, the World Bank, under the auspices of the U.S., approved $25 million in development aid for Thailand, the first funding it authorized for an Asian country.[43]

In addition, Thailand offered itself as a base for American covert operations against China. Through Operation Paper, Thailand helped the U.S. to arm the KMT forces positioned in Burma's Shan states that were preparing to invade and retake China's Yunnan province.[44] Through aiding American covert activities against China, Thailand not only managed to destabilize its historical enemy, Burma, but key figures in Thailand's military and police forces such as Phibun, Phao and Sarit benefited personally from the U.S. military aid and from the lucrative opium trade that the KMT engaged in.[45] Indeed, by 1954, when the U.S. established SEATO, Thailand had become the key base for American anti-communist activities in Southeast Asia. As an ally, the United States awarded Thailand and key politicians tremendous institutional and material benefits. Furthermore, to support U.S. military campaigns in Indochina, Thailand allowed the U.S. to construct military bases on its territory, in return receiving large quantities military aid, as shown in Table 2.

In contrast to the Thai case, where its alliances translated into significant material benefits, Burma has not been as lucky in receiving American aid money. Burma's geostrategic position certainly was crucial for the Americans in their efforts to counter the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. As Clymer points out, citing CIA sources, "In the early 1950s, the United States considered Burma to be nearly as important to the security of Southeast Asia as Indochina."[46] However, the U.S.' willingness to give aid to the Yangon government was continuously hampered by a combination of factors that originated from Burma's official neutral foreign policy position.

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[40] Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 69–88; Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism*, 1 edition (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2007).

[41] Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 114–15.

[42] Palapan Kampan, "Standing Up to Giants: Thailand's Exit from 20th Century War Partnerships," *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 15 (August 2014): 155.

[43] Fineman, *A Special Relationship*, 118.

[44] Richard Michael Gibson and Wen H. Chen, *The Secret Army: Chiang Kai-Shek and the Drug Warlords of the Golden Triangle* (Singapore: Wiley, 2011); Robert H. Taylor, *Foreign and Domestic Consequences of the KMT Intervention in Burma* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Dept of Asian Studies, Cornell University, 1973).

[45] Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin : CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, 1st ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991).

[46] Kenton Clymer, *A Delicate Relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar since 1945*, 1 edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 111.

Table 2. U.S. Economic and Military Assistance to Myanmar and Thailand Compared, in $US Millions

	Myanmar				Thailand			
	1946-1948	1949-1952	1953-61	1962-2009	1946-1948	1949-1952	1953-61	1962-2009
Total Economic Assistance	5	10.2	71.9	377.1	6.2	16.1	264.2	1313.7
Total Military Assistance			3.1	40.5		88	306.2	1937.2
Total Economic and Military Assistance	5	13.3	112.4	427.8	6.2	104.1	570.4	3251

* Source: U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants, USAID[47]

For Burma, even though they desired American economic and military assistance, they were wary of signing anything that would be interpreted as tying them to one side in the Cold War. Also, given the existence of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1951 (Battle Act), which prohibited American aid to "any country supplying strategic materials to communist countries." The Burmese government was also concerned by agreeing to American aid would bring trouble for their economic relations with the PRC and the Soviet Union.[48] Only after rounds of negotiations did the two sides agree on the terms for the Burmese government to receive aid from the U.S. However, the amount was quite small in comparison with aid to Thailand, as shown in Table 2.

Military aid to Burma was also small.[49] Although Burma expressed interest in updating their military system, the Americans were heavily constrained despite their interest in helping it do so. As Clymer points out, "[J]ust how to provide assistance without entering a normal military agreement produced immense bureaucratic headaches, which only became worse when it became clear that the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed military aid. They objected to Burma's neutral status and questioned the need for assistance."[50]

Although Burma's neutralist foreign policy stance did not earn it much aid from the United States, it did secure some good will from China. Given the international isolation it was facing at the time of the Korean War, Beijing tried to court a friendly relationship with Yangon.[51] In 1954,

[47] "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook)," accessed April 1, 2016, https://explorer.usaid.gov/reports-greenbook.html.
[48] Ibid., 112.
[49] Ibid., 144.
[50] Ibid., 147.
[51] Maung Aung Myoe, *In the Name of Pauk-Phaw: Myanmar's China Policy since 1948* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies ; London, 2011), 23.

Burma and China agreed a "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", which indicated "China's public assurance that it would not interfere in Burma's internal affairs."[52] Through pledges from Burma that it pursues a neutralist foreign policy and was not a "stooge" for imperial powers, Beijing showed significant understanding regarding the KMT issue, and initially refrained from direct military intervention into Burma to chase the KMT remnants. It was only in late 1960 was the PLA invited by the Burmese government for a coordinated military campaign that finally pushed the remaining KMT troops out of the country.[53] Also in 1960, Burma and China peacefully demarcated the border between the two, with the PRC allegedly making more concessions.[54] Beijing also offered to purchase surplus rice from Burma in emerging situations, in contrast with the U.S.' unwillingness to do so.[55] In addition, Beijing offered Yangon a loan of $84 million in 1961.[56] However, overall speaking, the neutralist open engagement foreign policy taken by Burma did not earn it as much economic aid as did Thailand.

Physical Integrity: Anti-Communist Insurgencies

Both Thailand and Burma faced domestic communist insurgencies during the Cold War period. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and Communist Party of Burma (CPB) both waged guerrilla warfare against their respective central governments. Although they differed in the scale and intensity of their military campaigns, the ultimate success or failure of the CPT and CPB hinged on the Thai and Burmese governments' international relations. The alliance between Thailand and the U.S. meant that Thailand possessed sufficient military capability for its counter-insurgent campaigns, and the American military support and protection of the Thai government also deterred the PRC from adequately supporting the CPT. Additionally, the normalization of U.S.-PRC relations in the early 1970s also helped its counterinsurgent efforts as Beijing started to wind down its support for the CPT. On the other hand, Burma's increasing isolationist foreign policy made it more subject to intervention from Beijing in its domestic politics.

The communist victory in China became a big morale boost for many other communist movements in Southeast Asia. Through ethnic Chinese ties, communist ideologies, propaganda

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 39. Also see David I. Steinberg and Hongwei Fan, *Modern China-Myanmar Relations: Dilemmas of Mutual Dependence* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012).

[54] PRC's international situation at the time perhaps explains its desire for a secure frontier in the Southwest at the expense of territorial claims. Because of the Sino-Soviet split, the Tibet rebellion in 1959, and the increasing tension between China and India, which together means Beijing was more interested in securing a friendly neighbor. See M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[55] Clymer, *A Delicate Relationship*, 151.

[56] Ibid., 195. However, one must note it was difficult to obtain accurate number on economic or technical aid from China during this period due to the lack of data.

materials as well as material resource were transmitted throughout the region.[57] In the Thai case, the PRC was perceived as its largest external security threat as a result of its fear of the communist menace.[58] Given Thailand's tilt toward the U.S. and its continual diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan, diplomatic recognition of Beijing did not occur.[59] The Phibun government also passed the Anti Communist Act in 1952, through which they arrested and deported many left-wing overseas Chinese activist, shut down pro-communist Chinese newspapers, closed down Chinese language schools, and restricted the immigration quota from the PRC.[60]

In retaliation, Beijing denounced the Phibun government as "fascist and propped up by American imperialists."[61] The Chinese government also accused Thailand of committing criminal acts against Chinese diaspora communities.[62] Phidi, whom Phibun ousted in a failed coup attempt, was granted asylum in China, where Beijing used him to tarnish the Phibun government's domestic and international credentials.[63] However, throughout the 1950s, Beijing did not offer much overt support for the CPT, which remained a small nuisance for the Thai government. However, since the mid1960s and especially after the American military commitment to Vietnam, Beijing intensified support for militarized "people's war" in Thailand.[64] Thus, in 1965 the CPT started its armed struggle against the Bangkok government, which spread throughout rural areas in the Northeast and Northern Thailand.[65]

To effectively carry out the counter-insurgency against the CPT, the Thai military governments under Sarit and Thanom effectively utilized American military aid and counterinsurgency policy guidance.[66] More importantly, after the Sino-U.S. rapprochement as a result of Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972, and especially after the unification of Vietnam in 1975, Vietnam replaced the PRC as Thailand's greatest perceived security threat. Thailand established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1975, and both countries began to find common ground for a cooperative rela-

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[57] Kasian Tejapira, *Commodifying Marxism: The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927-1958* (Kyoto, Japan : Melbourne, Victoria, Australia : Portland, Or: Trans Pacific Press, 2001); Peng Chin, *Alias Chin Peng - My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003).

[58] Anuson Chinvanno, *Thailand's Policies towards China, 1949-54* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992).

[59] Ann Marie Murphy, "Beyond Balancing and Bandwagoning: Thailand's Response to China's Rise," *Asian Security* 6, no. 1 (January 22, 2010): 9.

[60] Dingbang Yu and Shusen Chen, *History of China Thailand Relations (zhong tai guan xi shi)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2009), 315.

[61] David A. Wilson, "China, Thailand and the Spirit of Bandung (Part I)," *The China Quarterly* 30 (April 1967): 154–55.

[62] Ibid., 155.

[63] Jim Glassman, "On the Borders of Southeast Asia: Cold War Geography and the Construction of the Other," *Political Geography* 24, no. 7 (September 2005): 785.

[64] Daniel Dudley Lovelace, *China and "People's War" in Thailand, 1964-1969*, China Research Monographs, No. 8 (Berkeley, Center for Chinese Studies, University of California c1971, 1971), 78.

[65] Glenn Ettinger, "Thailand's Defeat of Its Communist Party," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence* 20, no. 4 (August 20, 2007): 661–77.

[66] Sinae Hyun, "Indigenizing the Cold War: Nation-Building by the Border Patrol Policy of Thailand, 1945-1980" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014).

tionship based on common antipathy toward Hanoi. In 1978, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia, Thailand and China formed a *de facto* alliance, whereby Thailand allowed Chinese materiel support for the Khmer Rouge to pass through its territory, and China promised it would help Thailand if the latter came under Vietnamese attack.[67] China's attack on Vietnam in 1979 also relieved the pressure Vietnam posed along the Thai border.[68] By 1980 the PRC has closed down its support for the CPT, which in subsequent years surrendered to the Thai government under a series of amnesty programs.

On the other hand, Burma's foreign policy orientation took an isolationist turn since Ne Win's coup in 1962. As a result of the general's pursuit of "Burmese Way to Socialism", he began to isolate the country from the outside world, and "foreigners and their institutions were expelled, and even tourism was discouraged."[69]At the same time, its domestic communist insurgency under the leadership of the CPB began to gain momentum, as a result of domestic radicalization in China in the mid-1960s and its willingness to export revolution to Burma.[70] Beijing mobilized the sizable Chinese communities in Burma in support of the Cultural Revolution, which resulted in a series of anti-Chinese riots in 1967 in several cities.[71] The anti-Chinese riots and the isolationist foreign policy positions rendered the Yangon government vulnerable to punitive measures from Beijing. Beijing started to overtly support the CPB in its armed struggle against Yangon to destabilize Burma and discredit the Ne Win government. The CCP provided financial, military, and personnel support for the CPB to establish more than 20,000 sq. km. along the Sino-Burmese border as "liberated areas."[72] Between 1967 and 1973, China supplied the CPB enough arms and ammunition to equip 10,000 soldiers. PLA military advisors were also dispatched to the CPB-occupied areas. China supplied 2 million RMB per year for the CPB's general military expenditures. Chinese hospitals along the border were opened for the use of the CPB. Beijing also set up a radio station for the CPB to disseminate propaganda.[73] Such a large scale of overt support for the CPB's armed struggle obviously constituted an open violation of Burmese sovereignty and territorial integrity as promised by the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence." Yet, there is little the Yangon government could do to protect itself from Chinese hostility. As the weaker state that pursued an isolationist foreign policy and refused to engage with any of the great powers, when the international competition became intense, Burma's security interests took a huge hit as a re-

[67] Murphy, "Beyond Balancing and Bandwagoning," 10.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Clymer, *A Delicate Relationship*, 197. In addition, Ne Win's view of the United States was tainted by an unpleasant visit to Washington, DC in 1960 when his wife was racially abused. See Ibid., 179–84.
[70] The Sino-Soviet split also played a role here. General Ne Win's strict maintenance of neutrality was perceived as Beijing as a betrayal and instead as a support for the Soviet Union. Robert Taylor, *General Ne Win: A Political Biography* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015).
[71] Hongwei Fan, "The 1967 Anti-Chinese Riots in Burma and Sino-Burmese Relations," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 43, no. 2 (June 2012): 234–56.
[72] Bertil Lintner, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB)*, 6 (SEAP Publications, 1990), 26.
[73] Aung Myoe, *In the Name of Pauk-Phaw*, 80–82.

sult. The CPB lasted until 1989, after the Chinese side cut off support in the mid-1980s.[74] However, the CPB's legacy has lingered on, as its troops broke into numerous ethnic rebel armies that continue to occupy several "special regions" in the Shan and Kachin states, with occasional fighting with the Myanmar central government continuing to this day.[75]

Autonomy: Regime Changes and Foreign Policy Engagements of Myanmar and Thailand

Since the end of Cold War, the United States' foreign policy goal in East Asia has changed from the prevention of communism to the gradual countering of the challenges posed by China's economic and military rise. From the 1990s onwards, both countries have maintained an overall competitive relationship with each other. From "strategic competitors" to cooperation on the "War on Terror", to the most recent American pivot or rebalance to Asia, the bilateral relationship is complex and maintains moderate level of competition.[76] Nowhere can we observe the same level of adversarial animosity that China and the U.S. displayed during the early years of the Cold War. Therefore, it is reasonable to describe the competitive dynamic between the two as moderate, although certainly the level of such competition has been increasing in the most recent years.

The post-Cold War international environment the Myanmar military government came into certainly was not friendly to the ruling generals. Because of its crackdown on the democracy movement in 1988 and the nullification of the 1991 election results, Myanmar's SLORC/SPDC military junta became a target of Western condemnation and sanctions.[77] In order to survive under such a hostile international environment, the Myanmar government decided to actively engage with one great power: China.

China expressed its principle of non-interference in Myanmar's domestic politics, in the context of its own suppression of the Tiananmen movement. Beijing offered the diplomatic protection the Myanmar military government desperately needed to prevent regime change. The most significant event was after the Depayin incident in 2003, when China helped shield the military government by vetoing a UN Security Council resolution against Myanmar sponsored by the United States and United Kingdom. In return for such diplomatic protection, China reaped handsome economic and strategic benefits. In 1989, bilateral trade with Myanmar was just $313.72 million, and enjoyed a trade surplus of mere $61.6 million. Twenty years later in 2008, the bilat-

[74] Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948* (Westview Press Boulder, CO, 1994).
[75] Mandy Sadan, ed., *The War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016); Kyaw Yin Hlaing, *Prisms on the Golden Pagoda: Perspectives on National Reconciliation In Myanmar* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014).
[76] Charles L. Glaser, "A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation," *International Security* 39, no. 4 (April 1, 2015): 49–90; Lyle J. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015).
[77] The U.S. expressed displeasure at the brutal military government in Yangon by imposing sanctions. Yet, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Southeast Asia was not high on the U.S. foreign policy agenda. In the case of Myanmar, it became more of a nuisance for the U.S. in its overall democracy promotion foreign policy.

eral trade became $2.6 billion with Chinese surplus at $1.3 billion. In 2009 and 2010, Chinese trade surplus vis-à-vis Myanmar further increased to $3.7 billion.[78]

China has also emerged as the top investor in Myanmar. Official Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China reached $6.4 billion million by mid-2010, mostly in natural resource sectors.[79] Particularly, in 2009 Myanmar and China agreed to construct a $1.5 billion crude oil pipeline and a USD $1 billion natural gas pipeline to connect the Kyaukphyu port in the Indian Ocean to Kunming, in China's Yunnan province.[80] These two pipelines to a great extent satisfied the Chinese government's concern for energy security, as they bypassed the Malacca Strait and also gave China a direct access to the Bay of Bengal. By acquiring access to these two pipelines, China has gained a tremendous amount of strategic access in Myanmar.[81]

Thus, by engaging with only one great power, the military government in Myanmar got what it desired in terms of security protection and economic investment from China. However, because it is a one-sided engagement, the weaker state does not have enough capacity to bargain effectively with the great power. Indeed, China's preponderant position in Myanmar was described by some as a "stranglehold", because many of the deals between the two countries were on China's terms.[82] Therefore, in order to improve its security interest, the natural course of action was for the Myanmar government to engage with both the US and China. To do that, domestic political change had to occur first. Indeed, after the 2010 election engineered by the military generals, the new Thein Sein government initiated a series of bold political reforms by eliminating many of the political restrictions on opposition parties, free speech, and civil society.[83] Such domestic political reform thus paved the way for improving relations with the United States, which very quickly translated into an active engagement between the two parties. The visit to Myanmar by U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in December 2011 was the first such visit since 1955. More significantly, U.S. President Barack Obama made a historical visit to Myanmar in November 2012, the first such visit to Myanmar by an American president. Two years later Obama made another visit to the country.

Because of the active engagement with the U.S., Myanmar is now more capable of pushing back against the perceived domination by China. In September 2011, the Myanmar government announced the suspension of construction work on the Myitsone Dam, which was a $3.6 billion

[78] Jalal Alamgir, "Myanmar's Foreign Trade and Its Political Consequences," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 6 (2008): 986.
[79] Aung Myoe, *In the Name of Pauk-Phaw*, 159.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Alex Vines, "Mesmerised by Chinese String of Pearls Theory," *The World Today* 68, no. 2 (2012): 33–34; Gurpreet S. Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications," *Strategic Analysis* 32, no. 1 (February 27, 2008): 1–39.
[82] Stephanie Shannon and Nicholas Farrelly, "Whither China's Myanmar Stranglehold?," in *ISEAS Perspective*, Books and Monographs (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2014).
[83] David I. Steinberg, ed., *Myanmar: The Dynamics of an Evolving Polity* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2014); Dan Slater, "The Elements of Surprise: Assessing Burma's Double-Edged Détente," *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 171–82; Aung Myoe Maung, "The Soldier and the State: The Tatmadaw and Political Liberalization in Myanmar since 2011," *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 233–49.

hydropower project to supply electricity to China. Another major Chinese investment, at the Lepadaung copper mine, also faced heavy domestic criticism and resistance from Myanmar. In 2014, China's plan to build a railway linking Yunnan to Myanmar's Rakkain state was shelved due to the lack of interest from the Myanmar side. China is increasingly worried that many of its investment projects negotiated with the previous military government might be at risk of renegotiation of terms or cancelation.[84]

The competition with the U.S. over Myanmar also means that China cannot afford to lose further ground. It seems there is not much China can do to make Myanmar comply with its demands: Retaliation runs the risk of pushing the country further into the embrace of the U.S., which obviously is not in China's national interest. This translates into Beijing own diplomatic charm offensive toward Myanmar with a flurry of high-level visits between the two countries after the Myanmar-U.S. thaw.[85] At the same time, the Chinese side reached out to the then opposition party the National League for Democracy (NLD) by holding consultations and inviting party members to visit China, which culminated in Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to China in June 2015, before her party's victory in the national election. The Chinese Foreign Miniter Wang Yi was also the first major foreign dignitary to visit Myanmar after the inauguration of the new civilian president U Htin Kyaw in April 2016.[86] Indeed, in the Myanmar case, during the post-Cold War period, although the Myanmar government benefited from Chinese security protection and economic investment by ditching its isolationist foreign policy and engaging with China only, the terms of that arrangement were nonetheless perceived as non-optimal. By actively reaching out to the U.S. and thus engaging with both great powers, Myanmar improved its security interests to maintain national autonomy dramatically.

In Thailand's case, ever since the Sino-U.S. rapprochement and U.S. pullout from Vietnam, the country has always maintained cordial relationship with both the United States and China, despite maintaining the security alliance with the former.[87] As a non-claimant in the South China Sea, Thailand does not have direct conflict of interest with China in terms of territorial disputes. Instead, Thailand treats the relationship with China as an economically beneficial one. Right after the Asian financial crisis in 1997, during which Thailand suffered greatly, the Chinese government's pledge not to devalue the RMB while committing $1 billion to the international bailout of Thailand earned

[84] For some strategic analyses on these issues, see Yun Sun's various blog posts at the Stimson Center, http://www.stimson.org/users/3326

[85] Enze Han, "Borderland Ethnic Politics and Changing Sino-Myanmar Relations," in *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire, 1994-2011*, ed. Mandy Sadan (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016).

[86] Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mofa.gov.mm/?p=6615

[87] Pongphisoot Busbarat, "A Review of Thailand's Foreign Policy in Mainland Southeast Asia: Exploring an Ideational Approach," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2012): 127–54; N. Ganesan, "Thailand's Relations with Malaysia and Myanmar in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (May 2001): 127–146; Kusuma Snitwongse, "Thai Foreign Policy in the Global Age: Principle or Profit?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 23, no. 2 (2001): 189–212.

China a positive image in Bangkok.[88] In the following years, Thailand has embraced a closer political and economic relationship with a rising China. For example, according to some sources, there were more than 1,500 bilateral visits by government officials at all levels in the two years following the 1997 crisis.[89] In 1999, Thailand and China signed *Joint Declaration on the Cooperation Program of the 21st Century*, where both sides pledged military cooperation and further economic ties.[90] In 2012, Thailand and China further signed a series of agreements for building a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. Closer economic engagement between the two countries has translated into China vying with Japan to be Thailand's top trading partner.[91] In addition, China is now the largest source of foreign tourists for Thailand, with more than 5 million Chinese citizens visiting Thailand every year in the past couple of years, a significant contribution to the Thai economy.[92] Thus, same as some other Southeast Asian countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia, Thailand has effectively pursued a hedging strategy whereby it combines active economic engagement with China with continual political and military relations with the United States.[93] In addition, by actively engaging with both China and the U.S., Thailand has managed to resist political pressure from the U.S. due to its domestic political instabilities and recent military *coups d'état*.

Since the start of the 21st century, Thailand has faced domestic instability with competing rallies and counter-rallies between political forces loosely defined as "yellow shirts" and "red shirts."[94] Such grassroots confrontations reflect the power struggles between the ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and his supporters among the royalist forces, which prompted the military to take over the government twice in 2006 and 2014. In particular, the most recent coup by General Prayuth Chan-ocha has created a domestic political environment of deteriorating civil liberties and human rights violations, particularly in the draconian use of the *lèse majesté* law on political dissidents.[95] Thailand's domestic political regression thus created a problem for its relations with the U.S., which is no longer as tolerant or supportive of military coups as it was in Thailand during the Cold War years.

Officially, the United States government downgraded its military relations with Thailand,

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[88] Michael R. Chambers, "'The Chinese and the Thais Are Brothers': the Evolution of the Sino–Thai Friendship," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 45 (November 1, 2005): 621.

[89] Busakorn Chantasasawat, "Burgeoning Sino-Thai Relations: Heightening Cooperation, Sustaining Economic Security," *China: An International Journal* 4, no. 1 (2006): 90.

[90] Amy L. Freedman, "Malaysia, Thailand, and the ASEAN Middle Power Way," in *Middle Power and the Rise of China*, ed. Bruce Gilley and Andrew O'Neil (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 111.

[91] Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics 2014, National Statistical Office, Thailand.

[92] http://www.thaiwebsites.com/tourism.asp

[93] Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia"; Kuik, "The Essence of Hedging."

[94] Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "The Necessity of Enemies in Thailand's Troubled Politics," *Asian Survey* 51, no. 6 (2011): 1019–41; Marc Askew, ed., *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*, King Prajadhipok's Institute Yearbook ; No. 5 (Nonthaburi: King Prajadhipok's Institute ; Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2010).

[95] Marshall, *A Kingdom in Crisis: Thailand's Struggle for Democracy in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Zed Books, 2014); Pavin Chachavalpongpun, ed., *Good Coup Gone Bad: Thailand's Political Development Since Thaksin's Downfall* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014); Federico Ferrara, *The Political Development of Modern Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

canceled some military aid, and criticized the political situation in Thailand. However, U.S. pressure, albeit feeble, did not matter much to the Thai government, as it actively courted Chinese support. On December 19, 2014, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang became the most high-profile foreign leader to visit Thailand since the coup in May.[96] A few days later, Thai Prime Minister Prayut also flew to Beijing, where he met with the Chinese president Xi Jinping, during which Xi said both countries "should continue to show mutual understanding and support on issues concerning each other's core interests."[97] By courting Chinese support, the Thai government has effectively resisted pressure from the U.S. For example, after a January 2015 speech given by Daniel Russel, assistant U.S. secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, in which he criticized the military government, the Thai Foreign Ministry summoned top American diplomats to register its displeasure.[98] Therefore, the U.S. faces the same dilemma as China did in Myanmar, as described above. The competitive dynamic between the U.S. and China for influence in Southeast Asia means that the U.S. cannot afford to alienate the current Thai government by pressuring it too much, lest to push Thailand further into the embrace of China.[99] Thus, the U.S. has treaded carefully in its dealings with the Thai government, and the annual military exercise Cobra Gold has continued in 2016 despite earlier indications that the U.S. might want to cancel it.[100] By keeping an open engagement, Thailand has managed to keep its autonomy from U.S. pressure on its domestic political changes.

Table 3 Great Power Competition, Myanmar and Thailand's Security Interest Satisfaction

	Moderate Competition	Intense Competition
Engage Two Great Powers	High (Thailand post 1975) (Myanmar post 2010)	Medium (Myanmar 1950-1962)
Engage One Great Power	Medium (Myanmar 1988-2010)	High (Thailand Cold War pre 1975)
Engage Zero Great Power	N/A	Low (Myanmar 1962-1988)

[96] "Thailand Welcomes China's Li as U.S. Ties Cool over Coup," *Reuters*, December 18, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-china-idUSKBN0JW2KH20141218.
[97] "Xi Satisfied with Breakthrough of China-Thailand Railway Cooperation," accessed February 15, 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-12/23/c_133874400.htm.
[98] Shawn W. Crispin, "Thai Coup Alienates US Giving China New Opening," March 5, 2015, http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/thai-coup-alienates-us-giving-china-new-opening.
[99] In fact, an opinion piece on the American Interest website does compare the U.S. getting Myanmar out of China's grasp with China getting Thailand out of U.S.' orbit. See "Is Thailand's Coup an Opening for China?," *The American Interest*, May 23, 2014, http://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/05/23/is-thailands-coup-an-opening-for-china/.
[100] Prashanth Parameswaran, "US, Thailand Launch 2016 Cobra Gold Military Exercises Amid Democracy Concerns," *The Diplomat*, accessed February 15, 2016, http://thediplomat.com/2016/02/us-thailand-launch-2016-cobra-gold-military-exercises-amid-democracy-concerns/.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, the comparative case studies of both Thailand and Myanmar's foreign policy choices since the end of WWII have confirmed the logic of our theoretical framework. Under different conditions of international competition, the number of great powers a weaker state chooses to engage has a different impact on its ability to realize its security interests. Indeed, during times of intense competition among great powers, such as during the early Cold War period, Thailand's active engagement with the U.S. served its security interests quite well, as we have seen in the handsome material benefits it received. Furthermore, after the intense competition between the U.S. and China subsided, Thailand's engagement with both China and the U.S. also helped its domestic anti-communist counterinsurgency. In contrast, Burma's neutralist foreign policy caused mistrust from the United States, as we have seen in its cautious and reluctant approach toward providing aid for the Yangon government. Worse still, being isolationist since the early 1960s also made Burma a pawn in the PRC's export of revolution abroad through its overt support for the CPB insurgency. Furthermore, since the end of the Cold War, engaging both China and the United States has proven the best option for countries to maintain their national autonomy, as we have seen in the cases of Myanmar and Thailand. Table 3 lists how each country in different periods fits into the theoretical framework.

The paper makes the following contributions. Theoretically it sets out a rather parsimonious framework of the conditions under which weaker states' foreign policies can have what kind of implications for their national security interest. It thus provides a general guideline for scholars and policy makers to analyze and evaluate weaker states' foreign policy choices under different circumstances of great power competition. The paper also adds onto the general literature on alignment behavior of weaker states, especially the recent burgeoning scholarship on hedging in the East Asian context. Given the ongoing and potential intensification of competition between the United States and China for primacy in the Asia Pacific region, scholars have devoted further attention to how weaker states in the region would react to different scenarios of changes in bilateral relations between the two great powers.[101] The detailed comparative case studies of both Myanmar and Thailand's foreign relations since the end of WWII thus communicate with this set of literature on the merits of hedging under changing contexts. It also invites further comparative studies, both qualitative and quantitative, to test the theoretical framework in a wider context of comparative foreign policies of weaker states.

Empirically, the findings of the paper can also shed light on how we should appraise contemporary regional alignment situation in Southeast Asia. In the current environment of Sino-U.S. competition in Southeast Asia, as long as the competition remains moderate, it seems the weaker states in the region have generally taken up the foreign policy position in active engagement with

[101] For example, see Evelyn Goh, ed., *Rising China's Influence in Developing Asia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Evelyn Goh, *The Struggle for Order: Hegemony, Hierarchy, and Transition in Post-Cold War East Asia*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Gilley and O'Neil, *Middle Powers and the Rise of China*.

both great powers, barring perhaps the Philippines and Vietnam, where a direct conflict of interests with China in their territorial disputes in the South China Sea has pushed them to seek closer alliance with the United States.[102] The Philippines and Vietnam cases are indicative of how future trajectories of Sino-U.S. competition would turn out to be. On the issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, the United States, as the reigning hegemon, has come out in the open to challenge China's expansive maritime territorial claims by proclaiming the principle of freedom of navigation and actively supporting both Philippines and Vietnam's claims against China. Thus the tension in the South China Sea has the high potential to witness to a showdown between the hegemon and its challenger China. If indeed in the end the United States and China openly confront each other militarily here, the Philippines' current choice of cementing the security alliance with the U.S. would be a wise one because it would benefit from the latter's military protection. By that time, the hedging strategy that is currently being practiced by many other Southeast Asian states would no longer be as viable. Although statesmen in Southeast Asia repeatedly warned that they do not want to be pushed to pick sides, but as this paper has demonstrated, under intense competition such open engagement policies would prove to be suboptimal than securing a close alliance with a great power. ■

[102] Renato Cruz de Castro, "The US-Philippine Alliance: An Evolving Hedge against an Emerging China Challenge," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 31, no. 3 (2009): 399–423; Maria Ortuoste, "The Philippines in the South China Sea: Out of Time, Out of Options?," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2013, no. 1 (2013): 240–53; Jason J. Blazevic, "Navigating the Security Dilemma: China, Vietnam, and the South China Sea," *Journal of current Southeast Asian affairs* 31, no. 4 (2012): 79.

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