

An Ally at the Crossroads: The Thailand Case

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June 25, 2015

The US-Thailand Alliance

- 1954 Manila Pact -- SEATO
- 1962 **“Thanat-Rusk Communiqué”**
- 1982 starting the Cobra Gold
- 2003 The status of non-NATO alliance

2012 Joint Vision Statement for Thai-U.S. Defense Alliance



A 21st Century Security Partnership

- Partnership for Regional Security in Southeast Asia
- Supporting Stability in the Asia-Pacific Region and Beyond
- Bilateral and Multilateral Interoperability and Readiness
- Relationship Building, Coordination, and Collaboration at All Levels

The Meaning of the Alliance

- The meaning of alliance depends on *security and economic concerns*.
- Unlike during the Cold War, Thai security priority is now more on non-traditional security, Southern insurgency, and domestic conflicts in which the US can hardly play a role.
- Economically, China surpassed the US as the largest trade partner for Thailand.

Thailand and China

- 1975 normalization of diplomatic relations
- China's assistance against Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia during the 1980s
- 2001 CAFTA
- Increasing arms purchase from China
- Bilateral military exercises
- 2012 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

- * Increasing cooperation w China after the Vietnam War
- * The role of ethnic Chinese elites in Thailand

Thai Security Identity

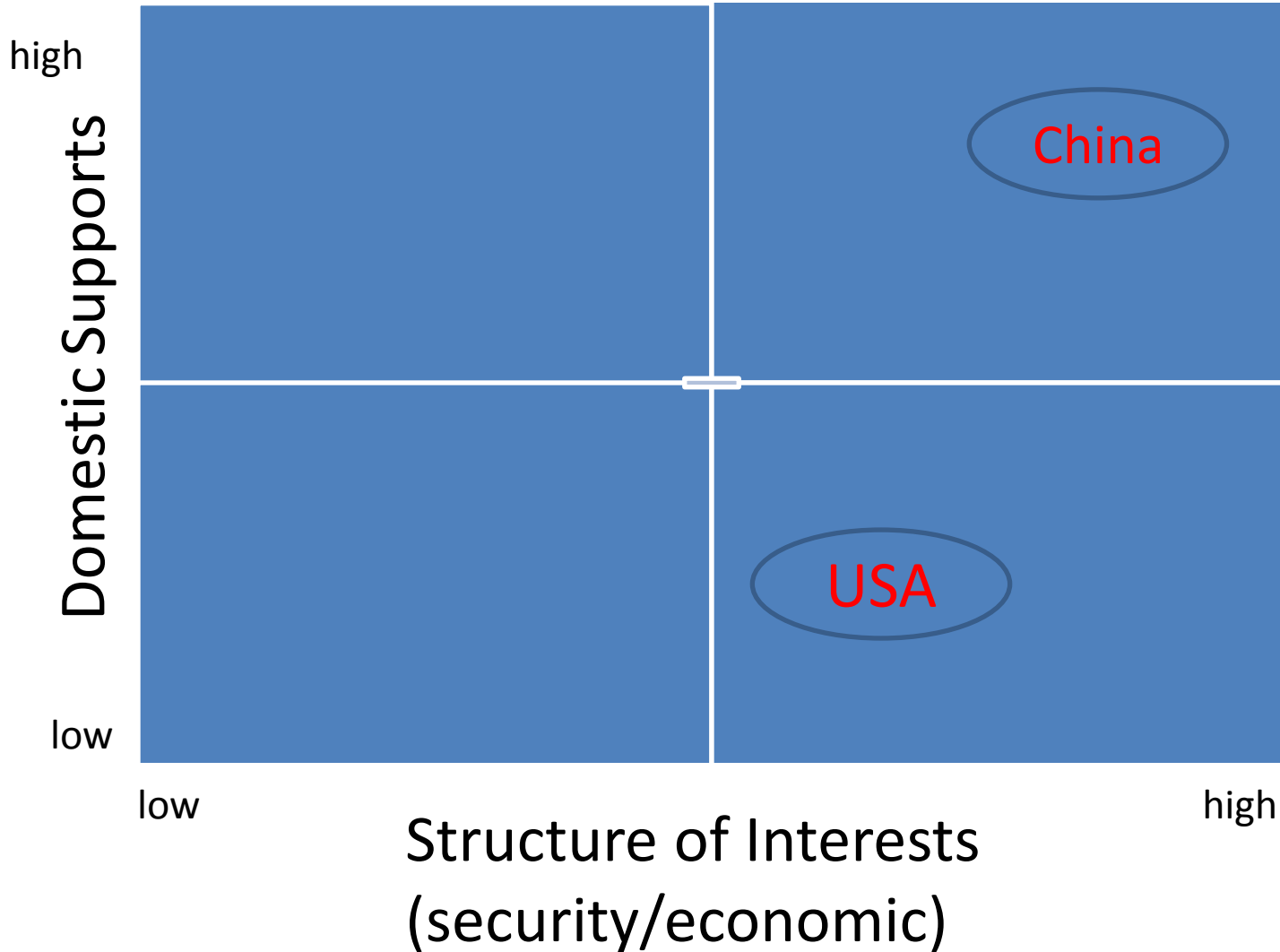
- Thailand has no territorial disputes with China.
- China threat is more in economic realm which has not clearly appeared yet.
- Over all, diluting security identity with the US
- Given the rise of China, a perception emerged that the US needs Thailand more than the other way around.



Strained Relations w the US after the 2014 Coup

- The perception among the military/Bangkok establishment that the US is not supportive (lack of understanding) during the difficult time of domestic conflicts.
- Disappointment over Daniel Russell's visit
- Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report dropped Thailand into the lowest tier.
- Scaled down Cobra Gold 2015
- Earlier, Thai cautious response to 'pivot' (e.g. SE Asia Composition, Cloud, Climate Coupling Regional Study: SEAC4RS)

Matrix of Thai Foreign Relations



US Arms in Thai Military

- Army: 54%,
- Navy: 41%
- Air Force: 37%

- not much recent purchase, most close to retirement
- Thailand prefers less costly w technological transfer and diversifying sources of purchase, inc. China, Ukraine, Sweden, Korea, Spain, and Israel.

Comparing of Up/Down Sides of the Alliance at Present

Down Side

- Diluting security identity w the US
- Domestic politics tip Thailand more towards China
- Increasing interest w China, esp. in economic realm

Up Side

- Longer and deeper cooperation; interoperability
- Can be temporarily and Thailand traditionally diversify ties w superpowers
- Converging interest w the US on regional stability and NTS

Conclusion

- The status of the US alliance is not as high as before in Thai strategic thinking (no clear mentioning about the US alliance; more emphasis on ASEAN-led mechanisms).
- Alliance management is more difficult but not impossible, given some converging interests and traditional/institutionalized relationship.
- Risk of even lower status of alliance if not properly managed.

Matrix of Thai Foreign Relations

