ABSTRACT

Since 1950s the United States had invariably declaring that it was an Asian/Pacific power, whose destiny was intertwind with that of various countries stretching from Japan to Australia. Indeed, at various periods, the United States had embroiled itself in a most profound way with developments of the entire region, particularly in the sphere of security.

After the end of the Second World War, Southeast Asia had been strategically and economically important region for the United States and the United States policy was marked by its determination to safeguard and promote political, economic and strategic interests in the region. The containment of communism had been emerged as a major policy of the every American administrations and also to contain the widespread influence of former Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, which later on contributed to the instability and conflicts in the region, particularly in Vietnam.

The United States containment policy to preserve the
non-communist states from being controlled by the communists collapsed in 1975. It caused a major shift in foreign policy of Southeast Asian nations in general and Thailand in particular. The United States, therefore, reduced the assistance and military presence and urged each nation to rely largely on its own resources to preserve its national independence and security.

The United States decided to support the South Vietnamese government and also helped to block the elections, which were to be held in 1956, believing that such elections would be rigged in the North to achieve the communist success under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. Again the United States decision was based on the nature of World Communism and on a desire to contain the expansionist tendencies of China in Southeast Asia. In 1957, North Vietnamese were furious over their failure to unite North and South Vietnam.

President John F. Kennedy in his short term of pre-evidency greatly broadened the commitment of President Dwight D. Eisenhower in South Vietnam. His policy towards the crisis in Laos affected his attitude towards commitments
in both Thailand and South Vietnam as well as his relationship with Cambodia. It became much more clear under John F. Kennedy than Eisenhower that American involvement in mainland Southeast Asia - the two Vietnams, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand - was pronounced and heading towards a major crisis.

President John F. Kennedy's policy in Laos led to deeper United States involvement in Thailand. Actually, Thailand had long been greatly concerned over developments in its Mekhong neighbours. The steps towards a neutralization of Laos against a background of the weakness of South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) caused Thailand to seek stronger assurance from the United States.

John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson believed that the world would be less dangerous if communism did not succeed in Indo-China. The basic American objective under President John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, therefore, remained constant in South Vietnam denying communism to control the area. Although South Vietnam remained in existence due to American policy after the Geneva settlement of 1954, the United States often found
itself at the mercy of weak and inefficient Saigon regimes.

Both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson Administrations constantly pre-occupied with the Domino theory or a variation of it. The theory persisted despite the emergence of the rift between Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China and despite the subsequent failure of the communist coup in the Southeast Asian country like Indonesia. Indeed, when Vietnam was viewed from United States in term of global strategic considerations, there was a certain aspect in outlook, a carry-over from an earlier period. After China fell to Mao Tse Tung and the United States policy towards communism became hardened and the importance of Indo-China in the United States security perception viewed seriously by the United States authorities to combat any eventualities of communists, particularly in Southeast Asian region.

During 1964 United States policy towards Southeast Asia shifted to new phase. In summer, the North Vietnamese attacked American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, then a congressional resolution permitted the President to response strongly to the incident. Moreover, when the North
Vietnamese government imposed pressure on South Vietnamese government, President Johnson approved American bombing in the North in an attempt to force the Vietnamese to the bargaining table. After 1965 the war became increasingly Americanized, such action certainly prevented North Vietnam’s unification of the country. And later on, led to a crucial bloody, prolonged and indecisive conflict.

When President Nixon came to power, he continued to bring the parties of the Indo-China war to the Paris talks and when it did not materialized, he then, offered a new plan that was the process of Vietnamization of war. Still hoping for a negotiate settlement but without other significant bargaining power, the President then suggested he would use the Vietnamization process and would simply proceed on his own schedule. Otherwise he would speed up the process of American withdrawal if North Vietnamese would negotiate.

To fight a war with no hope of decisive victory reinforced the frustration of the American soldiers and citizen alike. Then Americans were instructed to fight a holding action and to minimize casualties. Beginning in early 1970s no major offensive operations were to be initiated. While
conserving American lives, the effect of this policy was perceived as abandoning any hope of victory.

The Paris Agreements of 1973 between the United States and North Vietnam ended American participation in the war. It committed the United States to stop all military involvement in South Vietnam, and to withdraw all its remaining troops, technicians and advisors.

Early 1970s, only Thailand had remained in geopolitical terms, potentially to focal point of United States involvement on continental Asia. The United States authorities, therefore, attempted to redefine the role of America forward line of defence in the region. The security planners thought that there could be an arbitrary limit to set off the rimland of continental Asia which would represent the extent of new American defence and security.

In 1974, Thailand asked the United States to stop flying over the Indian Ocean from Thai bases and argued that such flights contravened Thailand’s support for the United Nations resolution declaring the Indian Ocean a Peace Zone and ASEAN agreement on the neutrality of the region. The Thai authorities also sought co-operation from neighbouring
countries as well as China regardless of differences in political, ideology, economic and social system.

The withdrawal of United States from Thailand in 1975 provided a useful bargaining tool for diplomatic negotiations with its neighbours. As Hanoi had long maintained that it would not open negotiations with Thailand as long as American troops were present. Hence, Thai insistence on United States withdrawal would be a useful gesture of good will.

Thai-American relations, however, have their own features, sometime if there were conflicts they mostly derived from problems of co-operation. During the Second Indo-China war the United States asserted itself too strongly, antagonizing its allies especially Thailand. Indo-China war ended with an American withdrawal. Allied which were parties to the war readjust themselves accordingly. By comparison, the Thai-American adaptation process had been remarkably satisfied.

As the competitive demands of the global economy propel the states of mainland Southeast Asia towards greater economic interconnection after the end of Cold War,
therefore, pressures upon Thailand to form a new and constructive relationship with government of neighbouring countries have multiplied and intensified. Thailand’s border area could no longer serve merely as buffer zones, instead, in the new politic and economic context of regional relations, they serve as gateways for trade and investment. Peaceful and open border were one major precondition for sustained economic development.

Economic and commercial relations since then, have replaced security ties as the Kingdom’s major foreign policy concern: Thailand economy is now integrated into the world capitalist system. The new tone of Thai-United States, therefore, reflected Thailand growing importance in the world economy. Major aspects of the relations between the two countries continue to include financial aid, co-operation to wage war on narcotics and support for Peace Corps.