

# REVIEW: A regional security complex analysis of the Preah Vihear temple conflict, 1953–1962

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## Abstract

The “regional security complex” (RSC) framework is used to examine the first phase of the Preah Vihear temple conflict between Thailand and Cambodia in the time period from 1953 to 1962. Analysis by this framework suggests that the said boundary conflict was shaped by constellations of enmity associated with nationalist myths of nationhood, the preferences of the leaders of the two sides dealing with the conflict, and the potential of the spilling over of negative externalities to other states. By taking Indochina as the security complex region and integrating multi-layer RSCs, we suggest that the RSCs produced structural effects, stemming largely from the involvement of the great powers in the ‘Cold War’ environment, which influenced the strategic calculations on the both sides of the conflict and prevented the dyad from choosing war to deal with the temple conflict.

**Keywords:** Boundary conflicts, Cambodia, Indochina, Preah Vihear temple, Regional security complex (RSC), Thailand

## Introduction

The 1950s was a pivotal period in modern international relations with the Soviet acquisition of nuclear power, the ‘loss of China’ in late 1940s, and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 which divided the world into a bipolar system, i.e. the ‘Free World’ versus the ‘Communist Camp’. In Asia, the outcome of the Korean War polarized the Asian states into alliance systems conditioned by the Anglo-American ‘Free World’ and the Sino-Soviet communist blocs (Best, Hanhimaki, Maiolo and Schulze 2008: 265–266).

Concurrently, the wave of decolonization deriving from the fall of the European powers led to the emergence of new states, particularly in Asia and Africa. A number of new independent states emerged, especially in the ‘Southern Asia’ region, India and Indonesia included. With the appearance of new sovereign states, the pressure exerted by the ‘great powers’ over alignment decisions became a significant burden on the leaders of the newborn states because aligning with either the US or the Sino-Soviet side or proclaiming neutrality entailed enormous security predicaments; this was a serious issue for the emerging states encircled by aligned neighbors because of the higher risk associated with their geographical position.

In addition, the increased number of existing states created a bigger potential for conflict leading to war due to the augmentation of the boundaries’ proportions (Geller & Singer, 1998: 60-61; Vasquez, 1993: 127). The boundary conflict over the Preah Vihear temple between Thailand and Cambodia, a newly independent state in Indochina, manifested not only a hostility between members of a dyad but also the influence of the great powers in the Cold War environment.

We examine the nature of the boundary conflict over the temple through a regional security complex (RSC) analysis. First, the RSC theory is laid out after which we explore the securitization of the temple at the dyadic level, investigate the international system, and narrow it down to Southeast Asia as a regional security complex. We also examine the interconnections among multi-layer levels to understand the structural effects on the strategic calculus of the dyad, and finally, we evaluate the consequences of the

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decisions of the two sides of the conflict swayed by the structural effects.

## Methodology

The methodology used for this research is constructivist-qualitative. In particular, discourse analysis was broadly applied for analyzing data, though it is a contested concept. This is because in the socio-political world, nothing is either objectively existent or a brute fact; everything follows a social construct, inter-subjective and subject to change. From this perspective, Robert Cox (1981) suggested that no concept should be taken for granted, as it is “always for someone and some purpose” (p. 128) and, as Ken Booth (2007: 150) added, “from somewhere”.

In their research on non-Western states, Cox (1981) and Booth (2007) warn that it is imperative to keep spatial differences in mind, particularly in systems of meaning. Thus, in this study, discourse analysis is not narrowly circumscribed by post-structuralist techniques such as deconstruction. Hence, notions of essentialism, exceptionalism, and universalism are rejected. According to Roger Pierce (2008: 280), the common ground for discourse analysis is the analysis of systems of meaning and the operations that shape and naturalize the pattern actors or agents conceive in their roles and positions within existing power structures; even more important is to scrutinize those who claim to hold the truth and how those actors or agents perceive the socio-political realities constructed by such truth.

By employing various techniques of inquiry, discourse analysis provides more insightful ways for gaining a practical understanding of existing power structures and their functions in the socio-political phenomena of the ‘Third World’. In the terrain of foreign policy, as Lene Hansen (2006) indicates, discourse analysis argues that:

“Foreign policy decision-makers are situated within a larger political and public sphere, and their representations as a consequence draw upon and are formed by the representations articulated by a larger number of individuals, institutions, and media outlets” (pp. 6-7).

This statement explains why the method of discourse analysis would be appropriate for our study. However, discourse analysis has not been free from criticism, particularly regarding its reliability and applicability. As a subset of qualitative methodology, it has inherited the critiques directed at qualitative research, including those alleging a lack of objectivity because of the immersion of the observer, an inability to generalize due to an insufficient sample, and the absence of numerical and statistical data, and empirical evidence (Grix, 2004: 121-122). As such, we were cautious in its usage and its drawbacks were taken into account.

### ***Regional Security Complex Theory:***

In *People, States & Fear*, Barry Buzan (2007) defines a security complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another” (p. 160); the term includes both the character of the attribute (security), and the concept of interdependence of neighbors whether in the form of rivalry or that of shared interests. This framework helps with the construction “of a multi-level, holistic approach to the analysis of security problems... designated to insert a middle level of analysis between the global system level... and the individual country level” (Buzan, 1988: 2). He further explains that each level retains its own distinctive character and dynamic for a separate analysis while it is also possible to examine interactions with others for a more comprehensive understanding.

The distinctive character, in this context, refers to the pattern of amity and enmity; however, a security complex is inclined to depend more upon enmity (Buzan, 1998: 2) and relationships arranged by suspicion and fear (Buzan, 2007: 160) rather than amity. This view reflects Louis Cantori and Steven Spiegel's approach to international regions. Cantori and Spiegel (1969) explain that the structure of relations is based on three elements: those associated with cooperation or conflict; those associated with amity or antagonism, plus the means and instruments of war and conflict or cooperation (Cantori & Spiegel, 1969: 362–363). They cite as an example the case of Southeast Asia during the 1960s when there were direct conflicts and antagonistic relationships among states, including that between Thailand and Cambodia (Cantori & Spiegel, 1969: 370). Udo Steinbach (1982) notes that in conflicts between the Third World states nationalism has been the characteristic source of conflicts at both the interstate and domestic levels; this can be seen in the persistent conflicts between Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam (Steinbach, 1982: 23).

The RSC analysis takes the distribution of power into account (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998: 13); in normal circumstances, the distribution of power, military and economic capabilities, is the measure that defines the polarity of the RSC, since ordinary complexes are structurally anarchic (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 55). Therefore, the analysis comprises security predicaments, particularly among regional powers inside the RSC. From this perspective, I argue that the distribution of power within the RSC is no different from that asserted by the neo-realist perspective on the distribution of capabilities across states on the international system level (Waltz, 1979: 98) in that it is a component of the RSC rather than an attribute of states. Furthermore, Cantori and Spiegel (1969) indicate that by considering power as a variable in subordinate systems, all aspects of power (material, military and motivational) must be accounted for in a relative way (Cantori & Spiegel, 1969: 367).

The distribution of power in the RSC is shaped by the perceptions of states; for example, fear leads to conflict-prone foreign policies and military behavior (Buzan, 2007: 161), causing security dilemmas. In addition, this predicament is exacerbated by the pattern of amity and enmity, though primarily by antagonism. For example, Thailand, according to Buzan, “is much more concerned by threats from Vietnam than from any of its other neighbors” (Buzan, 2007: 161).

The last and most problematic component is the member units within the RSC. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998) define this simply as “the arrangement of the units and the differentiation among them” (p. 13); groups of units “can be distinguished from the entire system by the particular nature or intensity of their interactions with or interdependence on each other” (p. 6). Buzan (2007) observes that “the task of identifying a security complex involves making judgments about the relative strengths of security interdependencies among different countries” (p. 162), adding that security interdependencies are stronger between members of a set than between the members and outside states. Nevertheless, I argue that these descriptions are too vague and must be elaborated.

So what are the objects of security that push states towards security interdependence? In a study of regional security and conflict, Patrick Morgan (1997) argues that the explanation provided by Buzan, Kelstrup, Lemaitre, Tromer and Wæver (1990) for the member units of RSC has miscalculated the role of external great powers within the RSC after the end of the Cold War. Morgan contends that the security interests of those powers were firmly interconnected with those of the members of the security complexes and concludes that “provision must be made for possible *members of a regional security complex not located in that neighborhood*” (Morgan, 1997: 28–29). Morgan does not suggest that geographical proximity is irrelevant in delimiting the member units of security complexes since “their most feared

opponents are usually in the neighborhood” (2007: 29).

Many studies in international conflict have supported the role of geographical proximity, specifically territorial contiguity, as an increased source of conflict and war. Geller and Singer (1998) found that at the dyadic level, proximate states were more inclined to engage in conflict and war than remote states and that, furthermore, conflict and war were more probable between states whose territories were contiguous (Geller & Singer, 1998: 78). Likewise, John Vasquez (1993) found that “states that are contiguous and/or involved in disputes over territorial contiguity tend to go to war with each other more frequently than other states” (pp. 132–133). Although territorial contiguity did not necessarily lead to a militarized conflict, it was more likely than other issues to lead to sequential events that eventually resulted in war (pp. 124–127). The influence of great powers, Morgan states, must not be trivialized either; their roles and security relations can be seen explicitly through their military presence, as well as in their military alliances, especially in geo-strategic regions (Morgan, 1997: 29–30). In this sense, conflict and war caused by proximity and contiguity may be either escalated or mitigated according to the interests of the great powers.

Morgan suggests that an active and durable military presence as well as intense security engagements complement geographical criteria. In such a case, “identified complexes will overlap, or vary somewhat, with issues, events, and related perceptions of what actors and analysts deem to be relevant externalities...Hence identification will always be problematic; the perceptions are not guaranteed to match up and may fluctuate” (Morgan, 1997: 30). Morgan’s revision, allows for a consideration of external actors whose security relationships are tied profoundly to the members of the RSC; moreover, it permits grey zones where complexes are inseparably overlapping. These interdependences are more apparent in the RSC for which conflict and war are in the middle. This is reaffirmed by David Lake (1997) who applies a systems approach to RSC analysis.

By considering the RSC as a regional system, Lake refers to ‘externalities’ as salient factors: “costs (negative externalities) and benefits (positive externalities) that do not accrue only to the actors that create them. They are also known as spillover or neighborhood effects...the actions of each party impose costs upon the others, creating a negative externality that binds the relevant states together as a set of interacting units” (Lake, 1997: 49). The security predicament can also be considered as an externality. In Southeast Asia’s pre-ASEAN years, negative externalities that tied new states together as a security complex were trans-border issues which included boundary disputes and communist insurgencies (Khong, 1997: 322–325). In this study, overlaps, relationships and externalities are regarded generally as structural repercussions.

The structural repercussions or effects, as Kenneth Waltz (1971) contends, do not entirely determine state behaviors; rather, “structural constraints are barriers, but men can try to jump over them. Structure shapes and limits choices; it establishes behavioral tendencies without determining behavior” (Waltz, 1971: 471). Hence, this study argues that the policy options of involved states in the RSC towards specific externalities were narrowed by the structural effects descending from a higher level.

A question to answer is what leads states to engage each other on security matters, i.e. to form security complexes. For Lake, this is the ‘negative externality’, but I argue that it is not necessarily an external factor; a conflict may be invoked intentionally by the involved parties for different purposes. We propose using the Buzan et al. (1998) term ‘referent objects’ for those factors that lead states to establish security complexes. The referent objects, according to Buzan et al., are “seen to be existentially threatened and ... have a legitimate claim to survival” (Buzan et al., 1998: 36). Objects of security are formed only through the

successful process of securitization, which is inter-subjective; they are the product of the power politics of securitization among securitizing actors (Buzan et al., 1998: 31–32).

Nevertheless, as Hans Günter Brauch (2008) indicates, some referent objects are more easily securitized than others, because the spatial connotations of referent objects are non-equivalent. For instance, territorial integrity and national identity have direct spatial connotations; therefore, they have more value at risk than anthropocentric objects such as eco-sustainability (Brauch, 2008: 340–341). Consequently, referent objects of security bind the members of the RSC together, and non-consenting parties are tied to the referent objects by negative externalities. Through the same process, complexes and sub-complexes could be turned into referent objects of either larger complexes or an international system dominated by rivalries among the great powers.

We have outlined the concept of RSC analysis by reviewing the literature on subordinate systems and security complexes. In summary, the RSC applied in this study consists of at least three components:

1. *The group of member units* (states) bound together by the referent object of security and located within delineated spatial areas, leading to interactions manifested in many forms, including conflict and war; the members are not delineated by geographical proximity but by security interdependence.
2. *The pattern of amity and enmity* (primarily antagonism) defined in terms of historical relationships arranged by the comity of nations: hence, the social construct.
3. *The distribution of power* determined by military and economic capabilities.

Multi-level parameters can also be added in the form of other complexes or an international system whose structural effects trigger down to the RSC.

## Findings and Discussion

### *The Revival of Traditional Antagonism:*

The corollary of the Second World War affected the configuration of the international system in terms of power transitions and geo-political strategies. As A. F. K. Organski (1958) points out, a power transition occurred in the early post-war period: the US replaced the British and European powers as the ‘dominant nation’; nevertheless, he adds, there were also challengers, the Soviet Union and Communist China, and power struggles among the US and its allies could lead to wars (Organski, 1958: 316–325). The decline of the European empires brought about the emergence of numerous states. Because of the timing of their independence, the former colonial states inevitably faced a tightly bipolar environment and became the referent objects of the great powers’ strategies to create their spheres of influence.

In Southeast Asia, direct and indirect battlefields formed, especially after the withdrawal of France, the former colonial power. Cambodia was one of those states that had become *de facto* independent in November 1953 and then officially received international recognition by the Geneva Accord in July 1954 (Lee, 1976: 236–237). In contrast, Thailand had been neither a *de jure* colony nor a *de jure* defeated state in the great wars, despite its ambiguous status during the two world wars. Nevertheless, what both states had in common were their Third World characteristics, i.e. weakness, vulnerability and insecurity.

As Third World states, both Thailand and Cambodia may be defined as prismatic polities, connoting a sense of immature state formation. Thus, they “impinge upon the state-making process of other states in their neighborhood, especially those contiguous to them” (Ayoob, 1995: 47). For Thailand, a further complication is its lack of national identity or nationhood since its population is multi-ethnic, especially in southern Thailand (Alagappa, 1987: 198). Nationhood is substantial to modern states, especially those

newly born, not only in relation to domestic aspects but also to international ones. As Pavin Chachavalpongpun (2005) indicates, nationhood “plays an important role in shaping the peoples’ consciousness and the way they perceive their place in the global community” (p. 10).

Nevertheless, nationhood is not intrinsic but a social artifact; therefore, it requires construction (King, 2008: 133). In Cambodia, unlike Thailand, 90 percent of the population is Khmer (Acharya, 2000: 57); however, this does not mean that Cambodian nationhood has always been firm. Rather, Cambodian leaders have tried to bind the nation to the great empire of Angkor, which flourished from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries (Wood, 2011: 39–42). This study argues that the cults of Thai and Cambodian nationhood were crucial ingredients in the boundary conflict between the dyad after the French withdrawal from Indochina.

In 1954, the year Cambodia became officially independent, the Preah Vihear temple became a referent object of security in the dyadic relation due to a negative externality initiated by Thailand, though this process had begun years earlier with Thailand stationing its keepers around the temple area in 1949 disregarding the French calls for their removal (Leifer, 1967: 85). The temple was located on the Dangrek mountains on the Cambodian frontier; after Cambodia became independent, the temple was immediately occupied by Thai police forces (Smith, 1965; Reddi, 1965: 210). In addition, Thailand, as David Chandler states, “was reluctant to accept that its satellite of the 1840s was now a sovereign state” (Chandler, 1998: 36); Cambodia used to be under Siamese (Thai) dominion before the arrival of Western colonialism.

On the other hand, for Cambodia, Thailand’s reoccupation of the temple was not merely a violation of its territorial integrity but also a symbolic invocation of the history of subordination that was still remembered by Khmer elites (Leifer, 1974: 51). This event exposed the reality that the removal of colonial rule brought about a fear of threats from traditional antagonists, as the cocoon guaranteed by a big power no longer existed. Therefore, a traditional antagonism was revived and intensified through the political maneuvers of dyad members designed to maintain the legitimacy of their regimes.

We realize that the pattern of relationships between Thailand and Cambodia was deeply rooted in the memory of the rise and fall of the great ancient empires with which they identified themselves, thus the constellations of enmity. In this sense, the dispute over the temple, as Michael Leifer (1967) indicates, was not “a matter of substance, but it was certainly symptomatic of the two countries’ mutual suspicion” (p. 85). This mutual suspicion stemmed from historical myths symbiotic to both sides, drawing their nationhood on the perception of their position in the regional and international spheres.

### ***The Nationhood of Thailand and Cambodia:***

After the collapse of Thailand’s absolute monarchy in 1932, Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram, the statist leader in power from 1938 to 1944 and again from 1948 to 1957, propagated the chauvinist cult of the ‘Greater Thai Empire’ (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005: 131–132) on the idea of a golden land (*Suwannaphum*).

“Southeast Asia is composed of small nations ... Siam, being situated in the centre of the group and the only independent country so far, naturally will be looked up to as an ‘elder brother’ nation” (Tarling, 2006: 71).

From the Thai perspective, its neighbors, including Cambodia “were all of ‘original Thai stock’ and should be united with Siam” (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005: 132). Furthermore, since the Phibun premiership, communism had been negatively identified by Thai leaders as the ‘contrary’ to Thainess, thus aligning Thailand with the ‘Free World’. Finally, Phibun attempted to regionalize the notion of Thai

nationhood as Southeast Asian-ness by joining the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the US-led anti-communist alliance (Chachavalpongpun, 2005: 48). Hence, from the world-view of Thai nationhood, Thailand labeled itself as the regional hegemony whose stance was opposed to communist domination.

After the decline of the Angkor Empire in the fifteenth century, Cambodia was annexed by its neighbors. After the French intervention in the second half of the nineteenth century, it became a French protectorate. In this regard, as V. M. Reddi (1970) states:

“Khmer nationhood was not exclusively the product of French rule. The love of freedom is embedded in the culture, history and, above all, the religion of Cambodian society. This rather dormant national trait was kindled and invigorated by centuries of conflict with the aggressive neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam” (Reddi, 1970: 225).

Given the nature of Khmer nationhood, Cambodia’s foreign policy direction was “shaped by old fears and new anxieties”, especially concerning its traditional antagonists (Leifer, 1972: 119). This induced a strong feeling of being vulnerable to its more powerful and aligned neighbors, hence its “hypersensitive attitude to national security” (Leifer, 1974: 50–51). In this regard, non-alignment was pursued by Cambodia’s leaders to ensure their country’s safety.

The nationhood of both states and their nationalist sentiments escalated their inclination to securitize the Preah Vihear temple. For Thailand, its forcible occupation of the temple signified a patronizing outlook towards Cambodia in its unilateral proclamation of a regional hegemonic status (Leifer, 1967: 85). Cambodia’s reaction, by contrast, was more complicated, though Thai aggression reaffirmed its fear of traditional antagonism. This derived from the fact that Cambodia, as a newborn state, was relatively weak, militarily and economically; in addition, in geo-political terms it was encircled by traditional adversaries that aligned themselves with the great powers.

Consequently, Cambodia was confronted with the security predicament that either securitizing the border problems and reacting forcefully or ignoring the Thai presence would produce a boomerang effect not only upon regime stability but also on the existence of the state. Given this dilemma, Cambodia decided not to securitize the issue immediately; rather, it chose diplomatic negotiation with Thailand (Pradhan, 1985: 71–72). From 1954 to 1957, there was no official response from Bangkok, yet Norodom Sihanouk, the former King and Cambodian leader, insisted that Cambodia withhold the use of force, so as not to deteriorate the border situation (Leifer, 1967: 86).

Nevertheless, after Sihanouk’s visit to China in 1956, Thailand boosted its police forces in the temple areas. In April 1958 Bangkok announced to Phnom Penh that the Preah Vihear temple belonged to Thailand, as Thailand had been compelled under pressure to sign the Franco-Thai Treaties of 1904 and 1907 over the issue of Cambodia’s boundaries and frontiers, and therefore the treaties were no longer applicable (Leifer, 1967: 86–87). The behavior of both states, this study contends, was not merely a product of domestic conditions; rather, both regional and international structures made Thailand’s aggressive actions possible and narrowed Cambodia’s options in responding to such aggressions.

### ***Indochina as the Mainland Southeast Asian Complex:***

In the 1950s, the international climate was strained by the bipolarization of international politics, particularly after the ‘loss of China’ and the Korean War. The anti-Communist campaigns in the US had also been stirred up, becoming widely known as ‘McCarthyism’, an overwhelming fear of Communist

threats, which put pressure on the politics of the Potomac (Crockatt, 1995: 93–95). The threat of communism seemed affirmed by the triumph of the Red China and the invasion of South Korea.

In addition to the instability in East Asia, Washington was also concerned by the weakening of French power in Indochina. This was expressed in the National Security Council Paper 64 (NSC-64) in February 1950:

“Indochina is the area most immediately threatened. It is also the only area adjacent to communist China which contains a large European army, which along with native troops is now in armed conflict with the forces of communist aggression. A decision to contain communist expansion at the border of Indochina must be considered as a part of a wider study to prevent communist aggression into other parts of Southeast Asia” (NSC, 1950).

The views of NSC-64 were then confirmed by the subsequent top-secret paper, NSC-68, which pointed to the need to contain the communist spheres of influence on a global scale. Southeast Asia became the foreign policy priority of the US and a chance for local state leaders to gain American support and recognition and thus the legitimization of their regimes. Thailand under Phibun zealously took this opportunity, despite the low degree of communist insurgency (Bamrungsuk, 1988: 43–47).

Nevertheless, the US conducted a neutral policy concerning independence in Indochina since it preferred the presence of France in the region (Bamrungsuk, 1988: 39). This was also the case when Sihanouk discussed Cambodian independence with John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of State, in 1953; American sympathy with colonial powers let Sihanouk down (Lee, 1976: 235–236; Kirk, 1971: 43–44). However, the network of security interdependence had more players, which became apparent during the establishment of SEATO.

Despite the words ‘Southeast Asia’ in its name, most of SEATO’s members were Western powers, including the US, the UK, France and Australia, as only two Southeast Asian states, Thailand and the Philippines, joined the alliance (Phuangkasem, 1973: 9). This implied the importance of security interdependence not only for the US but also for the former colonial powers and local states. Even though the US wanted to bring Indochinese states into the alliance, the UK disagreed after meeting with the Communist China at the Geneva Conference, wanting Indochina to become a neutral zone instead and SEATO to be only a safeguard of Indochinese neutrality (Pradhan, 1985: 38–39). Sihanouk was again disappointed with the US refusal of any solid guarantee of Cambodian security, apart from the ‘rights without duties’ of the SEATO umbrella, against the threats from neighboring countries (Pradhan, 1985: 40; Kirk, 1971: 45). This heightened Cambodia’s anxiety over American sincerity.

The role of the non-aligned movement, particularly India, was also crucial to the pattern of relationships within mainland Southeast Asia, especially after the Bandung Conference in 1955. At Bandung, the promotion of *Pancha Shila*, the India-enunciated principles of peaceful coexistence, seemed to offer a way out of the security predicament faced by newborn states such as Cambodia (Kirk, 1971: 46). In addition, Cambodia was convinced by India not to forge closer ties with the US and SEATO since from the Indian perspective a military alliance was the wrong way to secure Asia; Cambodia was inclined to adopt this view (Pradhan, 1985: 42–47).

The aforementioned demonstrates the complexities of security interdependence and power relations as well as the pattern of relationships between the units tied to mainland Southeast Asia in general and Indochina in particular as a security complex. To consider Indochina as an important part of the Southeast Asian security complex serves to comprehensively explain the Thai and Cambodian behavior during the

conflict over the Preah Vihear temple, particularly given the structural constraints on the dyad.

In terms of the security complex, it is fair to say that Cambodia was the most vulnerable, because its capabilities were inferior to those of its neighbors who were its traditional antagonists; moreover, the pattern of relationships among the local states that were member units of the complex was antagonistic. Thailand was much less vulnerable since it had aligned itself closely to the US immediately after the region had become strategically significant to Washington (Phuangkasem, 1984: 34–36; Kirk, 1971: 177). Due to its strategic significance, it was logical for Bangkok to choose aggression in reclaiming its superiority and to ignore Phnom Penh's objection since the small border issue would appear insignificant to the great powers compared to the greater strategic relationships.

On the other hand, because of its structural constraints and weakness, selecting a diplomatic negotiation (a normal procedure) and proclaiming neutrality were the only options open to Cambodia to minimize a negative backlash. Cambodia's neutrality was neither neutral nor non-aligned, however; instead, as Melvin Gurtov (1971) observes, Cambodia attempted to preserve an equilibrium between the two blocs; Gurtov calls this 'positive neutralism' (p. 57). Despite Sihanouk's distrust of communism (Pradhan, 1985: 47), he visited Moscow in 1956 and Beijing in July 1958 (when he officially announced Cambodia's recognition of Communist China), soon before negotiating with Thailand on the issue of the temple conflict (Pradhan, 1985: 66; Leifer, 1967: 86). For Sihanouk, the recognition of China also partly occurred because "there never has been a Chinese attack on Cambodia" (Deshpande, 1966: 17).

For Thailand, this was Cambodian intimidation as an invitation to communism and a threat to Thailand (Leifer, 1967: 86–87; Pradhan, 1985: 72; Jha, 1979: 114–115); consequently, Thailand responded by declaring a state of emergency along the border (Leifer, 1967: 86) and in other words, securitizing the conflict. Sihanouk's visit to Bangkok for negotiations did not reach a settlement; rather, it resulted in a breakdown in negotiations, which was followed by anti-Cambodian campaigns throughout the Thai press as well as violent demonstrations outside Cambodia's embassy in Bangkok (Smith, 1965: 144; Leifer, 1967: 87). Subsequently, diplomatic relations between the dyad were suspended and in 1959, the situation was intensified by Cambodia's accusation that Thailand and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were supporting a plot to overthrow the Sihanouk government (Leifer, 1967: 88).

In 1959, Cambodia proposed two possible resolutions: establishing a joint administration for the temple composed of both parties or presenting the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Smith, 1965: 145). Ultimately, in October both sides decided to take the issue to the court. The decisions of the dyad, I argue, were the result of strategic calculations swayed by the dynamics of the regional structure.

## Conclusion

By taking Indochina as the mainland Southeast Asian complex, this study argues that both the distribution of capabilities and the pattern of relationships (particularly antagonism) shaped the behavior of Thailand and Cambodia concerning the temple conflict. The decision of the dyad to present the case to the ICJ was to some extent the result of the structural influence on their strategic calculations. As Donald Nuechterlein (1965) states, "so sure were Thai leaders that their case would be upheld that they did not seriously consider the possibility that the court might rule against Thailand" (p. 250). This resulted from Thai leaders' strong belief in Thailand's strategic importance to the US and its stance as the loyal ally of the 'Free World' for nearly a decade. Their trust in US assistance was also manifested by Thailand's fierce rejection of the

court's jurisdiction over the Preah Vihear temple case; however, this objection was denied by the court (Jha, 1979: 115–116).

We conclude that the decision was a calculated risk for Cambodia: they were bogged down by the two available options, either using the mechanism of international law or avoiding conflict by *de facto* accepting their inferiority in a hierarchical accommodation, in the traditional Asian manner (Joo-Jock, 1984: 75). The former option was more favorable to Cambodia, however, because even if the ICJ's verdict favored Thailand, Cambodia would still benefit from the tension and unstable environment that might have been triggered by further Thai claims over more Cambodian territory because of its positive neutralism; this would allow Cambodia to utilize the instability of the regional complex to retain the support of both blocs (Gordon, 1965: 447–448; Gordon, 1966: 66–67).

In June 1962, the ICJ delivered a verdict favorable to Cambodia, and Thailand had to remove its presence from the Preah Vihear temple (Singh, 1962: 24). Thailand, under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, the King Bhumibol-backed leader of the 1957 and 1958 coups (Bamrungsuk, 1988: 78–80), was shocked and irritated by the judgment. Our conclusion is that this derived from Thai leaders' misperception of the American attitude to Cambodia, as demonstrated by Donald Kirk (1971): "U.S. diplomats hoped to improve relations with Cambodia...while continuing to support Thailand and South Vietnam as allies not against Cambodia but against the Communists" (p. 51).

Thus, the Thais committed a strategic miscalculation due to their overestimation of their position in the security complex. Instead of complying with the verdict, Thailand reinforced its presence around the temple (Jha, 1979: 116). In addition, the Thai Foreign Minister criticized the decision as a 'miscarriage of justice', charging the judges of being the representatives of communists and colonial powers and blaming the US stance (Singh, 1962: 24–25). Domestically, massive protests against the court's decision were mounted and approved by the government (Gordon, 1964: 225). The possibility of war was also discussed in Bangkok after the court's judgment (Nuechterlein, 1965: 254). Cambodia proclaimed immediately after the court's verdict that Thailand's presence on Cambodian soil would not be tolerated, and top representatives were sent to Beijing for consultations (Pradhan, 1985: 74).

The turbulence of the dyad led the US to be concerned that Thailand would attack Cambodia (Clymer, 2004: 92–93) and that this would lead to a confrontation between Washington and Beijing. Consequently, the US and its allies pressured Thailand's leaders, who eventually decided to relinquish the Preah Vihear temple (Leifer, 1974: 51; Singh, 1962: 26). To constrain Bangkok, President Kennedy sent messages not only to Sarit but also to King Bhumibol concerning the matter (Clymer, 2004: 93). After 1962 and until the end of the Sihanouk era, however, there was no sign of improvement in the relationship between Bangkok and Phnom Penh (Gordon, 1966: 64).

The loss of the Preah Vihear temple in 1962, this research argues, intensified Thai feelings of antagonism towards Cambodia and became a source of conflict that could be easily securitized by Thai leaders and elites because, as noted by Manu Walyapechra (1975), "the Thais still considered the temple to be Thai, not Cambodian" (p. 115).

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