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Introduction

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) prioritizes alliances and partnerships and the Department of Defense (DoD) invests significant resources on operations, activities, and investments (OAI's) in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance its "greatest global strategic advantage."[1] Recent announcements include the modernization of the U.S.-Japan defense alliance; U.S.-Australia posture initiatives and trilateral cooperation under the Australia, United Kingdom, and United States (AUKUS) security pact with Australia; new Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites in the Philippines; and increased strategic asset rotations to the Korean Peninsula.[2] These initiatives to enhance integrated deterrence with four out of five of its Indo-Pacific alliances signal the United States' commitment to improving its strategic advantages vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China (PRC). The U.S. theory of victory posits a strengthened network of alliances and partnerships bolsters integrated deterrence and provides tactical, operational, and strategic advantages in crisis and conflict should deterrence fail.

However, recent U.S. policy and strategic documents omit similar references to bilateral initiatives with Thailand, one of the United States' longest-standing Indo-Pacific allies. What explains the lack of similar activities with one of the United States' longest-standing defense allies in the Indo-Pacific? To what extent does the U.S.-Thai defense alliance remain functional and militarily valuable to both nations? Recent Thai strategic decisions and both states' unwillingness or inability to strengthen the alliance indicate strategic misalignment. By examining the U.S.-Thai defense alliance through Walt's balance of threat theory and Snyder's theory on alliance management, policymakers will be better equipped to recalibrate the alliance and mitigate the risk associated with alliance underperformance. Not doing so jeopardizes U.S. integrated deterrence of the PRC in the Indo-Pacific and would be a missed opportunity for the United States.

The U.S.-Thai defense alliance is the weakest of the five U.S.-Indo-Pacific alliances. Its underperformance presents risks to the United States in the context of great power competition with the PRC. To a great extent, the absence of U.S.-Thai alignment on strategic threats explains the current state of the alliance. U.S.-Thai history and alliance theory indicate the defense alliance will continue to underperform

until Thailand views the PRC as a strategic threat to its national interests. The United States must improve its bargaining power vis-à-vis Thailand in regards to alliance management. The United States should identify effective mechanisms to compel Thailand to abandon its current strategy of hedging between great powers. This process of reaching strategic alignment may be accelerated by real or perceived PRC threats and coercion.

The United States and the Kingdom of Thailand share one of the longest-standing relationships in the Indo-Pacific.

Background

The United States and the Kingdom of Thailand share one of the longest-standing relationships in the Indo-Pacific. The 70-year-old defense alliance between the two countries emerged from the aftermath of World War II and strengthened in response to the shared threat from the spread of communism during the Cold War. Thailand's decision to deploy soldiers to fight in the Korean War in 1950, the signing of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954, the 1962 Thanat-Rusk communique, Thailand's troop deployments to fight alongside the United States in Vietnam, and Thailand's willingness to host tens of thousands of U.S. forces until 1976, [3] signaled Thailand's unwavering commitment to the defense alliance. Both allies shared a common threat perception against communism and this set the conditions for seemingly limitless defense cooperation.

After the end of the Cold War, Thailand continued to support the United States, however to a lesser extent. For example, Thailand deployed modest troop rotations to Iraq and Afghanistan and allowed U.S. forces access to Utapao Naval Air Station in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and other regional contingencies.[4] President Bush named Thailand as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) after Thailand allowed the use of Utapao in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).[5] In addition, Thailand reportedly hosted a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) black site, known as "Detention Site Green," where close associates of Usama Bin Laden were whisked away for enhanced interrogation.[6] Done with the full knowledge and consent of the Thai authorities, such cooperation represented Thailand's willingness to support the alliance against common threats such as global terrorism. Furthermore, Thailand also co-hosts the annual COBRA GOLD joint military exercise with its U.S. partner. However, in recent years, the Indo-Pacific's largest multinational and longest-running joint military exercise remains stagnant, is increasingly symbolic, is prone to coup sanctions, and its focus on preparing for joint-combined large-scale combat operations (LSCO) is questionable.

The U.S. military seeks enhanced access, basing, and overflight (ABO) in

Thailand to improve integrated deterrence of the PRC and to gain a more favorable posture in the event of crisis or conflict. The U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) strategy identifies Thailand as key terrain for its "Western Approach," one of its four operational approaches in the Indo-Pacific.[7] USARPAC views alliances and partnerships as critical to achieving U.S. Indo-Pacific commanders objectives by accomplishing four tasks: 1) presenting credible deterrent capabilities, 2) denying key terrain to adversaries; 3) assuring allies and partners; and 4) setting conditions to prevail in war. At this time, it is not likely the United States will get all of what it wants from its ally because Thailand does not view China as a strategic threat to its national interests. Like many Southeast Asian nations, Thailand prefers to hedge between the two great powers to maximize its economic and security gains. Further complicating the relationship, Thailand's economy is exposed to PRC economic coercion while some Thai elites continue to resent U.S. criticism of its internal domestic political disputes putting into question each other's commitment to the defense alliance.

Analytical Framework: Walt and Snyder

Walt's Balance of Threat Theory

Analyzing the U.S.-Thai defense alliance through two prominent theories provides perspectives to better understand the conditions that led to alliance formation and offers observations on alliance management that should contribute to national policy prescription. What explains the formation of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance after World War II? What explains the current state of the alliance today? The answers to these questions will aid national security practitioners in charting a new course for the U.S.-Thai defense alliance. The first theory predominantly focuses on the structural aspect of the threat.

In The Origins of Alliances, Stephen M. Walt provides several hypotheses explaining alliance formation. His balance of threat hypotheses provides several conclusions valuable for an analysis of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance. Most saliently, Walt posits that "states balance against the states that pose the greatest threat," and "states will ally with the side it believes is the least dangerous."[8] The focus is principally on the threat and not necessarily the relative power of each state. Walt identified four factors contributing to the level of perceived threats including aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.[9] After taking stock of these strategic conditions, states either choose to balance or bandwagon. It is important to note that Walt approaches his analysis of the threat through a structural lens. It is not based on Parson's other three causal logics to explain a state's behaviors (i.e. ideational, psychological, or institutional).[10] Walt defines balancing as "allying with others

against the prevailing threat," and bandwagoning refers to "alignment with the source of danger." [11] Regarding its alliances, the United States advances its strategic objectives by cultivating partners willing to engage in balancing and dissuading them from bandwagoning with U.S. enemies and competitors such as the PRC, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Iran, and Russia.

Walt also concluded that shared ideology is "less important than external threats as cause for alliances," and "neither foreign aid and penetration has proven to be much as an explanation for alliance formation." These two observations have significant implications for national security practitioners as they are at odds with the traditional U.S. approach to developing allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. A common interest in a free and open Indo-Pacific and the rules-based international order is assumed to be a significant unifying ideology. Additionally, U.S. security cooperation across the region seeks to enhance alliances and partnerships to build new partnerships and strengthen existing alliances.

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However, according to Walt, ideology and aid do not lead to alliance formation, but are either extraneous factors or visible signs of the formed alliances. More simply put, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Australia perceive the threats from the PRC and/or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are so great that they have more fully embraced their alliance with the United States. This observation is particularly important for U.S. defense policy practitioners because some policymakers mistakenly measure success through the amount of foreign security assistance dollars given to partners. Instead, the U.S. senior leaders must better understand how potential allies and partners perceive the PRC as an existential security threat.

Snyder's Alliance Management

Glenn Snyder provides foundational insights into alliance management in his book Alliance Politics. He argues alliance management is a constant process in which states bargain to pursue both common and competitive interests. They seek to maximize joint benefits gained from the alliance while minimizing independent costs.[12] Looking at the U.S.-Thai defense alliance as a constant negotiation offers insights on how to best approach the future of the relationship.

Snyder presents three determinants of intra-alliance bargaining power: 1) the less dependence one ally has on the other, the more bargaining power they have ; 2) the more commitment one

state has to the alliance, the less bargaining power they have; and 3) the degree of interest in a specific issue in which they are bargaining.[13] This paper will evaluate these determinants from both the United States and Thailand's perspectives to determine the extent of each state's bargaining power. By determining their respective bargaining power and bargaining range, more sound analysis of the current state of the alliance and more sound policy prescriptions for alliance management may be found. Interestingly, Snyder's focus on analyzing allies' dependence, their measurable commitment, and alignment on interests places more emphasis on the structural logic explaining states' behaviors. Both Walt and Snyder do not seem to place a strong focus on analyzing the state's institutions, ideational factors, or ingrained psychological factors.[14] This perhaps indicates national security practitioners must place increased focus on analyzing the structural factors, physical and physical-like elements, contributing to national power.

Application of Theory

U.S.-Thai Defense Alliance Formation

After World War II, Thailand chose to ally with the United States because of the threat of communism. Despite only two Southeast Asian signatories, Thailand and the Philippines, the 1954 Manila Pact demonstrated eight nations' shared view that communism was a strategic threat. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was comprised of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States and signaled their nations' commitment to collective defense against communism.[15] Thailand perceived the aggregate power of communism as high, geographical proximity as extremely close, a high degree of offensive power, and a very high degree of aggressive intentions towards Thailand. These factors contributed to further bilateral strengthening of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance as captured in the Thanat-Rusk Communique, where Secretary of State Rusk expressed the firm intention of the United States to aid Thailand, its ally and historic friend, in resisting Communist aggression and subversion." Furthermore, both leaders agreed that the alliance was "an effective deterrent to direct communist aggression against Thailand," and "the treaty provides the basis for the signatories collectively to assist Thailand in case of communist armed attack."[16]

Quite simply, Thailand made a strategic decision to ally with the United States against the prevailing threat of communism. Thailand chose to do this because they would place their survival at risk if they had failed to curb the communist threat.[17] Communism posed an existential threat to the Thai monarchy, Buddhism, and military elites. Further research should be undertaken to analyze how the threat communism posed to traditional Thai sources of power and legitimacy: the

Thai military, the monarchy, and Theravada Buddhism. Perhaps lessons learned from the analysis may be applied to how PRC influence may impact these core Thai national interests.

Current U.S. Threat Perception of the PRC:

The United States currently views the People's Republic of China as "the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order, and increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so,"[18] and "remains our most consequential strategic competitor for the coming decades."[19] Since the end of the Obama Administration, the U.S. has and will continue to prioritize great power competition with the PRC. This strategic competition frames the U.S. approach toward building security partnerships and alliances around the globe. To a high degree, the United States has been left rather disappointed in its defense alliance with Thailand. The alliance has been underperforming in the context of U.S.-PRC great power competition.

"We are facing a common threat, which is now the overreach of the Communist Party of China."

President Trump's administration seems to continue placing special emphasis on strategic competition with the PRC and focusing on enhancing deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's visit to the Philippines underscored U.S. threat perceptions of the PRC. Secretary Hegseth said "We are facing a common threat, which is now the overreach of the Communist Party of China."[20] This message resonated with allies such as the Philippines, Japan, and Australia, but likely fell flat with Thailand.

Thailand's Threat Perception of the PRC:

From a recent high-level visit between Thailand and the PRC, Thai Prime Minister Shinawatra and PRC President Xi committed to advancing "their comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership." They also committed to "enhance traditional and non-traditional security cooperation including military-to-military exchanges at various levels, joint military exercises and training, cooperation in defense industry, capacity building, personnel training, and technology transfer."[21] Thailand also sought the PRC's support to becoming a full BRICS member, a move to join an organization aimed at challenging the U.S.-led world economic order. Lastly, Thailand, unlike several countries in Southeast Asia, does not have land or maritime territory disputes with the PRC. Thailand does not share the United States' view of the PRC as a strategic threat. In the aggregate, Thailand's policy decisions towards the PRC do not meet U.S. expectations for a defense ally. Lastly, the PRC's economic leverage will weigh heavily

on Thailand's strategic decision-making and its approach to managing the defense alliance with the United States.

Thailand's decision to move forward with the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) purchase of PRC diesel-powered submarines - despite previous efforts to scuttle the deal;[22] the Royal Thai Air Force's continued willingness to host People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) advanced platforms for Exercise Falcon Strike;[23] Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) desire to invite the PRC to participate more fully in Joint Exercise Cobra Gold;[24] and permission to allow a recent Russian naval task force for a port call [25] demonstrate a continued string of decisions not expected for a U.S. defense ally.

Recent news concerning Thailand's forced return of Uyghurs to the PRC further underscored the extent of PRC influence over Thailand. Despite offers of asylum from third-party countries and the action directly countering international human rights conventions, Thailand made the strategic decision to return 40 Uyghurs to the PRC.[26] Despite the PRC's history of forced labor and torture, Thailand chose to believe the PRC's assurances that the Uyghurs would be treated humanely. Thailand was ultimately sanctioned by the United States, and was admonished by the European Union, other nations, and even by its citizens.[27] The incident demonstrates the extent of influence the PRC currently wields over Thailand vis-à-vis the United States.

Thailand Abandons Balancing & Bandwagoning for Hedging Strategy:

Given Thailand's current strategic environment and its relationships with both the United States and the PRC, what expected behaviors should national security observers expect to see? What explains Thailand's hedging strategy towards both great powers? Analyzing the PRC through Walt's four levels of threat factors may aid observers in anticipating Thailand's current and future strategic decisions. In terms of aggregate power, the PRC wields a "tremendous population, industrial and military capability, and technological prowess"[28] that outmatches Thailand's capacity across all instruments of national power. Although geographically close to Thailand, the PRC does not present territorial challenges to Thailand's sovereignty. However, its control of the headwaters of the Mekong River represents the leverage the PRC has over many mainland Southeast Asian nations. The PRC military is capable of offensive operations but has not fought a war since it invaded Vietnam in 1979.[29] However, the PRC does employ aggressive gray zone tactics in the South China Sea and has not renounced the potential use of force to achieve unification of the island of Taiwan. Although the PRC has continued to pursue aggressive strategies across the Indo-Pacific, Thailand does not view those intentions directed at Thailand. In the aggregate, Thailand does not perceive a significant threat from the PRC, thus it will not

balance against it more fully through its defense alliance with the United States. Instead, Thailand adopted a hedging strategy to advance its national interests.

Instead of balancing against the PRC by aligning more closely with its U.S. defense ally or abandoning the alliance completely and bandwagoning with the PRC, Thailand adopted a double-hedging strategy towards both states. Hedging is an attractive alternative to balancing and bandwagoning and represents a middle position [30] for smaller states caught in between great powers. By employing a mixture of engagement, cooperation, and confrontation against the hedging target, Thailand adopts a hedging strategy as an insurance policy against insecurity and risk caused by the strategies and behaviors of great powers. [31] This type of strategy is particularly appealing to Thai elites as well as ordinary citizens given Thailand's proud narrative of successfully managing relations between great powers. Thais take great pride in their country avoiding colonialism in the 19th century, the only Southeast Asian country to do so.[32] Thailand's adoption of a bamboo-hedging strategy where it bends against the powerful currents of great powers is not helpful and certainly not expected from a U.S. defense ally.[33]

U.S. and Thailand Bargaining Power:

The least desirable outcome for both the United States and Thailand, regarding the defense alliance, is a complete dissolution of the security partnership. The unraveling of the alliance would feed the PRC narrative that the United States is an unreliable ally while leaving Thailand increasingly vulnerable to PRC economic and diplomatic coercion. Militarily, what little access, basing, and overflight remaining for the United States in Thailand would no longer be a viable military option for crisis or conflict. This jeopardizes U.S. military operations, activities, and investments (OAI's) to enhance integrated deterrence and to build positional advantages required to support contingencies or conflict should deterrence fail. By measuring both parties' dependence on the alliance, their commitment to the relationship, and their interests at stake, practitioners may better understand both the United States and Thailand's bargaining power to better manage the alliance.

Snyder measures dependence with three variables: "state's need for military assistance, degree to which the ally fills that need, and alternative ways of meeting the need."[34] The United States is not particularly dependent on Thailand for military purposes. Enhanced access, basing, and overflight on mainland Southeast Asia would provide increased military options and reduce risk to operational plans, but the United States has invested in other alliances and partnerships. The addition of additional Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites in the Philippines, ongoing access in Singapore, and an emerging relationship with Vietnam

seem to provide more appealing options to the United States. Thailand, on the other hand, is slightly more dependent on the United States for military assistance. The Thai armed forces were modeled after the United States and the Thai military is quite familiar with U.S. military doctrine, professional military education, training, and weapons systems. New security partners and military alternatives could fill future capability gaps, perhaps with a lower financial cost, but Thailand does depend on the United States more than the United States depends on Thailand. In regards to its commitment to the alliance, the United States is loosely committed to Thailand. Facing no existential threats from external actors, there has not been a need for the United States to verbally express itself to defend Thailand. In regards to strategic interests in Thailand, the United States does not have a lot at stake except for positional military advantage on mainland Southeast Asia. Thailand is not a significant supplier of natural resources, critical rare earth metals, or advanced technological components like other partners around the globe. Thailand is also loosely committed to the alliance as it does not have enough significant military capability to contribute to the United States. Additionally, Thailand is not seeking U.S. security guarantees to meet current or future strategic or military requirements.

Lastly, on U.S. interests on specific issues for negotiation. Specifically, how interested is the U.S. in negotiating with Thailand over military preparedness, diplomacy, or military action? On this matter, the United States would have a high degree of interest in discussing military preparedness and actions with its defense ally. The United States would also have a very high level of interest in wanting Thailand to align itself with the United States across a broad spectrum of diplomatic decisions. Thailand's vote in the United Nations or its influence within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) would greatly enhance the U.S. efforts to compete against the PRC in great power competition.

Risk & Policy Recommendations

The potential long-term or permanent risk of the continued degradation of the U.S.-Thai defense alliance is the complete dissolution of the alliance and the possibility of Thailand choosing to bandwagon with the PRC. These risks are for the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) and the President of the United States (POTUS) to underwrite as they directly impact U.S. national security interests in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. These potential strategic outcomes will negatively impact U.S. leadership in the Indo-Pacific, enhance the PRC's strategic and military advantage of interior lines, and further erode U.S. regional interests across the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic elements of national power. SECDEF and POTUS should direct the Office of Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (OUSD/P), the State Department, and

the National Security Council (NSC) to identify ways in which to better align threat perceptions with Thai allies and to develop novel and innovative approaches towards alliance management to recalibrate the U.S.-Thai defense alliance to advance U.S. national interests in the Indo-Pacific.

To avoid the negative consequences of the erosion of the U.S.-Thai alliance, U.S. policymakers must pursue a strategy to compel Thailand to 1) Abandon any notion of bandwagoning with the PRC; 2) Strengthen the U.S.-Thai defense alliance; and 2) Retain its hedging strategy should previous COA 1 or 2 fail. To advance its regional interests with Thailand, Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific, the United States must significantly influence how Thailand perceives the threat from the PRC. Additionally, the United States must adjust how it manages the alliance to maximize desired gains in the short, mid, and long term. A strategy of coercive diplomacy will involve the use of leverage as well as a combination of assurances, persuasion, and inducements.

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Altering Thailand's threat perception of the PRC must focus on PRC actions that directly impact core Thai national interests. Border security issues (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia), transnational crime, the Mekong sub-region, PRC economic leverage over Thailand, and maritime security issues in the Gulf of Thailand are directly linked to Thai national security interests. Taiwan and the South China Sea are over-the-horizon areas for Thailand and are not directly linked to more short-sighted national security interests. Potential areas for enhanced engagement with Thailand include increased 1) Synchronized U.S. and multinational (Japan, Korea, Australia, Philippines) partner intelligence sharing of PRC nefarious activities in the aforementioned regions; and 2) Thai liaison officers embedded at the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Headquarters. These approaches to better inform Thailand of the strategic threats from the PRC will advance U.S. interests. The United States must also continue to credibly signal costs to Thailand for continuing to bend to PRC demands. However, the United States must also prepare to offer inducements such as preferential trade deals and assurances of not publicly weighing in on domestic Thai politics. U.S. engagement with Thailand in areas where Thai national security interests and PRC malign activities intersect will provide actionable areas for further cooperation to achieve strategic alignment on common threats.

The 2023 U.S. decision not to offer to sell the F-35 to Thailand showcased the United States' lack of strategic creativity and risk aversion. Citing technical issues and timelines, the U.S.

decided not to offer the F-35 to Thailand. However, insiders also posit the U.S. was not comfortable with the Thais potentially exposing advanced technology to the PRC.[35]The F-35 fighter sale represented an opportunity for the U.S. to exert leverage over Thailand vis-à-vis the PRC. The U.S. should have fully explored offering the capability, encouraged Thailand to make necessary technical upgrades to its infrastructure, sought Thai commitments to protect U.S. technology, and stipulated terms to roll back Thai-PRC military-to-military engagement. In return, the Thais would have gained regional and international prestige for fielding the F-35. Potential concessions the U.S. should have pursued were: 1) Cancellation or downgrading of Thai-PRC exercise FALCON STRIKE; 2) Cancellation of Thailand's procurement of PRC submarines; and 3) Enhanced access to Thailand's air bases and airspace for anticipated F-35 training and engagement. These transactional approaches communicate U.S. seriousness towards identifying ways to deepen the alliance while also protecting its defense technology and achieving buy-in from Thai partners.

In coordination with the national defense aspects of the alliance, the U.S. must seek to create inducements for the Thais to more strategically align with the United States. Incentivizing U.S. businesses to invest in Thailand instead of China would be a fruitful start in the economic arena. However, carefully crafting its diplomatic engagement and information approach toward Thailand would likely yield better results. Thai elites would offer considerable concessions in exchange for consistent U.S. support. More specifically, the U.S. should avoid publicly involving itself in Thai domestic political issues. From the Thai perspective, elites and ordinary citizens are baffled when the United States criticizes Thailand for its domestic political turmoil but turns the other way in the case of another U.S. critical ally - Saudi Arabia's execution of a prominent journalist. Perhaps, the U.S. message to its Thai ally, indirectly or behind closed, is that there are tangible and mutual benefits for achieving strategic alignment on the threat from the PRC.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Thai defense alliance faces challenges due to diverging threat perceptions and Thailand's hedging strategy. To better preserve and enhance the alliance, the U.S. must refine its strategic engagement, utilizing diplomatic, economic, and military tools to counterbalance the PRC's influence in Thailand. The U.S. must creatively leverage all aspects of its national power to alter Thailand's perception of the PRC threat and to better align shared threat perceptions. Enhancing its relative negotiating power will also improve the United States' position concerning U.S.-Thai alliance management. A more proactive and transactional approach will demonstrate that Thailand will achieve security gains through an enhanced

defense alliance with the United States.

The worst-case scenario is the dissolution of the defense alliance as it would further the PRC's strategic aims for the Indo-Pacific while seriously degrading both U.S. military, informational, diplomatic, and economic advantages. At best, Thailand would fully recognize its security interests are threatened by a rising and more coercive PRC. However, if the alliance cannot be strengthened in the short term, the U.S. should bide its time by allowing Thailand to hedge in the space between competition and conflict. The U.S. must continue to invest in developing relationships and capabilities that may result in desired outcomes should crisis or conflict occur in the Indo-Pacific, or elsewhere in the world. According to several scholars and senior leaders, the U.S. is facing the most challenging international environment in its history. [36] It is increasingly important to cultivate its defense and security alliances in a manner that yields tangible results for the United States. Underperforming alliances, such as the defense relationship with Thailand, represent strategic risk. The United States must endeavor to mitigate this risk through innovative approaches to alliance management to achieve desired outcomes.[37]

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Pete Roongsang, Lieutenant Colonel USA, Asia-Pacific FAO

Lieutenant Colonel Pete Roongsang graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2004, earning a commission in the Military Intelligence branch with a branch detail to the Field Artillery. He began his military career in Germany, serving as a Fire Support Officer with the 1st Infantry Division and later with the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team from 2005 to 2008. Following these assignments, Pete was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, with the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, from 2009 to 2012, where he served as the Deputy Brigade Intelligence Officer and Troop Commander of the Brigade Combat Team's Surveillance Troop.

Lieutenant Colonel Roongsang's ational deployments include a tour in Afghanistan from 2007 to 2008 as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom VII-VIII, during which he served as the Troop Fire Support Officer in Paktika Province. From November 2009 to November 2010, he deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom X and Operation New Dawn, fulfilling roles as Deputy Brigade Intelligence Officer and Fusion Cell Liaison Officer.

In 2015, after completing a year of in-region training in Singapore, he transitioned to the FAO program. From 2015 to 2017, he served as the Chief of Defense Cooperation at the Embassy in Dili, Timor-Leste. He subsequently served as the Director for Strategy and Plans at the JUSMAG–Thailand from 2017 to 2020. From 2020 to 2022, he was assigned to the OSD for Policy as the Country Director for Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. He then served as the Military Assistant to the ASD for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs from 2022 to 2023. From 2023 to 2024, Pete served as the Foreign Area Officer (FA48) Branch Chief at the Human Resources Command in Fort Knox.

Lieutenant Colonel Roongsang's academic credentials include a Bachelor of Science degree in International Relations from West Point and a Master of Advanced Studies in International Affairs from the University of California, San Diego. He is recent graduate of the United States Army War College.

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