



Pragmatic diplomacy of “quiet steps” and a new paradigm of non-involvement

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the key trends of modern globalization in the context of geopolitical confrontation, analyses the goals of large geopolitical players, the role of “middle powers” and international organizations, the risks and challenges facing such countries. At the same time, the place of the “Global South” in geopolitical processes, the role and place of the Kingdom of Thailand, and the challenges facing this state are emphasized. The potential of the Kingdom of Thailand as one of the leaders of countries that set themselves the goal of non-intervention and not involvement in international conflicts is also substantiated.

KEYWORDS: globalisation, new world order, Russian Ukrainian war, Thailand, peace initiatives, new paradigm, non involvement

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Introduction. Restructuring the global hierarchy. The war in Ukraine marks a process of global reconstruction that is shaking the architecture of the unipolar world in which we have lived since 1989 (after the withdrawal of the USSR from Central Europe). The era of monopolarity, proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama as the “end of history”, probably turned out not to be the crowning achievement of political evolution (Fukuyama, 1992), but a stage for the transition to a “new” (or maybe return to the “old”) model of a multipolar or non-polar, but hierarchized world.

Not only people are dying in Ukraine today, but the very idea of monopolar globalization of the old world system through political, economic, informational, ecological or anti-epidemic unification is being questioned. Along with the new “sanction curtain” between the Russian Federation and the Western World, the “silk curtain” between the USA and China, the attributes, ethics and architecture of this world in the form of international organizations, written and unwritten rules, and communication models are weakening.

This issue is under close attention not only of politicians, but also of the academic community. In particular, in his book “World Order,” Henry Kissinger reflects on the challenge of building international political harmony and the risks of “world disorder” in the face of divergent historical perspectives, violent conflict, the spread of technology, and ideological extremism (Kissinger, 2014 a). The same problems were considered by Joseph S. Nye Jr. in his article “American Power in the Twenty-First Century” (Nye, 2009), Hedley Bull, “The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics” (Bull, s.a.), Anne-Marie Slaughter “The real new world order” (Slaughter, 1997) and others.

The Ukrainian Institute of Politics has been working on this problem for a long time. In particular, only in the article “On the Current Globalization and the Causes of the Russian-Ukrainian War” were considered 4 globalization processes that influenced the formation of the crisis around Ukraine (Bortnik, 2023).

Therefore, the purpose of this article is not only to analyse the processes and challenges of current international relations, but also to find the most optimal model of behaviour in the international arena for countries trying to maintain their sovereignty and avoiding participation in conflicts using the Kingdom of Thailand as an example.

2. Changes in the international balance and goals of key participants

At the same time, traditional hopes for a quick normalization and the formation of a new world order in which “it will be as good as before” are also unlikely to come true quickly. After all, the main global competitors have not just antagonistic goals of a pragmatic series influence and control over key resources, but also perceive reality in fundamentally different ways and see the future of the world (they are carriers of not only different ethical, but also axiological systems). Harvard University

professor Stephen Walt believes that: “The liberal order that followed the Cold War is now contested, and rising

tensions among major powers could lead to a serious breakdown of existing norms and rules” (Walt and Rodrik, 2020). What is at stake is not just the history of the future of mankind, but the principles on which it will be built.

For the PRC, the whole world is not only a field for the realization of its ambitions, but, above all, a space for the formation of security and profit. China is politically self sufficient, culturally narcissistic, and increasingly wealthy economically. The United States, despite its remaining ambitions, military and economic power, no longer has enough resources and internal unity, and, most importantly, ideas to maintain monopolarity and continue liberal globalization. The Russian Federation is trying to lead a “neo sovereign conservative rebellion”, but is deprived of insufficient economic and technological power. The US competes with the PRC, and opposes the Russian Federation; China competes with the US and cooperates with the Russian Federation; The Russian Federation “challenged the United States” and is trying to deepen partnership with China. And only the true nature of relations between the Russian Federation and the PRC remains not completely determined. What is it economic cooperation, ideological partnership, or an informal military political alliance? The question is open. Pavel Baev, senior fellow at the Brookings Center for the US and Europe and research professor at the Oslo Peace Research Institute (PRIO), describes the limits of compatibility between Xi Jinping’s China and Vladimir Putin’s Russia. He argues that although China and the Russian Federation are trying to demonstrate external friendship, they are not natural allies. China is a rising power while Russia is in a downtrend (Baev, 2020).

All over the world, we also see the process of formation and increase in the role of regional states and “middle power”. The American professor of international law at Princeton University, Richard Falk, believes that there is some prospect of a regionalization of the world order with countries such as the US, China, Brazil, India and the EU playing the role of regional hegemons. It is against this background that the question of the revival of the project of world order models emerges (Falk, 2014).

At the same time, the degradation of the UN and the UN Security Council, which is increasingly reminiscent of the “League of Nations” in the period between the First and Second World Wars, causes particular “concern”. This “mechanism for preventing conflicts”, developed after the Second World War, not only does not prevent anything else, but often ceases to be even a platform for negotiations, a mechanism for formalizing agreements. The UN is often simply pushed far into the “backyard” in interstate relations, excluded from decision-making processes in large and small conflicts

the examples of Syria, Nagorno Karabakh and Ukraine confirm this once again; or is only decorative. At the same time, the UN and other international organizations can exist for a long time, although they reduce their functionality. Italian academic expert in political science and international relations and scientific director of the CeSPI observatory in Turkey V. Giannotta notes: “The war in Ukraine has once again proved the ineffectiveness of the multilateral system in overcoming crises and conflicts. We are all witnesses to the unfortunate complete stalemate of the UN Security Council, as it was designed to maintain international peace and international security. At present, the main issue is the composition of five permanent members with veto power and ten non permanent members, who are elected on a regional basis and rotate every two years. Unfortunately, we have to state that what was conceived as the main guarantor of international stability turned out to be inferior because it froze any effective multilateral solution. The spirit of reform unfolds on five pillars. Namely, the category of membership, the right of veto, the expansion of membership in the UN Security Council, regional inclusion and relations with the General Assembly. On the other hand, the states of the African Union demand the inclusion of at least two African states and the expansion of membership.” (Giannotta, 2022).

The “diplomatic ball” before our eyes is “slipping out” from the weakened hands of traditional international organizations and “rushes to the ground” to the basic levels of international relations – direct interstate diplomacy, international trade and targeted regional interaction formats.

Therefore, in such conditions, not only the well being, but also the survival of states depends on internal stability and social consolidation, the presence of strong leadership (individual or collective type) and skillful diplomacy. A world without rules gives the smart and strong (stable) unlimited opportunities, and creates existential risks for the weak. And the key goals of states and peoples in this world are primarily internal – ensuring the socio political solidarity of society and the high efficiency of public administration.

3. Geopolitical South, APEC, dynamic position and role of the Kingdom of Thailand

But skillful international diplomacy will also play a very important role. The absence of stable conditions, friends and enemies, a huge number of direct interstate contacts, growing raw material and environmental crises, an increasingly effective role in interstate relations of non state players (TNCs, religious and public leaders, mass media, cybergroups, informationally influential figures – influencers and structures) are the factors of a new world.

The general shift in the vector of the dynamics of the development of human civilization (and politics, of course) from north to south is also an obvious factor. The global focus of economics and politics is gradually shifting to the South, not to mention hope. Danny Kua, Professor of Economics at

the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, believes that today there is also a growing demand for alternative non great power models of global order, especially from the Global South as well as Europe (Quah, 2019). And here it is difficult to disagree, since politics and economics in the Global South are still going through stages of development and growth, building relationships and searching for meaning, unlike Europe or North America. The Global South continues to gush with the energy of development (despite the numerous crises that are also characteristic of this stage), new ideas and approaches; develops new formats for solving global and regional problems.

Thus, from November 14 to 19, 2022, the Kingdom of Thailand hosted the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, or APEC (25), which became a significant event for the country. And the day before, on November 15–16, 2022, a G20 summit was held in Indonesia, on the island of Bali.

APEC members are 21 countries that agreed in 1989 to cooperate to promote economic growth, cooperation, trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific region and have created a common space that is home to more than 2.9 billion people or 38% of the world’s population, account for more than half of global GDP at \$52 trillion (1.768 trillion baht) (APEC, s.a.), with a dynamic economy of +5.9% of GDP in 2021.

Thailand’s APEC Chairmanship in 2022 has placed a lot of responsibility and opportunity on the country, especially in the current challenging geopolitical environment; with which the country certainly coped.

The theme of the APEC forum is “Open. Connect. Balance”, reiterated that the most pressing issue for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation is its transition to the post COVID 19 era, in particular the resurgence of trade and commerce and adaptation to new norms (Bangkok Post, 2022-c). Promoting sustainable development through a transition to clean energy and a low carbon society – the Bio Circular Green (BCG) model, the need for which was emphasized by the Prime Minister of Thailand Prayut Chan Ocha, is also more relevant than ever. Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan Ocha opened the APEC leaders’ summit with a call for balance, inclusiveness and sustainable growth for the Asia Pacific region. “It is our duty as leaders of the public and private sectors to ensure successful engagement with citizens through a public private partnership model to rebuild a new Asia Pacific region that is strong, resilient, and leaves no one behind. The time has come for us to use the strengths of APEC and ASEAN to promote inclusive cooperation that complements each other in order to move forward for our mutual benefit and win win cooperation”.

The Prime Minister of Thailand, Prayut Chan o cha, also noted that an effective digital transformation will create huge opportunities for businesses in the region and beyond, and will be a

significant economic boost that will contribute to the long-term development of the region (Prayut Chan o cha, 2020).

It is worth saying that the pace of economic growth in Thailand is especially noticeable in recent years in the industrial and service sectors. Rapidly developing tourism is one of the important sources of foreign exchange (bringing up to 15% of GDP), the production of cars, computers and electronics. Multinational corporations Suzuki, Nissan, Ford, Mitsubishi, Toshiba, Procter & Gamble, General Electric, Bayer, BMW, Toyota, Honda (Thailand, s.a.) have opened production facilities here. Thailand's main exports are office machine parts (\$17.2 billion), gold (\$14.3 billion), integrated circuits (\$9.17 billion), automobiles (\$8.28 billion), spare parts and accessories (8.7 billion dollars) (6.54 billion dollars). The bulk of exports are to the United States (\$35.3 billion) (2020 data) (OEC, s.a.).

Thailand's initiatives also include: revitalizing the dialogue on the Asia-Pacific Free Trade Area (FTAAP) (Thailand, 2022). Based on the lessons of the COVID 19 pandemic, establish a task force to coordinate the safe and smooth resumption of cross border transportation and ensure that the Bangkok Green Circular Economy (BCG) Goals are endorsed as a country leader-level document reaffirming APEC's commitment to the principles of a green economy.

Thailand's APEC chairmanship in 2022 has been made more difficult by Russia's illegal war in Ukraine, as well as ongoing tensions between the US and China. As these and other international confrontations gain momentum, competing states often try to use multilateral platforms, including APEC or the G20, as a tool of struggle or a showdown ring. Thus, during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) ministerial meeting in Thailand on May 21, representatives of the United States and a number of other states defiantly left the APEC meeting room in protest against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when the representative of the Russian Federation Maxim Reshetnikov began to make a speech at the opening (eighteen). Russia, in turn, is actively trying to win APEC members over to its side.

In any case, it is always important for chair countries to derive pragmatic economic benefits from the presence of all major world leaders at summits of the size of the G20 or APEC (Sanglee, 2022). Therefore, Thailand was reasonably focused on ensuring that the APEC meeting was successful, and at the same time tried to ensure the presence of US President Joe Biden, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the forum. US President D. Biden missed the APEC summit in Bangkok and was attended by Vice President Kamala Harris instead. While Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai said he would try to "persuade J. Biden to attend" the APEC summit, the focus would be on "which countries will or will not attend" rather than "who represent them" (Bangkok Post, 2022-a). As a result, Chinese President Xi Jinping became the key figure in the APEC forum.

Assessing the outcome of the APEC summit, journalist Kavi Chongkittavorn notes: “Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand, with their distinctive leadership styles and diplomatic skills, managed to make the most difficult somersault in international relations, bringing together stakeholders from all sides over the war in Ukraine to agree on disagreement, and then reach agreement. A task that seemed impossible only a few weeks ago suddenly became possible. Indeed, if world leaders had some humility, as leaders in this part of the world, the outcome of these regional summits could serve as a springboard for world peace and stability. Southeast Asia may even be shaping a new international order, as demonstrated by the organizers of the three summits ASEAN, G20 and APEC” (Chongkittavorn, 2022).

And it was really not easy to reach agreement and balance at the Forum. After all, there is a rapid politicization and weaponization of all instruments of international relations (from culture to economy) in the world. And for “neutral” countries, such as Thailand, although it is difficult, it is extremely important not to get into a position where they will be forced to choose someone’s side from the proposed “geopolitical menu”. It is necessary to try to “cook and serve your own dishes”, demonstrating all your “master’s” hospitality at the same time, but reserving the right to make key political decisions.

Moreover, in general, Thailand adheres to the issue of the Ukrainian crisis, a restrained and neutral position, based on the principles of the need to respect the territorial integrity of countries and international law. Although the reaction of Thai society to the Russian-Ukrainian war was often extremely polarized. After all, “People tend to think about the war in Ukraine in terms of their perception of democracy or authoritarianism,” commented Kitty Prasirtsuk, professor of international relations at Thammasat University (Pattaya People, 2022 b). Thus, prominent conservatives expressed sympathy for Russia, while many young people who had previously protested against the political and monarchical reform in Thailand rallied around Ukraine. At the same time, support for the Russian position is the view of a minority in Thailand. And among the younger generation there is a strong desire to support Ukraine. “When you learn how to fight a dictatorship, it will not be difficult for you to understand people who are fighting for the same goals in other places,” says Netiwit Chotiphathfaisal, a Thai student activist. Some have even expressed interest in traveling to Ukraine to support its people (Pattaya People, 2022-b).

Moreover, not so long ago, Thailand called for a peaceful end to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Thus, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand Don Pramudwinai suggested that the interested presidents of the countries meet in Southeast Asia in order to resolve the conflict and jointly overcome the global crisis: “There is a truly golden opportunity to negotiate peace and resolve the crisis in Ukraine. In November, three consecutive summits will be held in Southeast Asia, to which the leaders of world powers are invited. These are ideal platforms for negotiating a solution to the

crisis. “All stakeholders in the conflict in Ukraine, above all the world powers, could come together one or more times on the sidelines of one or more of these forums to find a way out of this crisis that is affecting the whole world” said Pramudwinai, speaking from the rostrum of the UN General Assembly (Pattaya People, 2022-c).

At the same time, after the start of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Thailand was among the countries that supported the resolution of the 11-th Emergency Special Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on March 2, 2022, which condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and demanded the complete withdrawal of Russian troops and the cancellation of the decision on recognition of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics. This is a consistent position of the country, because back in March 2014, Thailand supported the resolution of the UN General Assembly on the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

But Thailand abstained from voting on Russia’s exclusion from the UN Human Rights Council, as well as on October 12, 2022 in the UN vote condemning the Russian annexation of Ukrainian territories (UN, 2022). 143 countries out of 193 condemned the Russian annexation, saying that it was an illegal action, while only four countries voted against the resolution except the Russian Federation: Syria, Nicaragua, North Korea and Belarus. Thailand was one of 35 countries such as China, India, Laos, Pakistan, Vietnam and others that abstained from the vote. Explaining its position, the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: “Thailand has decided to abstain from voting on the resolution because it is taking place in an extremely volatile and emotionally charged atmosphere and situation and thus negates the chances of crisis diplomacy to achieve a peaceful and practical resolution to the conflict”. through negotiations, which could push the world to the brink of nuclear war and global economic collapse” (Panyadi, 2022).

In turn, Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman Thani Sangrat said: “Thailand is committed to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, including territorial integrity and respect for state sovereignty, and for many years has pursued a policy against the threat and use of force against the territorial integrity of another state” (Chindawongse, 2022).

The decision to abstain, as it were, demonstrates the Thai style of “quiet diplomacy”, which almost always opposes any form of condemnation and is in search of pragmatic and rational solutions; which is based on the principles of international law and justice, but considers the mechanism of sanctions and uncompromising condemnation to be ineffective.

Thailand’s pragmatic interest in a peaceful settlement in Ukraine is also evident. After all, a big war in Europe generates a huge number of crises around the world. In particular, Thailand expects that the increase in world oil prices after the start of the war in Ukraine will lead to the fact that the electricity tariff for the first time will rise to a record high level (Lynch, 2020). Also, the war in

Ukraine has a negative impact on world food prices, the cost of capital and technology, leading to global stagflation, which is very dangerous for developing and export oriented countries.

Moreover, global political conflict, along with socio-economic problems, carries the risks of domestic political destabilization for many countries around the world. Especially for important countries with open economies and competitive but unstable politics; with a high dependence on international finance, technology, markets and rules set by global players. Indeed, according to the co-founder and director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, Mark Leonard, in the coming decades, the question of who sets the global rules, standards and norms that govern technology, trade and economic development will be of paramount importance (Leonard, 2022).

Thailand occupies a key (geopolitical) position in Southeast Asia and attaches great importance to strengthening cooperation within ASEAN, where the country is a founding member along with Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines (Thailand and ASEAN, s.a.). In the field of politics and security, Thailand is committed to working with ASEAN member states to maintain a peaceful and stable regional environment, which is vital for the continued economic development and growth in the region.

For the ASEAN states seeking to preserve Southeast Asia as a nuclear-free zone of peace, freedom and neutrality, the formation of AUKUS is a very delicate issue (3). The AUKUS partnership between the US, Australia and the UK, which will see Australia equipped with a nuclear submarine fleet, is seen as a move to curb China’s growing military influence in the Indo-Pacific region. On the other hand, the activities of AUKUS may be annoying for the entire region. For Thailand in particular, this alliance adds a new, complex dynamic to Thailand’s longstanding policy of balancing the superpowers. It is also likely that some countries are pushing ASEAN towards political transformation. As tensions rise in the region, there will likely be more pressure from China or the United States on neutral countries to choose sides.

The new foreign policy of South Korea can also seriously change the situation in the region, from which the position on the need to acquire nuclear weapons to counterbalance the nuclear status of North Korea is becoming more and more clear.

4. Conclusions. New paradigm of non-intervention and non-involvement.

Potentially now it is the regions of Southeast Asia that can become a new battlefield between, on the one hand, China, Russia and the United States, and allies on the other hand. The situation of the Russian-Ukrainian war, as part of a global confrontation, may be repeated.

After all, Ukraine is in many ways similar to Thailand: an eclectic state and society, where the processes of archaism and postmodernity – nation building and liberal renewal along the American-European model – simultaneously mixed and clashed; imperial and national consciousness; formation of a new socio-economic structure; digital human liberation and new political control; east and west...

Ukraine has already turned out to be one of the “thin places” on the global geopolitical map and is doomed to become an unwitting detonator of the formation of a new world order in the European context.

Thailand remains an internally social democratic country with a diverse political life and intense competition between political and social groups, some of which are oriented towards external forces and models. Therefore, for Thailand, involvement in any geopolitical confrontation is fraught with internal destabilization.

Thailand’s traditional foreign policy goal has been to maintain a balanced stance and avoid bringing superpowers such as the US or China into conflict. Also, in the period 1991-2014 Ukraine also acted within the framework of its concept of “quiet diplomacy of non-condemnation”, “non-bloc” and “third way”, until it was destabilized.

Historically, Thailand is an independent and neutral state – the only one in Southeast Asia that retained its independence and was not a colony of any of the European states (Berzin, 1973). At the same time, the economic power of Thailand and its high level of technological development allow the country not only to effectively balance and resist attempts to draw it into a conflict between China and the United States or between Russia and NATO, but also to act as a stabilizer (pillar of stability) for the entire region. And new Thai peace initiatives regarding the preservation of the neutrality of the Southeast Asian region, as well as the promotion of peace initiatives for a European settlement, would probably be received positively in the world today. At the same time, APEC and ASEAN could become a platform for generating such principles or forming a new paradigm of non-intervention and non-involvement of third countries in the global confrontation.

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