

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the sudden rise and the dynamics of illicit production, distribution, and consumption of methamphetamine in Southeast Asia and how it threatens Thailand's national security. The focus on methamphetamine is based on how wide spread it has become and how it can be viewed as a transnational issue at the global and regional levels. The links between illicit drugs in a transnational context can help to understand and analyze how methamphetamine became a threat to the national security of a developing country such as Thailand.

Three research questions are raised in this thesis concerning the complex dynamics of trafficking in methamphetamines, various forms of cooperation at the international, regional and bilateral levels on narcotics drugs, which should help Thailand address the security threat, and the views of key Thai officials whose work is associated with drug control, especially methamphetamine. Three approaches to analyzing security, as suggested by Kolodziej, were used to guide the analysis since these approaches looked at the issues from three different, but compatible perspectives. The security threat to Thailand from trafficking in methamphetamines from Myanmar was thus viewed from three different analytical perspectives.

The analysis presented in the thesis resulted in several significant findings. First, the complex nature of production and trafficking in methamphetamine from across the border with Myanmar lead to various attempts at drug suppression. When the security threat of drugs from Myanmar became increasingly apparent, various Thai governments could not find any effective way to reduce or stop the trafficking.

The possible help offered by international values, norms and actions were not effective due to the limits set by state-centric principles of non-interference and a tradition of relying on government capacity to address only the domestic aspects of the drug problem. While a country like Thailand subscribed to shared international and regional principles and norms valuing cooperation in words, action to control methamphetamines as a national security threat prioritized domestic solutions and national capabilities to counter the threat. It was found that such actions had mixed results that tended toward inadequate responses to the drug threat.

A selected number of Thai government officials responsible for drug control were interviewed in order to understand how their values, norms, and practices might have changed as the drug threat became much greater and more complicated. The analysis showed that they viewed the methamphetamine problem as a threat to national security, which could be dealt with domestically. The logic and effectiveness of such a view was analyzed as limited in scope and not adequate to understanding the nature of the threat. The one outstanding aspect of Thailand's response to the threat of methamphetamine was the 2003 War on Drugs when the state's power and its interests were turned on the Thai people involved with drugs who were considered as a threat to national security. The overall analysis from an international relations perspective found that it was difficult for Thailand to make substantive use of the values and norms supporting various forms of cooperation to reduce or eliminate the threat of methamphetamine.