

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Background and the Significance of the Issues**

The area in mainland Southeast Asia known as the Golden Triangle has a long complicated history associated with various types of drug production, various political and business conflicts, and drug-related transnational organized crime. The fact that this area covers territory and borders shared by Thailand, Myanmar and Lao People's Democratic Republic makes the issue of drug production, distribution and consumption a complex international relations topic as well. The complexity is increased by the fact that the Mekong River flows through this area and creates linkages with southern China, particularly Yunnan Province.

As a practical problem that governments such as Thailand have to address, illegal drugs are seen increasingly as a transnational threat. According to one set of scholars and government officials, transnational threats are the major security threats for the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> They are characterized by their global nature, which means, by definition, that these threats cut across both the domestic and foreign spheres of policymaking and policy implementation. As noted by Pumphrey, in the past, responsibility for national security threats clearly belonged to the military and

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Pumphrey, ed., *Transnational Threats: Blending Law Enforcement and Military Strategies* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, 2000), p. 1.

responsibility for domestic security belonged to law enforcement.<sup>2</sup> However, such clear-cut divisions no longer exist and this creates profound security challenges, especially for developing countries.

The security challenges that developing countries face concern the nature of transnational organized crime and the impact of the illegal drugs that are part of their criminal business activities. The first challenge is the ability to exploit the vulnerabilities of states so that transnational criminal networks thrive where states might be weak and corrupt. A second challenge is when a country such as Thailand becomes a host-state by offering good possibilities to create markets for illegal drugs, such as methamphetamines. In such a case, organized criminals intend to exploit and manipulate the country rather than destroy it. For Thailand, this is a new domestic threat that cannot be ignored. The profits from organized crime and illegal drugs can also be used to finance other groups and causes, such as separatists or ethnic groups in conflict with the government. A third challenge relates to how drug trafficking and drug use can take a major human and financial toll, which affects the social and economic well-being of a country.

One major issue is the need to understand the dimensions of this transnational security threat for a country such as Thailand and the patterns it displays in mainland Southeast Asia. Some writers have already described and analyzed how production of opium and heroin as well as trafficking from the Golden Triangle created opportunities for organized crime in the 1960s and 1970s, including complicity from

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<sup>2</sup> Pumphrey.

agencies of foreign governments.<sup>3</sup> During the Cold War, it also created a climate of corruption and contributed to vulnerabilities and weakness while Thailand was involved in battles against communist insurgency as the main threat to security.

By the late 1970s, the direct threat of communism started to fade as the major security threat for Thailand and Southeast Asia. At the same time, the Thai government strengthened its capabilities and political will to engage in counter-narcotics activities involving heroin, including reduced production of opium and successful law enforcement against heroin traffickers.<sup>4</sup> The Thai government had proven to be highly effective at the national level in combating opium and heroin. However, at the regional level involving neighboring countries the problem had become more complex in a way that created new, more challenging issues for state-centric approaches that had worked in the past.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Myanmar had become the center for the flow of heroin from the region. Producers and traffickers shifted transportation routes and growing areas to places where control of such illegal activities was inadequate. One report stated that in 1994, Myanmar accounted for approximately 94 percent of the opium production in Southeast Asia.<sup>5</sup> However, one important factor that has made it difficult to take counter-narcotics action is the fact that the Burmese government does not control most areas of opium cultivation within its borders and has not seriously pursued opium reduction efforts on its own. Moreover, ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade, Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Central America* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Pornpimon Trichot, et al., *Collective Cooperation on the Narcotic Drugs Eradication in Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, China, Cambodia, and Vietnam* (Bangkok: Office of the Narcotic Control Board, 1998). (In Thai.)

<sup>5</sup> United States Government GAO, "Drug Control."

insurgent armies in Myanmar and in the Thai border areas of the Golden Triangle have control over most opium cultivation and heroin-trafficking areas and rely on proceeds from the drug trade to support their periodic fights with the Burmese government.

For a variety of complex reasons, some of which might relate to changes of illegal business strategy, opium production and trafficking from the Golden Triangle began to decline while production and trafficking shifted to amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). By the late 1990s, there were reports that production and trafficking of both methamphetamines and heroin were connected within the Southeast Asian criminal networks involving several countries.<sup>6</sup>

According to one study, the 1990s saw an explosive increase in consumption levels of illicit synthetic drugs in Southeast Asia. This increase largely consisted of ATS drugs, a category that includes methamphetamine. As such synthetic drugs flooded into illegal drug markets across East and Southeast Asia, it was clear that the use of methamphetamines had become popularized among wide groups of people who used it more as a recreational drug, not just a functional drug.<sup>7</sup> Research and reports showed that regional methamphetamine use was concentrated in Thailand, although it was also spreading to Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and China. According to Chouvy and Meissonnier, levels of social and

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Global Illicit Drug Trends 1999* (Vienna: United Nations, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy and Joël Meissonnier, *Yaa Baa: Production, Traffic and Consumption of Methamphetamine in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004).

economic development that are higher than average have been linked to ATS use by younger populations, particularly school-age youngsters and university students.<sup>8</sup>

Southeast Asian methamphetamines come mainly from Myanmar. While they may have also been produced in Thailand, a major point is that Thailand has become the largest regional consumer market for the drug. In Thailand, methamphetamine is known as *Yaa Baa*, “madness drug”. This was a change from its original name *Yaa Maa* (“horse medicine”). In 1996, the Minister of Public Health initiated this name change in order to change the image of using such a drug.<sup>9</sup> It was becoming clear that widespread consumption of this illegal drug in Thailand was receiving greater government attention. As an important issue for Thailand, it is necessary to see how government officials understand the various dimensions of the problem in order to identify meaningful solutions. With a focus on methamphetamines from an international relations perspective, the issue is what accounts for the rise and functioning of an integrated system of illicit drug production, distribution, and consumption in mainland Southeast Asia and how does this threaten the security of Thailand.

Chouvy and Meissonnier have outlined the general causes and some of the effects of the trend in methamphetamines as an illegal drug marketed by organized crime and separatist groups along the border between Myanmar and Thailand.<sup>10</sup> Their research gives a broad picture of the traffic in methamphetamine from Myanmar to Thailand, but they do not cover some of the international dimensions, such as the origins of chemical precursors and technical equipment; nor do they touch on some of

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<sup>8</sup> Chouvy and Meissonnier.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

the international and regional economic dynamics of methamphetamine prices, consumption and marketing. As mentioned earlier, if the dimensions and dynamics are transnational in nature, then the international and regional context should be a consideration when the Thai government analyzes the problems and seeks solutions to the increased consumption of methamphetamines.

As discussed in other research work, there are major issues involving the linkage between ethnic conflict in Myanmar and the production and trafficking of narcotics.<sup>11</sup> It is also important to recognize that these issues are cross-cutting since they involve the politics and economics of illegal drugs at the sub-national level inside Myanmar; the cross-border and bilateral relations involving Thailand, Myanmar and ethnic groups; the sub-regional level along the Mekong River and the transnational level where state and non-state actors define illegal drugs as a transnational threat.

According to Pornpimon Trichot et al, the Burmese central government has viewed narcotic drugs as a direct problem of ethnic minorities such as the Wa, Kokang, and people identified as tribal, including the Akha, Lee-Saw, Mu-Sor. These minority groups are believed to be uncivilized and used by “aliens” first for cultivation, production, abuse, and sale of opium and heroin.<sup>12</sup> The same logic was applied for methamphetamine production and trafficking. The fact that drug refineries are in Burmese territory and the drugs produced are smuggled for sale in other countries has been considered as a problem for outsiders.

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<sup>11</sup> Pornpimon Trichot.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Since people who abuse heroin and methamphetamines are in foreign countries, it is not of great concern to the Burmese government. Any heroin and methamphetamine abusers in Myanmar have been identified as people in the Shan, Kachin, and Chin States, which means they are located in border areas and are perceived as “ethnics” who receive little attention or assistance from the central government. On the contrary, Myanmar’s central government uses the illegal drug trade involving ethnic groups as an excuse to legitimately and violently suppress those who have not agreed to a ceasefire in the ethnic conflict. At the same time, the government is reported to turn a blind eye to the same drug trade by ceasefire groups who have allied with the government. At the national level, the government has tried to use the unfair treatment of non-ceasefire groups as a way to trigger conflicts among the ethnics groups themselves. Such a divide-and-conquer tactic was expected to weaken the ethnic groups in a way that creates no risk for government authority.<sup>13</sup> The implications for Thailand of the views and approach of the Burmese government require more analysis in terms of the bilateral diplomatic relations, the extent of bilateral cooperation between narcotics suppression officials and the nature of Thai relations with the various ethnic groups. It is important to understand how this complex set of relationships influence Thai perceptions about drugs as a national security problem.

The discussion about the background of illegal drug production in the Golden Triangle, related transnational organized crime, and ethnic conflict in Myanmar in areas where the border is shared with Thailand suggests that the emergence of methamphetamine takes place within a unique regional context that needs to be better

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<sup>13</sup> Pornpimon Trichot.

understood. The major issues that have been highlighted relate to an emerging threat from methamphetamine as an illegal drug and security challenges that are of direct concern to Thailand and its government. It was emphasized that the threat and challenges are complex since they are simultaneously transnational, regional and national in nature.

As an important issue for Thailand, it is necessary to see how the various dimensions of the problems related to methamphetamines have had an impact in Thailand and how they are understood by government officials in order to identify meaningful solutions. By taking an international relations perspective, it should be possible to analyze the rise and functioning of an integrated system of illicit drug production, distribution, and consumption in mainland Southeast Asia and how it threatens the security of Thailand. At the same time, an international relations perspective should make it possible to analyze the Thai solutions and responses along the transnational, regional and national dimensions.

### **B. Questions for Research and Objective**

The following research questions have been developed in order to gain an understanding and provide a more complete analysis based on an international relations perspective of the threat to Thailand and the challenges faced from the production, distribution and consumption of methamphetamines.

First, what is the impact of the patterns and dynamics of traffic in methamphetamine from Myanmar for Thailand's security? The patterns and dynamics of methamphetamine, including the production, distribution, and consumption are first



described as to how methamphetamine, emerging as a threat to transnational, regional, and national security, has developed itself under the unique and unconventional context compared to their predecessor drugs such as heroin. The production covers both that of chemical precursors necessary for manufacturing methamphetamine and that of methamphetamine itself. Sources of chemical precursor production are reported to be located in various countries in East and Southeast Asia whereas the major and largest production of methamphetamine is allegedly in an area controlled by ethnic groups in Myanmar. The description of methamphetamine distribution includes routes and methods utilized by traffickers. Trafficking routes which pass through many countries in the Mekong Subregion and methods complicated and used by distributors are explored. Consumption of the drug which concerns directly about Thailand since it serves as the largest consumer market for Myanmar-produced methamphetamine is also covered including the discussion of the price dynamics of methamphetamine in the major countries involved plus recent trends of the demand of methamphetamine. Then, identified patterns and dynamics of methamphetamine are analyzed to pinpoint an impact or impacts they have to threatening and challenging the security in this region and in Thailand in particular. There are a number of impacts caused by these patterns and dynamics which shape the thinking, understanding, and reacting of key government officials in Thailand.

Due to the multi-dimensional nature of methamphetamine in its precursor production, its manufacture, trafficking, and abuse, every major pattern and dynamic are covered to describe the link to the illegally-integrated system of methamphetamine industry which is part of transnational organized crime. The result of the analyses shows how Thailand alone fails to deal with the transnational problem

such as this even though it seems, at a glance, methamphetamine could be the country's domestic problem. The failure of a nation's unitary action against methamphetamine attracts more attention from international players such as the UN and foreign governments and leads to non-state centric approach, the Thai government's new approach to combating methamphetamine.

Second, how do the elements of international cooperation on methamphetamine have an impact on Thailand's security and its efforts to address the threat? This question focuses first on the elements of international anti-drug cooperation which exist in Thailand. The cooperation includes major cooperation frameworks and programmes in which Thailand participates or to which it is a member. As it is necessary for the Thai government to incorporate international cooperation on anti-drug efforts to combat the threat of methamphetamine inside and outside the country more effectively, Thailand has been participating in a number of cooperation programmes both at the international, regional, and sub-regional levels. For better understanding, the cooperation is categorized into two; one is bilateral cooperation and the other multilateral cooperation.

Elements of international cooperation on methamphetamine are analyzed in order to answer the question of how they have an impact on the way the Thai government thinks and does about its security and whether or not the impact resulted from international cooperation changes or shapes Thailand's efforts to address the drug problem, especially methamphetamine inside the country. Since, from an international relations perspective, methamphetamine is not a threat to one particular country in Southeast Asia due to its transnational nature and challenges it causes to regional as well as national security, dealing with the threat unilaterally does not

always work. Most states, including Thailand, realize the need to incorporate significant international cooperation in the anti-drug movement.

Third, what are the views of officials from key Thai agencies about the impacts of methamphetamine on Thailand's national security and related-international cooperation? The question is designed to analyze the views of anti-drug officials from Thailand's key government agencies toward various dimensions of the problems related to methamphetamines. To understand the illicit methamphetamine industry in this region and be able to understand the dynamics of how Thailand is addressing methamphetamine issues as a threat to Thailand's security with regional and international implications to methamphetamine-related problems in Thailand, it is necessary to see how these officials view, understand, and react to the security threat caused mainly by the circulation and demand of methamphetamine inside the country.

There are a number of international anti-drug cooperation frameworks and programmes involving Thailand. The thesis will study and find out what different impacts methamphetamine trafficking has to the way Thailand, represented by its key government officials, think or do about national security under the unique circumstances of methamphetamine traffic from Myanmar and demand in Thailand. The officials concerned in this question have been working in the field of anti-narcotic for a long time and are able to give useful information about the research topic. The presentation of their views on the impacts of the traffic in methamphetamine from Myanmar. Challenges to Thailand's security do not derive only from the demand of methamphetamine abusers but also the drug production in and trafficking from other countries. Analyses of these views are added to point out

why and how these views of the interviewees reflect their work to control and suppress methamphetamine in Thailand and this region.

The objective of the thesis is to answer the three research questions by analyzing the international and multi-dimensional nature of methamphetamine, analyzing the international, regional and national responses aimed at control of illicit drugs, especially methamphetamine, and identifying and understanding the impact of methamphetamine trafficking from Myanmar for Thailand's security in order to see whether unilateral efforts or cooperative efforts could be considered as more effective in reducing the threat.

### **C. Conceptual Framework**

Edward Kolodziej is one major international relations scholar who has noted that there are diverse views about the concept of security and there are six international relations paradigms that make different assumptions about actors and their behavior. According to Kolodziej, the various paradigms approach the concept of security with different purposes, ways of understanding and methods of doing research.<sup>14</sup> To start, security must be defined as a political concept and phenomenon.

In order to guide the answers and analysis for the three research questions, the conceptual framework does not treat these six paradigms as totally incompatible. Rather, as Kolodziej has argued, each has something worthwhile to contribute to the understanding of security as part of major changes in the structure and processes of

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Kolodziej, "Security Theory: Six Paradigms Searching for Security," in *Conflict, Security, Foreign Policy and International Political Economy*, eds. Michael Brecher and Frank Harvey (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 113.

global politics in recent years. He adds that whether any theoretical tool or paradigm is useful depends on the research or policy problem being analyzed.<sup>15</sup> In that context, understanding the nature of the security challenge and the response of the Thai government to the threat posed by methamphetamine drugs produced in Myanmar is the main research and policy problem.

For the purpose of answering the three research questions, it is necessary to take the main concepts and assumptions from three of the international relations paradigms and use them together in order to gain a more complete analysis of the security problem Thailand faces from methamphetamine produced in Myanmar. The three paradigms are presented in Table 1.1 which outlines the main features that distinguish each paradigm.

Table 1.1  
Three Approaches for a Conceptual Framework of Security

Approaches	Classical Realism	Liberal Institutionalism	Light Constructivism
Basic concept of security	Security involves material power and coercive threats.	Security based on relative power and continuous threat creates a security dilemma for individual actors.	Security and power emerge from cultural and institutional norms and ideas about material factors.
Main actors	States as the main rational egoists, plus other, less powerful actors.	States and other actors are rational egoists.	States and other actors are not given, how they identify themselves and their interests must be studied.

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<sup>15</sup> Kolodziej, p. 114.

Assumptions about actors	States have infinite and conflicting preferences, plus political will to try and get their way in exchanges with other states.	Interests might differ, but mutual preferences might be to avoid unwanted wars and limit human and material losses; repeated exchanges to cooperate teach that maximum gains are from cooperation.	Identities based on culture and institutions form states and other actors, as well as their interests; thus states and their interests are problematic--especially how identities and interests change.
Basic conditions for interactions	Perpetual conflict since security arises as a political phenomenon whenever the desired outcome of exchanges between actors is to be resolved by force or the threat of force.	Continued incentives to cooperate can lead to views of mutual interdependence and creation of institutions for cooperation.	The cultural-institutional environment, especially non-material and ideational elements, can reconstitute states and transform their identities and interests.
Assumptions about conditions	State has greater capacity for survival and security than some other actors; states focus on maximizing relative benefits/gains at the expense of other actors.	Institutions constrain behavior and promote opportunities for more cooperation; shared principles, norms and rules provide incentives; predictability and transparency overcomes the security dilemma, which are absolute benefits/gains for everyone.	Norms can shape state behavior since they are not completely exogenous or subject to rationalization; norms have their own power and are more than functional or instrumental when determining state interests.
Limiting factors	Interests and existence of the state are subject to human preferences and other actors who might have countervailing power and oppose the state's power, authority or policies.	The role of force might still be useful, but problems of complex interdependence make unilateral threats or action less likely; other, more non-coercive policy instruments are preferred.	Light constructivists insist that ideational factors explain action and outcomes in world politics, but do not reject the assumptions of other research paradigms.

The paradigm of classical realism provides the conceptual approach for answering the first research question about understanding how the national security of Thailand is affected by the patterns and dynamics of traffic in methamphetamine from Myanmar as a neighboring country. According to classical realism, governments represent states as the main actors with sovereign power, although there are other actors with less power. It is assumed that states have conflicting preferences as well as the political will to try to get their way, mostly in exchanges with other states through the use of material power and coercive threats. As noted by Thomas Hobbes, this creates a social condition of permanent and perpetual conflict based on the overriding concern about threats to the security of the state.<sup>16</sup>

In classical realism, security emerges as a political phenomenon whenever an exchange between actors is resolved by force or the threat of force. Classical realism has the most general understanding of security in international relations by focusing on the state's capacity for survival in terms of military response to external threats. It does not generally cover responses to internal threats, but all threats can be seen in terms of the condition of force as an underlying determinant of human exchanges.<sup>17</sup>

Another important conceptual point according to Kolodziej is that while states have a greater capacity for survival and security, human preferences define its existence and interests. At the same time, the human preferences of other actors may lead to the use of countervailing power to challenge or threaten the authority, power and policies of the state.<sup>18</sup> In Southeast Asia, such countervailing power and threats to the state can take various forms, including ethnic conflict, separatism and organized

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Kolodziej, p. 116.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

crime, especially when there are links among these activities and the actors involved. The basic concept of security, identification of the main actors, basic conditions for interactions and related assumptions of classical realism provide guidance for the analysis in order to answer the first research question.

Liberal institutionalism as an approach to the study of security guides the analysis for answering the second research question. The focus of this question is on the nature of the impact of international cooperation covering drug control, enforcement and transnational organized crime involving methamphetamines on Thailand's security and Thai efforts to address the threat from this type of drugs. Liberal institutionalism shares certain features with realist paradigms about security, but it presents an alternative explanation about state preferences and state behavior with a focus on cooperation among states. As pointed out by Thomas Schelling, when states face a security dilemma they have a mutual interest in (1) avoiding unwanted conflict and (2) limiting human and material losses.<sup>19</sup> While Schelling focused on how armed rivals might cooperate to avoid war, his insights were the basis for Robert Axelrod to show that even where interests might differ, rational egoists are able to learn that they have an incentive to cooperate when they are able to maximize gains.<sup>20</sup> States would have a greater preference to cooperate when they become more certain that their exchanges and mutual interdependence would continue. As noted by

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

<sup>20</sup> Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).



Kolodziej, when accelerated learning shows actors that the gains and benefits are increasing, then cooperation could be institutionalized.<sup>21</sup>

According to liberal institutionalism, the important elements of institutions that constrain state behavior and create opportunities for cooperation are: shared rules, norms and principles of behavior. These elements of institutions and cooperation can produce benefits, such as transparency about actors' motivations and behavior; compliance with norms and rules; decreased uncertainty and greater predictability.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of answering the research question, it is worthwhile to consider Thailand's bilateral cooperation, regional cooperation in ASEAN and international cooperation involving United Nations agencies in the issue area of controlling methamphetamine production, distribution and consumption.

The characteristics of security as a concept become more distinctive and less over-simplified with the liberal institutionalism approach. That is, the realist view of perpetual conflict based on concerns about relative gains is replaced by conditions of complex interdependence and concerns about absolute gains that can benefit all actors.<sup>23</sup> As Kolodziej has observed, continued incentives to cooperate can lead to views of mutual interdependence that give greater attention to non-traditional security problems just as traditional zero-sum security issues become less important.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, when security involves problems of complex interdependence, this makes unilateral threats or actions less likely, even though states might consider that the role

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<sup>21</sup> Kolodziej, p. 125. One important gain is the understanding that actors are constrained from cheating since they know that others would then cheat in turn and the losses would hurt everyone.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Kolodziej, p. 126.

of force is still useful. The liberal institutionalism approach contributes to analyzing the impact of various forms of international cooperation on Thailand's preferences and behavior when addressing the threat of methamphetamines.

In order to answer the third research question, the conceptual framework of this thesis makes use of a security paradigm identified by Kolodziej as light constructivism.<sup>25</sup> Light constructivism argues that ideational factors—norms and values—from the cultural-institutional environment can contribute to explanation and analysis in international relations.<sup>26</sup> However, light constructivism does not reject the role of material factors (military capabilities, economic and technological resources) and acknowledges that such material factors also help in explaining and analyzing actors' behavior. Wendt maintains that social structures have three elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices. Social structures are defined in part by shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge. These constitute the actors in a situation and the nature of their relationships.<sup>27</sup>

The third research question focuses on understanding and analyzing the views of officials from key Thai agencies about the impact of methamphetamine on Thailand's national security and related-international cooperation, which means that their ideas, values and shared understandings about security and the nature of the threat from methamphetamines produced in neighboring countries. Richard Ullman

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<sup>25</sup> Kolodziej, pp. 131-132. Kolodziej notes that constructivism comprises a broad array of theorists and scholarly approaches, but there are two broad approaches—light constructivism and heavy constructivism. In his view, heavy constructivism rejects the methodology and purpose of other paradigms such as realism. In particular, heavy constructivism rejects the causal importance of material conditions and focuses on subjective conceptions of identity and interests.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make Out of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

defines a threat to national security as something that either threatens drastically to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state or significantly threatens to narrow the range of policy choices available.<sup>28</sup> By taking a light constructivist approach, it is possible to look at how the threats change and how related concepts of security change as well.

According to Alexander Wendt, constructivism is a structural theory of the international system. It makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are inter-subjective, rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are an important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics.<sup>29</sup> This formulation makes it possible to bring together the internal (domestic) and the external (international) within a framework for analysis that focuses on ideas and identities that are more comprehensive, especially with reference to the illegal drug trade involving amphetamines.

Definitions for the concept of security can clearly be diverse, which means they are assumed to be contested. According to some scholars, the contested debate about security has emerged and lasted since the end of the Cold War.<sup>30</sup> When the concept of security is viewed as socially constructed, that means it is constructed in response to a changing world as well as changing values and preferences of people

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<sup>28</sup> Richard Ullman, "Redefining Security," *International Security* 8, no.1 (1983): 133.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review* 88 (June 1994): 385.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas J. Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, eds., *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 18.

involved. As argued by Biersteker and Weber, a concept such as security emerges as a product of knowledgeable practices by human agents.<sup>31</sup>

As noted in Table 1, light constructivism considers that states, identities and interests are not given, and thus must be studied. When light constructivism says that identities based on culture and institutions make states and their interests problematic, this brings a focus on how identities and interests related to the state and security are changing.<sup>32</sup> This focus also covers how the cultural-institutional environment can transform ideas about security and threats to the state or the well-being of its citizens. The analysis for answering the third research question considers the changing ideas and norms of Thai government officials in response to their perception of a security threat from methamphetamine produced in neighboring countries. Along with changes in their ideas about security and threats, the analysis considers their ideas and values concerning international cooperation as a possible solution.

Other scholars have observed how concepts of security in the context of Asia differ from the narrow Western concept. They have argued that Asian concepts view security in a comprehensive, multidimensional and holistic manner.<sup>33</sup> The light constructivist approach makes it possible to analyze Thai ideas about security in terms of its comprehensive, multidimensional and holistic characteristics with respect to illegal drugs, such as methamphetamines.

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<sup>31</sup> Biersteker and Weber.

<sup>32</sup> P. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Amitav Acharya, David Dewitt and Carolina Hernandez, "Sustainable Development and Security in Southeast Asia: A Concept Paper," *CANCAPS Paper 6* (York, Canada: York University, Canadian Consortium on Asia Pacific Security, August 1995), p. 2.

The light constructivist approach guides the research towards considering ideational factors, how these change and the nature of such changes. As noted by Kolodziej, light constructivism is an approach to analyzing security that can accept the assumptions of classical realism and liberal institutionalism.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, approaches such as classical realism and liberal institutionalism have a narrow scope and light constructivism makes the scope broader and covers the dynamics of change. Based on these points, the conceptual framework for this thesis makes use of the three approaches to the analysis of security in order to answer the three research questions.

This is in accordance with talking about the increased importance of human security over military security. To deal with a threat nowadays is not different from protecting people or inhabitants in that society from what could lower their quality of life. One prevailing concept of national security in Thailand is defined by Captain Cheera Khienvichit as “related to the violation of Thailand’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, a growing influx of drugs and related problems, and a huge number of refugees, illegal entry workers and military confrontation. In recent years, such border activities have indeed increased. In the national leaders’ view, this issue threatens the security of Thailand and leads to the mistrust of others. Cross-border smuggling and drug trafficking have undermined the country’s image, have damaged the national economy, and have created national social problems as well.”<sup>35</sup> Captain Cheera argues that since the 1990s, there has been a significant change in national

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<sup>34</sup> Kolodziej, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> Cheera Khienvichit, “How Security Is Conceived by Key Decision Makers in Thailand,” Shedden Papers of Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, 2003.

security policy making.<sup>36</sup> The process of security policy making has moved from military leaders to a group consisting of the head of government, military leaders, and civilian leaders in related fields. This security policy-making group is known as Thailand's National Security Council (TNSC). They try to systematically define and narrow the concept of security by focusing on five specific dimensions: political security, economic security, social and psychological security, military security and science and technological security.

The above explanation suggests the changing concept of security over time. It has shifted from strictly military to political, economic, and societal. One single definition or concept of security cannot be assumed to apply in doing this research..

To understand and be able to analyze the issue of security threat faced by Thailand from methamphetamine trafficking in Southeast Asia in a comprehensive sense, this thesis includes two additional concepts -- comprehensive security and human security.

Comprehensive security is a concept that emerged to give a wider meaning to security and it became part of national agendas for many Southeast Asian governments since the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>37</sup> Comprehensive security includes wider arrays of security, which involved economic development and social stability. However, the concept was considered as an integral aspect of the strategy of regime preservation with a strong focus on regime legitimation and identifying and addressing nonmilitary threats to state security. It has not been centered on people as

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<sup>36</sup> M. Alagappa, "Thailand: The Elite's Shifting Conceptions of Security," *Asian Security Practice*, ed. P. Wattanayagorn (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 443.

<sup>37</sup> "Proceedings of the ASEAN-UNESCO Concept Workshop on Human Security in South-East Asia" (Paris: UNESCO, 2007), p. 44.

humans with rights and freedoms per se.<sup>38</sup> Along these lines, it is important to see how drug trafficking could be identified as a non-military threat to national security. This can be compared and contrasted to whether drug trafficking is seen as a threat to people's well-being and what the state should do about it.

It is relevant to see how this security concept can be used for the thesis research in relation to the third research question, since the focus is on widespread trafficking of methamphetamine in Southeast Asia as a threat to regional and national security. The use of force may not be alternative to deal with the complicated, transnational nature of illicit drugs that not only threaten national security in a traditional way but also comprehensive security by emphasizing the state's economic development and social stability.

Human security, as stated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1994, is people-centered and concerned with how people are able to freely exercise their many choices, how much access they have to the market and social opportunities and whether they live in conflict or in peace.<sup>39</sup> In Southeast Asia, as argued by M.C. Abad Jr. and Moufida Goucha, the concept of human security has not been recognized by ASEAN until recently.<sup>40</sup> ASEAN members, including Thailand, did not show much interest in human security, because regional attention has been on comprehensive security. One point of conceptual debate in Southeast Asia is whether human security could be a new element within the multidimensional comprehensive

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<sup>38</sup> "Proceedings of the ASEAN-UNESCO."

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994*, p. 22. [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr\\_1994\\_en\\_chap2.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_1994_en_chap2.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> M.C. Abad Jr. and Moufida Goucha, "Concept paper on Human Security Workshop in South-East Asia," Jakarta, 25 – 27 October 2006, p. 20.

security concept or whether it was more of a human rights and individual freedoms concept as representative of certain western liberal values.<sup>41</sup>

However, transnational crimes including trafficking of illicit drugs such as methamphetamines in Southeast Asia not only threaten traditional national security because borders are unimportant to such transnational business, but the impact cuts across all economic and social spheres. The United Nations has pointed out that transnational threats also have an impact on human security in terms of challenges to human dignity and safety.<sup>42</sup> Major challenges in Southeast Asia since the mid-1990s have underscored the fact that national and regional security are now threatened by dangers from untraditional sources, which may have to be on the national security agendas of governments like Thailand.

Trafficking in methamphetamine from Myanmar to Thailand is conceptualized as a new challenge to the government. Since the impact could threaten people's well-being and safety, various approaches and concepts related to security can be applied for the analysis of the impact of drug trafficking from Myanmar on Thailand and Thai people.

#### **D. Methodology and Scope**

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is used in order to answer the research questions based on analysis as developed within the conceptual

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<sup>41</sup> Abad Jr. and Goucha.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



framework. However, as mentioned by Bryman, this represents an approach that combines the two research methods and does not attempt to integrate them.<sup>43</sup>

In order to answer the first research question, quantitative descriptive statistics are presented about patterns of methamphetamine trafficking, involving quantities and values of drugs produced, distributed, consumed and confiscated. Primary sources, such as reports from governments and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provide information for qualitative content analysis in order to assess the context and changing dynamics of trafficking in methamphetamines. The documents include annual reports on drugs, official reports on the drug situation, policy statements by the Thai government, and meeting reports of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies of Asia and the Pacific Region (HONLEA). The primary sources of information are mostly from key Thai government agencies concerned namely the Office of the Narcotics Control Board, the Secretariat of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Defence, and the Public Relations Department.

Other sources of information consist of world drug reports and statistics reported by the United Nations, Global Security Reports, the Drug Intelligence Brief by the government of the United States, International Narcotics Control Strategy Reports, journals and periodicals published by UNODC. Secondary sources of information and analysis include scholarly works and research on methamphetamine, as well as media reports, including newspapers, magazines, articles, and so forth.

The information gathered from these sources is analyzed and assessed in order to understand the patterns and dynamics of methamphetamine trafficking. The

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<sup>43</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p" 444.

analysis and interpretation is intended to focus on the impact of methamphetamine trafficking as a threat and challenge to security in Thailand. The impact is understood as covering patterns of production, distribution and consumption, which provides the context for seeing and interpreting the effects on Thailand's national security and its anti-drug trafficking efforts.

In order to answer the second research question, qualitative content analysis makes it possible to identify and interpret the main elements of arrangements for anti-drug cooperation. This includes Thai participation in bilateral and multilateral arrangements. The focus of the analysis is on the key elements of the frameworks for cooperation that contribute to active support for anti-drug trafficking efforts in Thailand and the region.

Primary sources of information are documents about international anti-drug cooperation arrangements and annual reports that update important joint arrangements and actions to cooperate in combating methamphetamine trafficking. This included information published by the Office of the Narcotics Control Board of the Thai government. Secondary sources of information consist of documents and meeting reports made by parties involved in cooperative frameworks, such as the United Nations, the ASEAN Secretariat, and other governments. The analysis and interpretation focuses on cooperative frameworks in which Thailand participates and which has an impact on Thailand's security with respect to the threat from methamphetamine trafficking.

The method used to answer the third research question consists of a semi-structured in-person interview with selected Thai government officials who were responsible for security and drug-related issues involving methamphetamines.

Fourteen officials interviewed were from key Thai government agencies. The Thai government agencies were the Office of the Narcotics Control Board, the Narcotics Suppression Bureau, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and Thailand's National Security Council. One academic from the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University was also interviewed. The interviews were conducted in July and August 2006. The total list of fifteen respondents is in Appendix 1.

The semi-structured interview was based on a series of open-ended questions designed to obtain information about how the interviewees interpreted the national security issues involved with the problem of methamphetamines in Thailand and the region. The complete set of interview questions is in Appendix 2. As noted by Bryman, a semi-structured type of interview provides a context for asking a series of questions in a general form with the possibility of some variation based on interviewee responses. The questions have a general frame of reference to allow the interviewer to ask further questions in response to significant replies.<sup>44</sup>

The qualitative interpretation of the interviews is based on open-ended questions that can be interpreted in line with the light constructivism approach and its consideration of ideational factors. According to Bryman, the interpretivist method stresses understanding the social world through the interpretation of the participants.<sup>45</sup> In this case, the social world involves the dynamics of the Thai government's views that production, distribution and consumption of methamphetamines represents a threat to Thai national security.

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<sup>44</sup> Bryman, p. 110.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

The open-ended questionnaire made it possible for the respondents to provide their interpretations and understandings, which then could be analyzed for the purpose of answering the research question. The set of questions focused on (1) viewpoints concerning Thailand's national security and the impacts of methamphetamine trafficking from Myanmar; (2) viewpoints on the success and failure of different types of international cooperation on drug control in Thailand; and suggestions about effective methamphetamine suppression/control in a national security context with possible recommendations about solving the drug problem in Thailand.

The scope of the research covers three aspects of methamphetamine trafficking, which includes production, distribution and consumption. All three aspects are closely linked and it is their combination that needs to be interpreted as forming the threat to Thai national security. The focus of the thesis does not cover other related problems, such as money laundering or corruption involving government officials, although these are linked to methamphetamine trafficking. However, when these problems are mentioned in relation to the security threat, international cooperation, or in the interviews, they would be brought into the analysis, but not as the main focus.

International cooperation to create frameworks and take action involving anti-drug efforts can be categorized as bilateral and multilateral. Bilateral cooperation, which are covered in this research include Thailand and Myanmar. Multilateral arrangements for cooperation covered in this thesis are ASEAN and the United Nations through its regional office of the UNODC.

### **ling Points**

The main purpose of this thesis is to understand how the rise and functioning of an integrated system of illicit drug production, distribution, and consumption in mainland Southeast Asia threatens the security of Thailand. The focus on methamphetamines is intended to show how the global spread of this illegal drug has become an international issue, as well as a security issue for a developing country such as Thailand.

As an important issue for Thailand, it is necessary to see how government officials understand the various dimensions of the problem, especially from an international relations perspective. The complex dynamics of trafficking in methamphetamines includes major issues involving the linkage between ethnic conflict in Myanmar and the illegal drug business as well as the general nature of bilateral relations between Thailand and Myanmar. It must be recognized that the issues are cross-cutting, since they involve the politics and economics of illegal drugs at the sub-national level inside Myanmar; the cross-border and bilateral relations involving Thailand, Myanmar and ethnic groups; the sub-regional level along the Mekong River and the transnational level where state and non-state actors define illegal drugs as a transnational threat.

It is important to understand how this complex set of relationships influence Thai perceptions about drugs as a national security problem. The major issues, the questions for research and the conceptual framework relate to the nature of the threat from methamphetamines as an illegal drug and the changing security challenges of direct concern to the Thai government. The complexity of the threat and challenges arise from the awareness that they are simultaneously transnational, regional and

national in nature. By taking an international relations perspective, it should be possible to analyze the various facets of this complexity from the viewpoint of how it threatens the security of Thailand. An international relations perspective should make it possible to analyze Thai viewpoints and responses along transnational, regional and national dimensions.