

CHAPTER 4

VIEWS OF OFFICIALS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF METHAMPHETAMINE

ON THAILAND'S NATIONAL SECURITY AND RELATED

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

A. Overview

The aim of this chapter is to answer the third research question as to what the views are of officials from key Thai agencies about the impacts of methamphetamine on Thailand's national security and the role of related international cooperation. The question can be answered through an analysis of the views of selected officials who were interviewed about the impact of methamphetamine on Thailand's security and related international cooperation.¹

An open-ended questionnaire was used to conduct the interviews.² One focus of the interviews was to identify the norms and values shown in their viewpoints concerning the definition of national security and the impact of methamphetamine trafficking on Thailand's security, as well as what they identify as obstacles to the suppression of drug trafficking and control of methamphetamine as a problem in Thailand. Their views about the security aspects of methamphetamine trafficking and obstacles to suppression and control can also be linked to their views about their duties and the role of the various government agencies.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of the people who were interviewed.

² See Appendix 2 for the questionnaire that was used.

A second focus of the interviews based on the questionnaire was to analyze their views about types of bilateral cooperation on drug control between the Thai and Burmese governments in order to see how whether their views on bilateral cooperation are in line with the international and regional cooperation frameworks. Their responses can help explain how their views on bilateral cooperation between Thailand and Myanmar are constructed.

A third focus of the interviews based on the questionnaire was designed to ask about effectiveness of multilateral cooperation on methamphetamine control in Thailand. This includes international cooperation, regional cooperation, and bilateral cooperation which were discussed in chapter 3. The interviewees were asked if they thought the types of cooperation on methamphetamine control that Thailand has participated or has been a signatory were effective. It is analyzed further why or why not and how their views on the effectiveness of related cooperation were constructed by their work.

The fourth focus of the interviews involved asking the officials to give their views and recommendations about solving the methamphetamine problem, since Thailand was a destination of methamphetamine trafficking. Their recommendations were not limited to ways of solving the problem only from inside Thailand. Therefore, the interviews sought recommendations on the drug control in order to understand and analyze how their views and norms are socially constructed.

Responses from interviewees selected as representatives of key Thai government agencies provided data for analysis of their views about the impact of methamphetamine on Thailand's national security and related-international cooperation. The focus is to see how these officials view, understand, and react to the

security threat caused by methamphetamine trafficking and the conceptual framework helps guide the analysis.

Some officials who declined to be named were from the Narcotics Section Bureau (NSB), Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), National Security Council (NSC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Defence, and Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University.

The approach labeled as light constructivist by Kolodziej was used to guide the analysis in this chapter. Light constructivists consider that factors such as norms, values and practices can contribute to explanation and analysis of actors' behavior in international relations. Their ideas about issues involving the definition of national security, the impact of methamphetamine on security, as well as their views about the role of international cooperation are presumed to contribute to their behavior and explain their approach to solving the methamphetamine problem in Thailand. However, at the same time, light constructivists acknowledge the role of material factors such as military, economic and technological resources.³ Wendt maintains that social structures have three elements: shared knowledge, material resources, and practices,⁴ which are similar to Kolodziej's conceptual framework because it accepts that both ideational and material factors help explain actors' behavior.

In the case of the views of officials from key Thai governmental agencies, their ideas, norms, and practices and the extent to which these are shared were analyzed and explained.

³ 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. 126.

⁴ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425.

B. Views about the Impact of Methamphetamine

1. Ideas about national security

The ideas of the interviewees related to national security help to reveal the norms and values about the nature of Thailand as a nation-state, the nature of threats to the country and the role played by problems with drugs such as methamphetamines. In terms of shared views, nine of fifteen officials considered that Thailand's national security begins with the existence of a state, which has its own territory and people. Neither the territory nor the people should be interfered with or dominated by any external influence. Territory was considered as an important element to defend and monitor at all times as part of keeping the nation secure. The values and norms contained in this concept of national security appear to be widespread and well-established in the thinking of the interviewees. However, the relevance for practical action, especially in relation to drug problems, might be limited in view of the unresolved issues about border demarcation between Thailand and Myanmar, as well as the fact that armed insurgents and drug traffickers from Myanmar might be escaping into, and not attacking, Thailand.

One interviewee from the Ministry of Defense observed, "The Thai military has maintained stations along the Thai-Burmese border for the purpose of territorial defense."⁵ The attention of the interviewees focused on the importance of national

⁵ Thikamporn Chulilung (Director of Planning and Strategy Division, Office of Policy and Planning, Ministry of Defence), interview by the author, 12 July 2006.

security in terms of capability, especially military capability, to defend the territory from external intruders or enemies and ensure the survival of the state. The interviewees tended to define intruders or enemies in a conventional way, meaning the military from a neighboring country who would cross the border into the country for the purpose of waging war and threatening the country's independence. They mentioned those who would attack Thailand's independence in times of war. Their construction of national security did not give much attention to drug producers and traffickers from Myanmar. One interviewee added that their duty along the border consisted of monitoring, patrolling, and detaining suspected people but they could not arrest them. According to one military official, suspects would be stopped and detained while awaiting investigation or arrest by directly responsible units. He said, "Our task as allowed by the Constitution ends after the suspect is taken by other units."⁶

Officials from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau were among the group of officials, who defined national security along the lines of most of the other interviewees. They defined national security as protecting the existence of the state without external interference; adding that a nation consists of territory, population, and natural resources, national independence, and safety in the life and property of the population. However, one official from Narcotics Suppression Bureau added, "For police officers, national security means safety in life and property of people in the country. The bureau is entrusted to secure the peace and safety of the Thai people."⁷ It should be noted that interviewed officials from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau

⁶ Thikamporn Chulilung.

⁷ Thirayuth Umpho (Sub-inspector, Narcotics Intelligence Center, Narcotics Suppression Bureau, Royal Thai Police), interview by the author, 6 July 2006.

were of the view that their major responsibility is enforcing the law and suppressing violations of the law within Thai territory because their main duty is to keep peace for Thai people. It can be seen that Thai police officers whose job is to enforce the laws against drug traffickers thought that national security was more about internal security, despite the fact that methamphetamines were produced and trafficked from outside the country. They clearly separated internal security from external security, so that their duty was only to deal with the threat of methamphetamines when trafficked inside the country. Their values, norms and practices seem to derive from the duties they perform as government officials with a focus on protecting domestic peace and internal security of citizens in Thailand. Such views about national security can be considered as quite narrow from an international relations perspective, especially since ideas about drug problems related to concepts of national security acknowledge complexity and the multidimensional aspects.

The views of the interviewees from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau affirmed that Thailand has tended to separate the two in order to give priority to national solutions, although the government has participated in some international activities.

Although more than half of the interviewees gave traditional definitions of national security with a focus on military capability, ability to defend the nation, and accumulation of weapons, almost all of the interviewees agreed that a human element should be given more importance when discussing national security. In this view, more attention is given to the well-being and security of the population. According to some interviewees, human beings are the most vital element of national security and have become more important than defense of the territory.

Thirteen out of fifteen of the interviewed officials mentioned the strength of mind, and quality of life of population, freedom of people, stability of society consisting of people, security of people. According to the interviewees, when major wars are unforeseeable in the near future, human beings are treated more importantly than defense of the territory. However, the majority of the interviewees who identified the increasing importance of human beings for defining national security still prioritized national independence from external influence as the most important part of any definition. This would seem to show that the officials' values had adjusted somewhat in their thinking about national security. However, the idea that the people had to be stronger and improve the quality of their lives does not seem broad enough to include the norms that support human rights. Even though the interviewees mentioned two norms, namely freedom of people and security of people, the war on drugs in 2003 showed how security could be opposed to freedom when Thai people involved with methamphetamine were targeted as threats to security.

Two interviewees explained their ideas about national security in ways that differed from other officials. Khun Rachanikorn from the Office of the Narcotics Control Board expressed her view by saying, "National security has been newly defined in an unconventional way. It no longer means the defense of national security as in the past. It focuses on society and economy."⁸ According to her, society means a community or country where there is a certain border that marks where citizens dwell. Citizens are the most important actors in society and they must not be threatened by illegal drugs such as methamphetamine. Khun Rachanikorn made the point that

⁸ Rachanikorn Sarasiri (Director, Foreign Affairs Bureau, Office of the Narcotics Control Board) interview by the author, 21 July 2006.

activities of people who make up a country's population are very important for development of society. If some people became drug addicts, it would affect that society, because human resources are vital to the production sector and to economic growth. While the focus on people as important actors adds a new dimension to this official's views about national security, the norm is not so different since human rights of people are not mentioned. Moreover, it implies that since addicts are not making good contributions to the national economy, then they are a problem or possible threat; while the norm of treatment and rehabilitation would focus on what the government could do to help these people.

One interviewee who does research at the Institute of Asian Studies mentioned that national security should be viewed differently. She said that national security should be redefined so that the significance of security shifts from defense of the country through military capability to what she calls human security. She does not give a specific definition of human security or the source of such a concept. However, it seemed to mean that people who live in a society should be given greater importance as part of security issues. According to this view, the norm prescribes that the government cares more about the population's well being, health, and standard of living without fear of any threat. She said that human security could be defined as national security by arguing:

National security is a non- traditional security, not identical to what we used to understand. It is security that concerns about security of people as a whole. In the past decade, the number of Thai addicts to methamphetamine has been growing so fast and it affects society and the economy. Socially, methamphetamine abusers definitely receive direct impacts from methamphetamine on their physical and mental well-being, as well as affect the people around them. People are threatened with murder and robbery. Therefore, considering the methamphetamine situation in Thailand, national

security is defined more with the significance of human beings, equivalent to human security.⁹

The interviewees identified the general concept of national security as the state's capability to defend the national territory and remain an independent state. There was also some awareness that security had a broader meaning that involved people in the society and economic stability. When they were asked about the impact of methamphetamine on national security, however, everyone viewed the threat of methamphetamine as having an impact on national security in a newly-defined sense. According to the interviewees, this newly-defined sense involves the increased importance and greater attention given to human beings as part of society.

The effects of methamphetamines on dealers, addicts and abusers in social and economic terms had become more significant than threats to national territory. This differs from the national security that they first defined as national defense. The growing awareness of methamphetamine as a threat to human security led almost all interviewees to be concerned about how the growing number of methamphetamine abusers in Thailand affected society as a whole.

From the ideas of the interviewees, it can be seen that no major war is likely in the foreseeable future between Thailand and other countries, which means that traditional military capability will become less important. However, the social and economic conditions of citizens as human beings are vital for national economic strength and development during a period of peace and must become the main concern of government officials.

⁹ Pornpimon Trichot (Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University), interview by the author, 21 July 2006.

A closer analysis shows that many of these views and values about how people are supposed to contribute to the nation are actually more consistent with the Asian concept of comprehensive security and not the generally accepted definition of human security.¹⁰ Comprehensive security gives more attention to values and norms related to national economic development and social stability, which does not really focus on the security of the human person. Within this understanding, internal security is a matter for legal and police enforcement, with support from the military; while external security is still a military matter, with support from the law and the police. The whole society of the nation might be subject to potential non-military threats, but the military serves as an instrument having a more comprehensive role in addressing such threats.¹¹ In effect, such views of security are still centered on the nation and cannot be considered as very people-centered.

An example of the nation-centered view is one interviewee from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau who said, “With the great number of methamphetamine abusers, Thailand loses valuable human resources. They have no strength to work and thus become unproductive. They fail to build up the country’s economic structure as a whole. Methamphetamine addicts are a cause of crimes considered as one major social problem.”¹² The impact of methamphetamine on the abusers causes problems

¹⁰ See “Proceedings of the ASEAN-UNESCO Concept Workshop on Human Security in South-East Asia” (Paris: UNESCO, 2007), p. 13. Human security is defined by its focus on the individual and the right of every person to freedom from fear, which means being protected; freedom from want, which means being provided for; and freedom to grow, which means being empowered.

¹¹ Teerawat Putamanonda, “The Strategy of Conflict: A Royal Thai Army Perspective,” in *Strength through cooperation: Military Forces in the Asian-Pacific Region*, eds. Frances Omori and Mary A. Sommerville (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1999).

¹² Narongsak Kantawijan (Deputy Commander of Division 1, Narcotics Suppression Bureau, Royal Thai Police), interview by the author, 6 July 2006.

for the abusers themselves and society as a whole. Col. Rangsit from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau added, “A set of social problems are caused by methamphetamine addicts. Methamphetamine hardcore abusers become dealers themselves so they can enjoy price mark-up or methamphetamine pills at lower prices. Abusers become dealers who will then target potential customers.”¹³ By valuing national security in a comprehensive way, it is easier to put the interests of the state or the society above the human dignity of the individual in ways that could lead to drug wars. Certain groups of citizens become possible threats to security and government officials consider this is a problem solved at the national level without involvement from the international or regional levels.

As for national defense, undetected routes used by drug traffickers to bring drugs into Thailand could serve as undetected routes for enemies to enter Thailand for other purposes as well. According to one military officer, “It is difficult for the Thai military to defend our country efficiently if there are routes that people use for illegal activities.”¹⁴ This view shows a concern about multifaceted threats that would require a comprehensive approach to security. However, the official from the Ministry of Defence gave more importance to human beings affected by methamphetamines than the national defense or the economy. Even though the failure to defend or monitor the territory is one of the impacts on national security, security of the population is more important.

A researcher with expertise on Myanmar mentioned the impact of methamphetamine for human security. She argued, “The type of security that received

¹³ Rangsit Piriyanon (Deputy Commander, General Staff Division, Narcotics Suppression Bureau, Royal Thai Police), interview by the author, 6 July 2006.

¹⁴ Thikamporn Chulilung.

the most severe impact from methamphetamine in Thailand or Myanmar is human security.”¹⁵

The emphasis on human security as a value contradicts the government policy against methamphetamines during the war on drugs since 2003. The majority of the officials interviewed expressed concern about human beings affected by methamphetamines more than conventional national security. However, the wars on drugs in 2003 targeted Thailand’s own citizens and claimed success based on the high death toll of both suspects and drug dealers, most of whom were small-time dealers.

The interviewees still viewed part of national security as the defense of the national territory but it has become less important as a norm compared to the well-being of the population in view of the social and economic impact of methamphetamine. When the population is affected, so is the economy. When overall productivity is limited or decreases, the country’s capability to compete with other countries become lower too. The impact of methamphetamine on population causing numerous social problems and affecting national economy can be seen as an endless cycle.

All interviewees responded that the security impact of methamphetamine production and trafficking from outside of Thailand should focus intensively on the security of humans inside the country. They viewed the impact of methamphetamine as being most critical on that part of the Thai population who abuse methamphetamine produced mainly in Myanmar.

¹⁵ Pornpimon Trichot.

2. Ideas about related international cooperation

When answering questions about the impact methamphetamine on international cooperation, in both multilateral and bilateral forms with Myanmar, the interviewees said the line between multilateral and bilateral cooperation was not clear. The interviewees made only brief mention of the multilateral frameworks and arrangements to which Thailand is a signatory, but they did not elaborate on what role Thailand actually plays in multilateral cooperation to control methamphetamine. It would seem that the international principles and norms that support cooperation were not part of the guidelines to their approach to drug control.

One officer from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau briefly mentioned the role of multilateral cooperation when his agency received assistance. He said, “Cambodia, Burma, Lao PDR, Vietnam, China and Thailand have regular meetings on drug suppression, prevention, and law enforcement. These meetings have been organized and funded by the UNDOC.”¹⁶ The officers of the Narcotics Suppression Bureau viewed international cooperation as good overall, because it has been so far free of interference in operation of local officers. It comes in the form of financial support, technical training and assistance but there is no intervention policy. “Funds from international organizations or foreign governments are interference-free. They give money and let us do our job.”¹⁷

Financial assistance from the UNODC is allocated to the relevant unit through government agencies, such as the Thailand International Development Cooperation

¹⁶ Rewatt Catithammanit (Deputy Superintendent, General Staff Division, Narcotics Suppression Bureau, Royal Thai Police), interview by the author, 6 July 2006.

¹⁷ Rangsit Piriyanon.

Agency (TICA) and the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB). TICA is attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and administers international projects involving development cooperation. ONCB is the key agency that will propose projects for funding through TICA. In case other agencies want a fund for their projects, they must be in line with the ONCB's direction. This is a good sign for key Thai agencies in their cooperation.¹⁸ The way they have to propose the projects in harmony brings up the idea of work integration among related government agencies.

However, some points made by the interviewee claimed that the participation of too many government agencies can cause delay and work redundancies. These points will be elaborated in the section about bilateral cooperation where the interviewees gave more insight and detailed information from their work experience and viewpoints.

In the view of officials from selected Thai government agencies, overall multilateral cooperation is good, based on their ideas that they receive regular support from international organizations such as the United Nations and foreign governments such as the United States. These sources of assistance do not interfere with the internal administration or operation of Thai agencies. They only monitor from afar and facilitate Thai officers to do their work.

Bilateral cooperation with Myanmar was also considered good overall. An officer from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau explained why he thought cooperation between Thailand and Myanmar was good. "As for bilateral cooperation with Burma, it has been good so far and the anti-drug policies of the central government will not change significantly because I believe that the Burmese government wants to

¹⁸ Rewatt Catithammanit.

eradicate drugs from minority-controlled areas because the government does not have benefit in those areas,” he said.¹⁹ Officials from all agencies who were interviewed shared this view. All of them agreed that there could be problems of cooperation from the Burmese side in other fields, but in the field of narcotics Thailand and Myanmar maintain close cooperation through intelligence exchanges, exchange of liaison officers, and joint operation.

According to Khun Ratchanikorn from ONCB, “[Bilateral cooperation] is a success. I can say that Myanmar may have conflicts, mistrust, or problems with some agencies on some issues but as for narcotics cooperation and relations with the ONCB, we are real good friends.”²⁰

However, Myanmar is an isolated country sanctioned from countries like the United States. The assistance that Myanmar receives from the United Nations is in the form of assistance programmes or projects such as ethnic development projects or training. International cooperation that goes to Myanmar has to be discreet and delicate. Myanmar will not accept assistance easily as the government sometimes doubts if there is a hidden agenda behind the assistance. Even though all of the officials interviewed considered that bilateral cooperation between Thailand and Myanmar was maintained at a satisfactory level, they saw the need for a more serious approach to what they saw as obstacles to Thai–Burmese cooperation at both the bilateral and multilateral levels. between Thailand and foreign governments under multilateral arrangements and the UN. Each interviewee mentioned at least one obstacle.

¹⁹ Rewatt Catithammanit.

²⁰ Rachanikorn Sarasiri.

C. Views on the Effectiveness of International Cooperation

The interviewees responded to the question about the effectiveness of international cooperation for methamphetamine control in Thailand with views that complemented their responses about arrangements for international cooperation involving Thailand. They gave several reasons why they thought international cooperation was effective. First, their agencies received both financial and technical assistance as part of international cooperation. Second, they have established joint operations with neighboring countries in the form of exchanges of information and intelligence.

During the interview, the officials also identified points that they considered obstacles to the effectiveness of international cooperation. To them, without these obstacles, international cooperation on drugs in Thailand will become better or fully effective.

The obstacles to international cooperation are identified and put into two categories: those considered to be caused by (1) external factors and (2) internal factors.

Interviewees identified most obstacles as external factors, which they viewed as difficult to predict and subject to political changes or national policy changes of each country on drugs. The first obstacles identified by officers from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau, whose job is to make sure people abide by the laws, is differences in the methamphetamine-related laws of each country. “The different laws in each country is one thing. For instance, we can intercept phone lines, while this act

has not yet legalized in some countries. We can ask for permission to extradite drug traffickers for investigation in Thailand, but many countries will not allow that.”²¹

Inconsistent conditions or abrupt changes in Burmese politics is another obstacle. According to an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Leadership changes, for example, the change from General Khin Nyunt, who was keen on narcotic suppression, to the current leader caused a slowdown in narcotic cooperation.”²² According to Khun Sukhum from ONCB, “If there is any (obstacle to international cooperation), it should be internal politics; not only in Myanmar but in assistance providers like the United States. When the United States sanctioned Myanmar due to human rights violations, the Department of State cut every type of assistance. However, the officers of the Drug Enforcement Agency can still go inside Burma to conduct their anti-drug operations.”²³

An interviewee from Thailand’s National Security Council considered lack of trust and sincerity among countries concerned as an obstacle. The interviewee explained further, “Sincerity in cooperating is needed prior to any exchange of information or criminals. I think no more than 40 percent of information exchange has so far led to a closed case. Overall cooperation in the Mekong subregion is good, especially between Thailand and China, but some countries, cannot be fully cooperative because of unsolved internal problems. We want the world to be in peace and free from illicit drugs, but the problem is not understood by everyone. Countries

²¹ Rangsit Piriyanon.

²² Kallayana Vipattipumiprakes (Counsellor, Division 1, Department of East Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs), interview by the author, 28 July 2006.

²³ Sukhum Opasniputh (Director of Narcotics Law Enforcement Bureau, Office of the Narcotics control Board), interview by the author, 20 July 2006.

in this region see the problem as one thing while other countries elsewhere see it as another thing.”²⁴

The last external obstacle that affects international cooperation, especially bilateral cooperation, involving Myanmar, which is a non-democratic regime. It is difficult to provide help from outside Myanmar to make people have a good life quality or abandon producing and trafficking methamphetamine since Myanmar is ruled by a military junta that is struggling with ethnic insurgencies,. According to Khun Pornpimon, “As long as Myanmar remains non-democratic, human security problems will not be addressed as a root cause.”²⁵

The internal obstacles identified by some interviewees were corruption of officers and work redundancies of the agencies concerned. It is difficult to believe that millions of methamphetamine pills have entered Thailand through territory it has with Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. The main obstacle that should be tackled first is corruption of officials concerned. It should not be implied that every concerned official is corrupt but there are some as a matter of fact, especially in the provinces outside of Bangkok where authorities’ monitoring and check are not as intense.

It is not easy to receive support for drug control activities from international organizations such as the United Nations. According to an officer from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau, “We need to know someone in the ONCB, TICA, or the Narcotics Affairs Section in the United States Embassy or have some kind of connection with them so we can make use of the money. For instance, NSB can only incorporate its project into the project proposals that ONCB proposes to TICA., the

²⁴ Interview with National Security Council of Thailand officer, 20 July 2006.

²⁵ Pornpimon Trichot.

ONCB should act as a fund manager and clearly allocate those parts to NSB that involve suppression.”²⁶

Despite some identified obstacles, all of the interviewees viewed international cooperation as effective. They observed that multilateral cooperation on drugs in Thailand was funded mostly from the UNODC and foreign governments, of which the United States provided the largest share of assistance. Some constraints or limitations involved with multilateral arrangements of international cooperation were identified, such as the formality and protocol, which caused arrangements or agreements to move slowly. However, as long as there was forward movement, no matter how slow, most interviewees believed that those arrangements were effective.

They had similar views about bilateral cooperation in controlling methamphetamine based on cooperation with Myanmar. The interviewees claimed bilateral cooperation on drugs between Thailand and Myanmar was effective when compared to other fields of cooperation involving economics, politics, border disputes, displaced persons and ethnic minorities who entered Thailand from Myanmar. Despite the claim that international cooperation was effective, the interviewees identified a number of obstacles that hindered improvement in international cooperation on drug control.

Some officials noted in the interviews that it was not only a question of being effective or ineffective, but it was also the issue of whether they could work better and faster without financial aid in cooperation with international donors. According to an officer from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau, “Budget is not a problem. Rather, the

²⁶ Narongsak Kantawijan (Deputy Commander of Division 1, Narcotics Suppression Bureau, Royal Thai Police), interview by the author, 6 July 2006.

problem is whether officers are serious enough about drug suppression. They concentrate on international meetings and seminars. Operations are not fully supported and extended. The methamphetamine control strategy is not yet integrated.”²⁷ In his view, the cooperative assistance that the Narcotics Suppression Bureau wants most from international donors is not financial assistance. Their greatest need is to do their jobs more independently, without strong influence from particular donors. “The United States is quite okay as they will share all information they have with us if they want to extradite someone to the US. They will do anything necessary to meet that goal.”²⁸

D. Analysis of Recommendations about Solutions

One focus of the interviews was on the officials’ views and recommendations about solving Thailand’s methamphetamine problem, since the country was a destination for methamphetamine trafficked from Myanmar. Questions about their recommendations gave attention to ways of solving the problem domestically, as well as ways that would include international and regional dimensions of the drug threat.

The majority of the interviewees recommended better ways to address the methamphetamine problem as a threat to Thailand’s national security. The first set of recommendations are related to the international aspects, which are then analyzed in order to understand the norms and values of the interviewees as well as how their

²⁷ Rewatt Catithammanit.

²⁸ Ibid.

work activities deal with the methamphetamine problem in terms of supply, trafficking and drug use.

Two officers from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau recognized the importance of problems on the supply side, including production and trafficking from Myanmar. In their view, the problem should be dealt with at the sources of supply in the ethnic-controlled areas in Myanmar. However, they also considered that dealing with the source of supply or trafficking in Myanmar represented factors beyond their control since related Thai government agencies could not go inside Myanmar or negotiate with ethnic minorities, such as the UWSA, to stop producing and trafficking methamphetamine into Thailand. The use of military force was not possible, because the Burmese government would not allow Thai troops on their soil, regardless of other Thai agencies claiming close relations with their Burmese counterparts.²⁹ As one officer said, “An ideal solution should begin with the ethnic groups that produce methamphetamine in Myanmar before the pills enter Thailand. If going into Myanmar and using military force is not possible, the best way to deal with the problem inside the country is through suppression and prevention”³⁰

This reflects the inward-looking norm as a guide for action for the concerned officers. They admitted that the best way to deal with the problem should cover production, trafficking, and consumption as methamphetamine is a transnational issue. However, they did not take action on production and trafficking since it occurred mostly in Burmese territory, where areas controlled by ethnic groups producing methamphetamine were inaccessible. In view of the strong value placed on

²⁹ Narongsak Kantawijan.

³⁰ Ibid.

national sovereignty by both Myanmar and Thailand, it would be impossible for Myanmar to let Thai military forces help Myanmar control methamphetamine production and trafficking. Therefore, their proposed solution is suppressing and enforcing the law against drug dealing and helping potential users.

One interviewee from the Narcotics Suppression Bureau also suggested a way to solve the problem of methamphetamine trafficking by stopping supplies from entering Thai territory at the border. Since the government in Myanmar made pledges at annual seminars to do its best to counter drugs domestically, his recommendation was to stop traffickers who deliver methamphetamine shipments right at the border before they enter Thailand. He said, “As it is perceived that most methamphetamine was not produced in Thailand, the best solution could be the interception of the trafficking of methamphetamine right at the border.”³¹ This official’s view reflects the inward looking approach, but also shows the idea of preventing methamphetamine produced elsewhere from entering the country, thus avoiding its impact on national security.

This official proposed that it might be necessary to close border checkpoints at those times when concerned officials received tips about large shipments coming from Myanmar. He explained, “Some border checkpoints have been closed because we knew for sure that a large shipment of methamphetamine would be trafficked during a certain period, but we did not know how the Burmese couriers would deliver their shipment. Closing the border for safety reasons is thus recommended.”³² However, such an approach would block legal trade activities and cause economic

³¹ Rewatt Catithammanit.

³² Ibid.

losses. Only some businesspeople face loss but if reckless authorities let a methamphetamine shipment in disguise of goods and commodities into Thailand, it will cause many more economic and social impacts to the country. It also has an impact on national security because a threat can make way through the border into Thailand.³³

Interviewees from the ONCB suggested an inward approach to solve the methamphetamine problem by minimizing abusers and educating everyone about the danger of narcotics drugs, especially methamphetamine. One officer viewed tackling the problem from inside the country as the best solution, because there could be no guarantee that ethnic groups in Myanmar would stop producing methamphetamine and turn to legal alternative. He said “I do not believe that the ethnic groups will completely stop this illegal activity because inside each ethnic group, there are factions that do not have any other alternative, except to manufacture narcotics. Profits from drugs are much easier and more lucrative compared to agricultural production on vegetable or fruit plantations, for instance.”³⁴ Thai officials are not confident about the capabilities of the Burmese government and ethnic groups to effectively control methamphetamine and stop its manufacture.³⁵

While political matters between ethnic groups and the Burmese government were settled, it did not guarantee the end of methamphetamine manufacture, as demonstrated by the case of the United Wa State Army (UWSA). The UWSA had a ceasefire deal with the Burmese government in exchange for allowing them to

³³ Rewatt Catithammanit.

³⁴ Chotipun Chulapetch (Law Enforcement Officer, Narcotics Law Enforcement Bureau, Office of the Narcotics Control Board), interview by the author, 20 July 2006.

³⁵ Ibid.

produce narcotics. The ceasefire seemed to be nothing but a go-ahead for the UWSA to produce illicit drugs as long as they did not fight with the government.

Organizations that promote international cooperation on methamphetamine, as well as foreign governments, should pressure the Burmese government to do more to cut methamphetamine manufacture inside Myanmar.³⁶ The Burmese government pledged to do more in countering narcotics drugs in Myanmar, but if they did more, production and trafficking of methamphetamine should be under control. The government should be able to control or has full authority to get in the ethnic-controlled areas or the conflicting areas to enforce laws or suppress ethnic groups who were still going on producing methamphetamine.

The official from the National Security Council of Thailand said during the interview, “The problem should be viewed as global as it is now a transnational problem. It is possible for a drug shipment to be manufactured in Burma, trafficked into Thailand through routes from Lao PDR, and probably operated by a drug mafia in Taiwan.” His idea about the need of collective cooperation of more states reflects the point that in his view existing international cooperation seemed insufficient or incapable of dealing with the security threat in Thailand. The official added that methamphetamine trafficking was not always simply about drug trade. It could also concern other issues such as ethnic conflicts, weapons trade, and the fight for self identity.³⁷ The point was raised because the methamphetamine problem should be seen to link other transnational crimes. It could be a source of fund for non-ceasefire ethnic minorities to fight with the Burmese central government. The norms of the

³⁶ Interview with National Security Council of Thailand officer, 20 July 2006.

³⁷ Ibid.

officer at the Thailand National Security Council show that with the ongoing conflict between the Burmese government and ethnic groups and the unsolved political clouts among ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups, consolidated international cooperation would serve as a mechanism to push the Burmese government to do more about narcotics drugs as existing international organizations and related agreements did not seem to be enough.

E. Concluding Points

The analysis based on a light constructivist perspective revealed several distinctive patterns in the views of selected government officials who were interviewed for the thesis research. They were asked questions designed to show their views and interpretations about the impact of methamphetamine from Myanmar on Thai national security and international cooperation on drug issues.

The interviewees with a responsibility to enforce drug-related laws and keep domestic peace in Thailand viewed national security in terms that clearly separated internal threats from external threats. Their values, norms, and the actions within their governmental agencies showed that they viewed the methamphetamine problem as a national security threat which could be dealt with domestically. Based on prevailing views at the international level, as well as within ASEAN, this thinking contradicts the view that the drug problem is by nature a transnational issue involving cross-border crime and complex linkages worldwide. At the global level, the threat of methamphetamine trafficking cuts across geographical, political and economic

spheres so that from an international relations perspective there are multi-faceted aspects that affect a country like Thailand.

The tendency to be inward-looking in their views meant that the interviewees' perceptions were not in line with the widely shared view in the global community as reflected in international agreements and conventions to which Thailand is also a signatory. The Thai government has, in fact, accepted that the drug problem involves many countries and is too complicated for any country to solve on its own.

However, since international conventions support the value of allowing each country to use its authority to implement its own measures tailored to address the drug problem according to variation in each country, Thai officials focused on methamphetamine distribution and the demand side involving drug abuse by Thai people, rather than how they could be guided by international agreements.

The discussion showed that the recent anti-drug policy of the Thaksin government had downplayed the importance of human beings when compared to identifying the threat to conventional national security. Before 2003, drug abusers in Thailand were considered as patients who needed treatment from the health care system and public awareness would encourage drug prevention and protect Thai citizens in terms of their contribution to the development of the nation as a whole.

The interviewees' ideas were influenced by the government's War on Drugs in early 2003. The War on Drugs showed how the government and its agencies treated security as more important than the well-being of the people. The authorities were not concerned about the well-being and freedom of the people. In effect, their actions against methamphetamine made it clear that the Thai people themselves were viewed as a threat to national security. The threat was dealt with by using force and violence

and extra-judicial killings. Most interviewees showed that their understanding about national security did not take all aspects of the drug issue into account.

The analysis of the views of concerned officials about the War on Drugs indicated that the interviewed officials were most concerned about the country's economic development and social stability, not the security of human beings in society. This is in line with the Asian concept of security under which people are supposed to contribute to the nation's development. The nation is given more attention than the population who comprise the country.

The discussion also showed that international cooperation on drugs was not a very significant part of the interviewed officials' guidelines in their work or their reactions to the drug problem. They did not seem to have enough information about international cooperation, although they were aware that their agencies were provided with funding from foreign donors in order to promote international cooperation.

The discussion of the interviewees' responses showed how the officials took an inward-looking view of international cooperation. Although international cooperation on drugs was not part of their working guidelines, they all agreed that both multilateral and bilateral cooperation were necessary in order to avoid looking at the drug problem only from a domestic viewpoint. However, as long as their work focused on domestic distribution and consumption continued, and there was no interference from foreign donors, they considered international cooperation effective.

Analysis of their recommendations and related ideas about how to effectively handle the methamphetamine problem in Thailand revealed the inward-looking perspective of the interviewed Thai officials. Their recommendations were focused mainly on domestic suppression, law enforcement, and education. The high value that

Myanmar placed on its sovereignty was a major barrier to any forceful intervention into methamphetamine-producing locations in areas controlled by armed ethnic groups. The impossibility of disrupting production and trafficking from Myanmar meant that methamphetamine supplies would continue to be available in Thailand.