

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The widespread production, trafficking and consumption of methamphetamine in Southeast Asia since the mid-1990s showed how this illegal drug has become an international issue. It became identified as a threat to the national security of Thailand, which was one of the largest Southeast Asian markets for methamphetamine consumption as a result of production in Myanmar.

When considering the multidimensional issues involved, the purpose of this thesis was 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. An international relations perspective made it possible to analyze the rise and functioning of an integrated system of illicit drug production, distribution, and consumption in mainland Southeast Asia and see how it threatens the security of Thailand. At the same time, an international relations perspective made it possible to analyze the Thai solutions and responses along the transnational, regional and national dimensions.

Three research questions were raised in order to understand and analyze the issues involved with the threat of illicit drugs on Thai security. The first question focused on the impact of the patterns and dynamics of methamphetamine trafficking from Myanmar on Thailand's national security. The second research question considered the impact of international, regional and bilateral cooperation related to drugs on Thai security. The third research question involved analysis of the views of

Thai government officials about the impact of methamphetamine on Thailand's national security and related international cooperation.

Three approaches to the concept of security and related threats to security were applied to guide the analysis and answer the research questions. As noted by Kolodziej (see Chapter 1), the three approaches could be used together in order to analyze the security issues from several compatible perspectives.

The analysis for answering the first research question used the approach of classical realism, which focuses on aspects of security involving material power and coercive threat. This approach considers the way in which a state identifies and deals with threats through the use of military or threat of force. In order to understand and analyze the impact of methamphetamine trafficking on Thailand's security, it was found that the use of force or threat of force was limited even when an external threat such as methamphetamine trafficking was identified as a threat. At one point, widespread drug trafficking from Myanmar through the Thai border led the Thai army to the point of almost resolving the problem through use of force. However, the civilian government saw the priority of the drug threat differently and force was not used. Moreover, drug trafficking was in the category of non-traditional security threats and this affected the nature of the response in a part of Thailand where control of the border was difficult.

Liberal institutionalism, based on conditions that created continued incentives to cooperate is a second approach to security, which could lead to views of mutual interdependence and creation of institutions for cooperation. The analysis for answering the second research question covered the impact that cooperation on illicit drugs had for Thailand at international, regional and bilateral levels. The analysis

focused on how shared values, norms and actions provided the rationale and incentives aimed at countering the drug problem as a transnational crime affecting security and stability throughout the world and in Southeast Asia.

In order to answer the third research question, the focus was on the ideas of selected officials from key Thai agencies about how they viewed the threat to Thai security from methamphetamine and whether related international, regional or bilateral cooperation provided effective responses to the threat. Based on interviews, their norms and values were analyzed using a light constructivist approach. Light constructivism argues that non-material and ideational elements can reconstitute states and transform identities and interests of states, as well as other actors, since these are not accepted as given and must be studied. The affect of norms and values of selected governments officials responsible for addressing drug problems were considered in terms of their duties and the roles of various government agencies.

In analyzing how the patterns and dynamics of illicit drug trafficking became a threat to Thai national security, it was found that ATS, especially methamphetamines had the fastest growth in Asia, particularly South-East Asia. Thailand became the major consuming country of methamphetamines from the mid-1990s until a market crackdown by Thai authorities in the form of a Drug War in 2003.

The role of international agreements to contain the drug problem was based on shared responsibility at the international, regional, and national levels meaning that the government took the lead for defining the scope of responsibility and the nature of cooperative activities.

Domestically, the economic crisis in 1997 contributed to the increased number of methamphetamine users causing both social and economic problems in

Thailand. Several social concerns were highlighted as part of Thailand's problem with methamphetamines: a fast growing market based on pyramid selling; growing numbers of prisoners; mass media attention to the violence and dangers of methamphetamines; and growing corruption of government authorities. Many government officials considered that social approaches to solutions were not working even as the public considered drugs as the worst social problem in Thailand. Border control efforts between Thailand and Myanmar as well as public relations campaigns did not have much effect.

According to the analysis, most aspects of Thailand's methamphetamine problem were considered as domestic matters to be handled by the public health authorities and the judicial system based on the norms of prevention first and suppression second. These norms underwent adjustment as the drug epidemic became more widespread and government leaders sought other ways to solve the growing drug problem.

As a security issue for Thailand, the principle of national sovereignty in addressing the threat from drugs has prevailed in various forms. National efforts and responses were considered as the acceptable approach at the international, regional and national levels. The analysis showed that this principle could be taken to an extreme as in the case of Thailand's 2003 War on Drugs. Further analysis and discussion in this chapter showed that a drug war did not balance the safety, well-being and health of Thai citizens against the state-sponsored violence that took place in the name of governmental responsibility. The government tended to look inward and specifically identify certain groups of Thai people as a threat to national security.

The War on Drugs generated violence and human rights violations that undermined government statements about success in solving the drug problem within Thailand.

It was argued that even as the understanding and responses of the Thai government to the drug problem had evolved since the mid-1990s, the independent, unilateral capabilities of the nation to protect its security was given priority.

In Chapter 3, the analysis and discussion considered the institutionalization of cooperation at the international, regional and bilateral levels. The values, norms and activities that comprised cooperation covered drug control, law enforcement, and addressing the threat of transnational organized crime involving methamphetamines. This provided the context for looking at the impact on Thailand's security and the effectiveness of cooperative efforts to address the threat.

The evolution of regional cooperation and the perception of methamphetamines as a non-traditional security threat showed that consensus has been easily formed around the words that express shared values and norms. However, strengthening capacities at the national level has been the dominant value, which means that actions are limited and not very widely shared. Within ASEAN as the main regional institution, lack of funds has meant that even minimal cooperative action has faced difficulty.

The scope of ACCORD was seen as much wider compared to ASEAN, but most of the action remained at the national level. In this context, Thailand accepted the prevailing values and norms, which meant that regional institutions could not be expected to give much help beyond words in the face of the drug threat to Thai security.

Cooperation at the bilateral level between Thailand and Myanmar was found to be quite limited on matters of production and trafficking of methamphetamines. The two countries had few shared values and norms, which meant there was high potential for tension, mistrust and conflict on drug matters. Relations between the two countries were found to rely on personal and business connections at the top leadership level with strong emphasis on non-interference in each country's domestic affairs. The analysis showed that cooperation on drug issues involved only a few cross-border interactions, which included some exchange of information and technical training and some joint police action in recent years. One major constraint to any cooperative solution was the fact that armed ethnic groups who traffic drugs are not under the control of any government. As a result, there has been no agreement between Thailand and Myanmar or action to control production, because no one had power to stop trafficking. The hope of "friendship" between the two countries had no effect on reducing security threat from methamphetamines.

The answers to the research question covered in Chapter 4 aimed at identifying the norms and values that provided the basis of ideas and views of Thai government officials working on drug issues. The analysis considered their viewpoints concerning the definition of national security and the impact of methamphetamine trafficking on Thailand's security. The interviewees were asked to identify 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 were also linked to their views about their duties and the role of the various government agencies.

The analysis of their norms and values showed that Thai officials clearly separated the security threat as internal and external. They viewed the methamphetamine problem as a threat to national security which could be dealt with internally by domestic policies and actions. Such inward-looking views were not compatible with international conventions emphasizing the transnational dimension of solutions to control the spread of illicit drugs. However, the conventions allowed each country authority to implement its own measures tailored to contain the drug problem, which made it logical for Thai officials to focus on methamphetamine distribution and abuse by Thai people. As a consequence, nothing was done about production and trafficking of the illegal drug from Myanmar.

The anti-drug policy of the Thaksin government raised the issue of the importance of human beings when weighed against national security concerns. The War on Drugs in early 2003, showed how the state's ideas about the security threat of amphetamines was more important than the human rights of the people. The government's concern about economic development and social stability was in line with the Asian concept of comprehensive security, which valued people according to what they contribute to the nation.

It was also found in Chapter 4 that international cooperation on drugs was not part of Thai officials' work guidelines, which reflected emphasis on inward-looking approaches rather than international cooperation. The analysis showed that as long as their work focused on domestic distribution and consumption without interference from international donors, they seemed to consider international cooperation as effective.

Their ideas about recommendations for solutions were based mainly on domestic suppression, law enforcement, and education. The high value given to sovereignty by Myanmar was considered as a major barrier to any intervention against methamphetamine-producing locations in ethnic-controlled areas in Myanmar.

Several points that were significant findings derived from data and information collection and analysis through an international relations perspective about methamphetamine as a threat to Thai security are worth emphasizing. First, the methamphetamine problem was much more complicated than other transnational crimes as methamphetamine trafficking in Southeast Asia could be linked to issues such as ethnic armed conflicts, weapons trade, ethnic self-determination, border conflicts, and sovereignty.

Second, the inward-looking view of Thai officials involved an idea about national security that seemed to be a major obstacle to effective control of methamphetamines. Methamphetamine trafficking was widely recognized as a transnational problem, due to its complications and the various dimensions affecting a number of countries. However, the Thai government's policy on drug control and foreign policy toward Myanmar as a neighboring country was narrow and not completely relevant to the nature of the drug trade. It was likely that the government could have benefited from more help from the international community, because a nation-centered policy did not cover important aspects of the problem. Instead, the narrow drug-related policy focused on how concerned officials could deal with domestic distribution and consumption.

Third, regional cooperation frameworks such as ASEAN and ACCORD had several limitations in terms of linking values and norms to cooperative actions.

ASEAN valued the long-term goals in Vision 2015 as an effort to eradicate drugs in Southeast Asia. This was in line with numerous declarations that reflected shared recognition of the drug threat, but was limited in terms of cooperative actions. Any substantive action was limited due to lack of funding and constrained by the ASEAN value giving priority to national sovereignty. The ASEAN principle of non-interference helps explain the inward-looking view of Thai officials in handling drug issues. Both Thailand and Myanmar strongly valued sovereignty and the protracted conflict between Myanmar's military government and ethnic groups meant that disrupting production and trafficking of methamphetamine was impossible. ACCORD was set up to address drug problems of ASEAN member countries and China, with a focus on ATS. However, cooperative activities required funding contributions rather than simply providing assistance to members.

The overall analysis from an international relations perspective found that it was difficult for Thailand to make substantive use of the values and norms supporting various forms of cooperation to reduce or eliminate the threat of methamphetamine.