

Peace Warriors: Thoughts and Experiences of Thai Military Leaders (1932-1973)

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Abstract

This study focuses on the thoughts and experiences of Thai military leaders who are classed as 'Peace warriors' in modern Thai history. It argues that the seed of non-violence has gradually filtered into the Thai military culture for a long time and that there were military leaders in the past, who promoted the use of democratic rules and Parliament to effect political change. These military leaders were 'Peace warriors' or 'Pro-peace' serving officers. Although they played many important roles during the first 20 years of the Thai democratic system, their story is always overshadowed by the military's authoritarianism that led to the resolution of conflicts through the use of force.

This research has been culled from the prosopography (collective biography) that traced the lives and political roles of 120 military leaders between 1932 and 1952, dividing them into two camps – peace and non-peace warriors. The study cites General Phya Phahon Phonphayuhasena as the role model of the peace/pro-peace faction and Field Marshal Po. (Plaek) Phibunsongkhram as the non-peace/forceful faction. Peace military leaders in the past respected constitutional rules and used the parliamentary system to deal with political conflicts. Thus, an important principle of the peace military is its "politically led strategy", which later appears in the Prime Minister's Order 66/23 of 1980, which granted amnesty to the communist insurgents and provided the reconciliation policy for the conflict in the South. It seems that society has, so far had little space to discuss the story of the peace military, and thus historians need to elaborate more about these military leaders, who advocate peaceful solutions rather than forceful ones.

Keywords: Peace Warriors, Thai Military Leaders, Thai Modern Politics

1. Introduction: The Thai Military's Missing Narrative

Part of the origin of this research came from the researcher's long-held observation regarding Thai political history. It is strange but true that among the Thai academics in present-day society tend to be fixated on military leaders who used force, despite the fact that Thai society in general have embraced and supported the 'Peace warriors' who eschew violent methods due to the fact that supporting these actors may be more conducive for

democratic development and use of non-violence. Furthermore, the peace military leaders have had important roles in parallel with their non-peace counterparts since the formation of the modern armed forces and the establishment of the democratic system.

In Thai society, it may appear that the issue of the military and non-violence may be incompatible. However, Thai military leaders have a certain non-violent concept, rejecting violence, when it comes to confronting local, national, or international issues. Indeed, there are plenty of examples in Thai history to

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demonstrate this point, from ancient to modern times. The role of Thai military leaders in this vein are quite apparent and exert considerable influence in the democratic age. For example, these military leaders opposed the violent suppression of the Boworadet rebels in 1933 and did not participate in the 1947 coup and acted as a peaceful opposition to the post-1947 government.

Ever since the establishment of the democratic regime following the 1932 Revolution, the military leadership under Colonel (later General) Phya Phahon Phonphayuhasena, as head of the People's Party and Prime Minister from 1933 to 1938, had an important role in creating and developing the democratic regime, including the use of non-violent measures in resolving political conflicts. These initiatives included political reconciliation, floating the proposal to allow politics to lead the military as state policy, and acting in accordance with the mechanisms and framework of the legislature under the constitution. These ideas are reflected in important policy statements from 1934 onwards, including one which stated that: "The Royal Thai Government aims to encourage all Siamese, including the monarchy, the Sangha, the Parliament, the Government, as well as the general populace, to come together and reconcile under the Constitution". (Report of the Parliamentary Meetings, 1934, p. 1756)

Thus, why is the understanding of this aspect of the military's role and influence so limited in Thai society? The main obstacle is not the lack of historical information or research regarding the military's role in politics, but the lack of a new research perspective, especially among researchers that remain trapped in the same, old paradigms.

Why are these old paradigms so powerful? It is not for a lack of new ideas, but a certain attachment to old ideas and theories that are not so difficult to understand, especially if these theories have a degree of universality within and without

Thai society. Indeed, in most societies, military studies and non-violence seems to be an unnatural pairing since our knowledge, ideas, and understanding is more used to modern concepts, interpreted through historical records or analyses in the state-national framework. It cannot be denied that this body of knowledge is often based on the assumption of the military, which exerted such a great influence, as an actor that has access to force, weaponry, and violence. (See Boulding, 2000)

Thus, instead of repeating this conceptual frame of thought, the researcher sees that building a new body of knowledge to change the military perspective is an essential action in present-day Thai society. To begin with, the old body of knowledge has to be considered to answer the question as to why and how we should study the peace Thai military leaders, which is an unexpected or even unacceptable issue among Thai society due to the fixation with a stereotype. This stereotype casts the military as a monolithic authoritarian and violent organisation.

This research does not reject the stereotype completely; that is, it does not deny the existence of the authoritarian strain of military leaders or the use of violence by the military in the past. However, it begins from a new perspective and proposal that this is not representative of the entire Thai military organisation. In reality, the Thai military never lacked the non-violent military leaders, but the story of this strain of military leaders or 'Peace Warriors' have not really been covered in historical research. Most importantly, the role and influence of these actors have often been eclipsed by their non-peace counterparts.

For this reason, it should not be surprising that non-violence has never been formally incorporated into state policy when it comes to resolving various conflicts in Thai society until during the period of Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988). It was during General Prem's premiership that non-violence entered the

heart of national strategy, as reflected in the issuing of the Order of the Office of the Prime Minister, No. 66/23.

Although individual Thai military leaders during the time of Order 66/23, such as General Prem Tinsulanonda have little to no continuity with the 1932 generation of military leaders, but their main ideas were arguably not so different from those of the People's Party, especially in their acceptance of and adherence to democratic and non-violent principles, as demonstrated in their policies. These modern policies, which included the idea of allowing politics to lead the military, political reconciliation, and using political measures to solve political issues, had their antecedents in the ministry of Phya Phahon Phonphayhasena (1933-1938).

When viewed from this perspective, it is undeniable that non-violent military leaders had a role and influence in the government of Phya Phahon Phonphayhasena. This period should be considered to be a key period in the formation of the first generation of Thai military 'Peace Warriors' in the democratic age, which provided a template for subsequent generations of Thai military leaders, be it in the adaptation of non-violence for use in national policy and its use to resolve issues at various levels. Thus, non-violence is a significant strand of thought among the Thai military and politics.

Given the present context, the importance of non-violence is arguably undeniable and there are few if no military leaders who are unaware of the process of using non-violent methods to resolve issues. However, the initial problem is how can Thais explain, learn, or understand this phenomenon, especially the connection between the military and non-violence in Thai society, if we lack information regarding the origins of Thai 'Peace Warriors'.

Undoubtedly, if we are to understand the origins of the military leaders in regard to the issue of non-

violence and political solutions for political conflicts, the best way is to study their background, especially the ideas and experiences of the first generation of peace warriors who played a role and exerted direct influence on Thai political history.

Thus, if we wish to research this missing part of the Thai military so as to develop our understanding of the military and the relevant issues, we must begin from a new perspective concerning to the military through the use of an appropriate methodology. This process will then allow us to understand the collective thought processes of the military and distinguish the characteristics of figures in the peace warriors and non-peace factions.

2. Methodology: Prosopography

In order to achieve its objectives, this research has chosen a methodology that has not been applied to the academic study of the Thai military, that is Prosopography (Collective Biography). This methodology involves a unique combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods and emphasizes linkages between socio-economic conditions, as well as the individual and group's collective ideas, experience, and culture as important variables in determining their behavior and relationship with the political and social context. (See Stone, 1971, pp. 69-85; Ngamcachonkulkid, 2005, chapter 1)

Prosopography has been used in this research to study the background of Thai military leaders in the Royal Thai Army, Navy, and Air Force. The methodology used here integrates the classical method of Sir Lewis Namier, a British historian, (See Namier, 1961 and 1963) and the modern method demonstrated by academics such as Timothy Tackett, an expert in French history during the Revolution. (See Tackett, 1996) The study of the background, ideas, and political behavior of 120 'Peace Warriors' and non-peace military leaders include 60 'Peace Warriors' and 60 non-peace leaders. The study attempted to find

basic variables that may explain why some leaders turned towards non-violence, while others went the opposite path. In other words, this analysis will attempt to find a link between the acceptance or lack thereof of non-violence and democracy to the socio-economic backgrounds of the Thai military leaders.

With regard to the military leaders within the 'Peace Warrior' camp, this research has focused on 60 important leaders, divided into 4 sub-categories. The Royal Thai Army faction was divided into 2 groups: those under General Phya Phahon Phonphayuhasena and members of the senior military leaders affiliated with the People's Party and those under Lieutenant-General Luang Sinardyotharuk and the younger staff officers associated with the Seri Thai Movement. The Royal Thai Navy is also divided into 2 groups: the senior officers under Vice-Admiral Phya Rajawangsan and the young officers affiliated with the People's Party under Admiral Sinthu Kamolnawin (Luang Sinthusonggramchai).

The non-peace leaders also number 60, with 3 sub-groups: those under Field Marshal Po. (Plaek) Phibunsongkhram and the young officers affiliated with the People's Party and the 1947 coup group. This latter group is also divided between the Field Marshal Phin Choonhavan and Police General Phao Sriyanond versus the group led by Field Marshals Sarit Thanarat and Thanom Kittikachorn. The latter group consists of young officers that will have a continuous role up to the 14 October 1973 incident.

3. Initial Analysis of the Prosopography of Thai Military Leaders

It should be emphasised from the start that this initial analysis can only address the basic differences between the groups. How these differences are related to the tendency towards peace and violence will have to be considered in the contemporary socio-political context. The

result of this analysis cannot be applied to other groups of officers operating in a different context. For example, the results of the analysis of the first generation of military leaders cannot be applied wholesale to later generations, such as the present generation (for example, General Prayuth Chan-o-cha and the National Council for Peace and Order), since the variables and their relations to other factors in society will be different from those present in the time of the first generation.

On a group basis, it can be broadly summarised that the Thai military leader most prone to be a member, if not the core, of the first generation of 'Peace Warriors' generally came from a good or average family background and were brought up in a social environment with some degree of diversity, with a wide range of domestic and international experiences. It may be that a good upbringing and experience may allow for a broader perspective and learning experiences in peaceful conflict management.

Furthermore, the upbringing in a large or ethnically diverse society allows the military leaders in this group to become familiar and establish relations with various other groups in society, especially those with different ideas, beliefs, religions, and customs. Another important factor is a foreign education, which broadens the horizons and familiarises them with the gamut of human behaviour. Moreover, the experience of living abroad, especially in Europe, even for a short time, allowed this group of officers to have a broader perspective in terms of conflict management.

Thus, this socio-economic background may not only point to the trend where 'Peace Warriors' learnt from early experience to accept differences and diversity, but also peaceful means of conflict resolution. These concepts are essential to living amongst different communities in an equitable manner, where everyone in the community has an equal share in creating the collective future. Thus,

taken together (rather than individually) this background had a direct and indirect influence that familiarized these officers with the idea of diversity, compromise, and peaceful resolutions to conflicts.

In addition, there is another interesting variable that is apparent when the 'Peace Warriors' are considered as a group. The members of this group also display a large degree of diversity, which may have further acclimatized them to exchanges, debates, and the establishment of balance within the group and the military as a whole. Thus, by nature, they were used to accepting differences, the idea of unity on the basis of plurality, and dealing with conflicts that may arise in a peaceful manner. It can be seen that the socio-economic background and the upbringing of these officers, in general, did not build a "wall" that divided them from the rest of society. (For more details on the characteristic of this wall, see Satha-Anand, 1996, pp. 44-45.)

On the other hand, when considering the status of the non-peace leaders, it was found that the socio-economic status of this group was more monolithic than those among the 'Peace Warriors'. Most non-peace leaders hailed from poor and lower middle-class families and grew up in a closed environment, often in small rural, provincial communities. These communities were homogeneously Thai. Most importantly, with the notable exception of Field Marshal Po. (Plaek) Phibunsongkhram, none of them had any significant foreign educational experiences. Thus, the non-peace leaders tended to have been moulded by an environmental "wall" that divided them from the rest of society, especially when compared to the 'Peace Warriors'.

The aforementioned environmental factors had direct and indirect influence on the non-peace leaders' tendency to use violence as the solution to challenges to conflicts. Their upbringing in poor families that had to strive for success, sometimes through violence, may lead to a more

pessimistic view of the world. At the same time, growing up in a small, homogenous community meant a smaller circle of acquaintances and relationships. What relationships they had through schooling, marriage, trading or kinship networks did not really expose them to diversity and the need for compromise when it came to conflict resolution. Their lack of foreign educational experiences ensured that they were still stuck in the narrow world of their childhood. These factors combined to make them view situations purely from their own perspective or ego, where they are the centre (centration) of the world.

This ego-centrism has a close link with aggression, where some academics have concluded that "ego-centrism in youths and adults is an important variable in approving violence and violent behaviour". (See Satha-Anand, 1996, p.44; Stagner, 1977, p. 25) Therefore, the background and upbringing of the non-peace leaders exerted a significant influence on them and once they had the power and weaponry at their disposal, they tended more towards violent solutions when encountering conflicts with others.

A further interesting variable emerges when considering the non-peace leaders as a group. The members of this group display a great degree of unity within the group and the military, resulting in a lack of familiarity with exchanges, debates, or disputes within the group and as part of the military establishment. This cohesion stems from their similar ideas, beliefs, and experiences, which undoubtedly leads to group-centeredness and ethnocentrism. It is, therefore, unsurprising to find them subsequently developing into nationalist leaders, such as those that emerged during the tenure of Field Marshal Po. (Plaek) Phibunsongkhram, since these ideas were already circulating within the armed forces among this group even before the 1932 revolution. (See Vella, 1978)

By nature, the military is accustomed to an authoritarian culture, where soldiers must obey their superiors.

This culture is vulnerable to the emergence of a dictatorship and use of violence, especially when encountering challenges or conflicts. Most importantly, the non-peace leaders often view differences and conflicts with minority or emerging groups in society, such as the growth of the civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and professional groups that create social conflict or pose a national security threat. This view stems from the fact that the non-peace leaders see themselves as representatives of the majority ethnic group. Consequently groups beyond this perspective are seen as the opposition or the enemy that must be eliminated rather than brought into an alliance, in line with a narrow view of what constitutes national security. (There are numerous examples of what happens when an authoritarian military leader attains power, see Bowie, 1997; Winichakul, 1994)

Thus, this divergent background and upbringing is a basic variable that determined the differences in the approaches of the non-peace leaders and the 'Peace Warriors' towards conflict resolution. Although this initial conclusion may not be able to address the relations between the socio-economic factors and the conditions that they worked under in terms of how they determined the later thoughts and behaviors of military leaders, it is difficult to deny that they form a hidden but important factor that explains the differences between the two groups that heavily influenced the democratic age.

In the democratic system, once a conflict emerges, a non-violent resolution can often be found. However, whether or not a military leader chooses this path is dependent on the background and experiences of that individual leader. For this reason, socio-economic factors in combination with the variables of ideas, beliefs, and collected experiences, as well as existing relationships can be used to explain how one leader may have non-violent tendencies, while another may be

more authoritarian. We can use the results from the prosopographical analysis to place them in categories and place their ideas and political behavior in the context of modern Thai history. To begin with, it is worth examining their divergent ideas on national security. This divergence led to the formation of two separate schools of thought among the military, where one is built on the basis of diversity, while the other emphasizes unity.

In other words, the status of 'Peace Warriors' will be clearer if we examine their past military ideas and experiences in military operations. We can begin with their ideas on national security, since the differing ideas on this issue is the origin of the two schools of thoughts among the military, especially how they view diversity and unity. The definition of national security affected how the 'Peace Warriors' and non-peace leaders thought about and viewed national security issues and subsequently the completely different way they went about determining the national developmental policies in the dimensions of politics, economics, society, and foreign affairs. These differences extended to political and administrative policies, as reflected in the actions of the government, both in terms of the measures enacted and how political issues were managed where the radical differences between the 'Peace Warriors' and non-peace leaders are evident.

4. 'Peace Warriors': Diversity as National Security

In comparison with the non-peace leaders, it can be said that an important ideological basis for the 'Peace Warriors' is their progressive view of security. They saw diversity as part of the social and national security. To understand this ideological foundation, we must begin by analyzing the mainstream ideas on this issue among the military and compare it with that of the 'Peace Warriors', so that we can distinguish the ideas of the 'Peace

Warriors' from that of the non-peace leaders, where both had undergone the same military training.

What then constitutes the basic knowledge and ideology of the military? The answer is simple since the primary mission of the military is inevitably related to the protection of national sovereignty and national security. However, the concept of "national security" is broad and covers practically every domestic and external aspects, such as democratic politics, the activities of the opposition, issues concerning ethnic minorities, Communism, and so on. The problem then is how to pursue and ensure national sovereignty, beginning with how the military defined and managed security issues and how it saw its role in these solutions, especially vis-à-vis their impact on the democratic regime.

Undoubtedly, the military is a group that has been physically and ideologically trained to carry out the mission of protecting the nation's sovereignty and security. It can be said that this is the basic idea of most military officers, where the nation's security has to be paramount. To achieve this end – the guarantee of national security – if one were to think along the military line, this would not escape ideas concerning military readiness and armaments.

Given this basic ideology, military leaders had to determine national policy to conform with this mission – that is, giving primacy to the military above all other considerations. Therefore, it should not be surprising to find that developmental policies during this period emphasized the development of the armed forces, not only in terms of building the capacity of the armed forces but also in terms of their armaments. Thus, the majority of the annual budget went to the armed forces. The reduction or opposition to this military budget, whether by an appointed or an elected civilian Parliament was a major cause of conflict in the post-1932 period, since such opposition was deemed to be unacceptable among the military and led to

political conflicts vis-à-vis the issue of national security.

Even so, although in general military leaders share the aforementioned view even before the 1932 revolution, that is, ever since the establishment of a professional military institution during the reign of King Rama V, not every military leader followed this line of thought in the exact same way, especially those among the 'Peace Warriors'. These included those within and without the People's Party, all of whom became involved in politics under the constitutional regime. This divergence stemmed from their different perspectives with regard to national security and a broader worldview than those of the non-peace leaders.

This broader world view allowed the 'Peace Warriors' to have a better understanding and be conscious of a significant problem in the relations between the use of military force and the new regime, that is, how to make the military management of security become acceptable and appropriate under the democratic regime. Can these concerns be met, whilst also preserving the rights and liberties of individuals in Thai society? Finally, the concerns must not come into conflict with the democratic regime that they had themselves established. This understanding and awareness was reflected in how they distinguished military security issues from politics or the security of the government from that of the nation's during the time when they still exerted political influence.

In other words, the 'Peace Warriors' made a clear distinction between military and political action due to the fact that they had a broader view of what constituted national security, which was considerably different from the perspective of the non-peace leaders. They saw that the national security issues that arose from political problems, such as flaws within the democratic regime, was unrelated to security in the military sense of the word. If political problems could be solved, then security would not be an issue. Most

importantly, the 'Peace Warriors' saw security not solely as a military issue but a political and administrative one. Military security is dependent on political security, while political security is built on consensus and democracy, where importance must be attached to civil society and the will of the people through their representatives in the legislature.

Therefore, the ideas and policies of the 'Peace Warriors' with regard to national security was not narrowly defined where military security was equated with national security. They had a broader perspective and so tended to encourage development in other important dimensions that laid a more secure foundation for the nation and society in the long-term. These measures included socio-economic development, income and power re-distribution, and providing access to justice to everyone in society. They also eschewed promoting nationalist and ethno-centric ideology and policies against ethnic minorities. It was through these policies that the 'Peace Warriors' thought that national security could be creatively ensured in the long-term.

The 'Peace Warriors' did not have a vehement nationalist ideology that was centered on one ethnicity or another, but were accepting of diversity. They saw the constitutional regime as a good framework to manage conflicts between various parties in a peaceful manner. Parliament was seen as the key platform that allowed all sides the opportunity to participate in determining policy and the nation's developmental direction. It was this basic perspective and assumptions that allowed the 'Peace Warriors' to embrace the democratic way and sowed the seeds for the idea of allowing politics to lead the military.

5. 'Peace Warriors': The Prototype of Politics leading the Military

It has been generally accepted that the political trend post-1932 tended towards violence rather than non-violence

or, in other words, military forces were used to resolve conflicts more than peaceful political negotiations. An interesting issue that should be examined is the stance and proposals of the 'Peace Warriors' at this time.

It is clear that the 'Peace Warriors' adhered to the democratic rules, that is, allowing politics to lead the military. Throughout the first 20 years of political conflicts under the democratic regime (1932-1952), the 'Peace Warriors' expressed themselves in a concrete, non-violent way that was consistent with their ideology. These actions allowed meaning of the 'Peace Warriors' to become more apparent and tangible as examples of politics leading the military.

While no single individual concretely introduced or developed these ideas into a national policy in the manner that could be subsequently seen in the Order No. 66/23 period, they were commonly shared ideas within the group that began among the senior naval officers under Vice-Admiral Phya Rajawangsan, in the Army under General Phya Phahon Phonphayahasena and Lieutenant-General Luang Sinaryotharuk, and the junior officers under the People's Party under Admiral Sinthu Kamolnawin. Together, they formed a consistent and tangible front that stuck to their non-violent principles.

Following these principles, the 'Peace Warriors' adhered to the principle of building national reconciliation, allowing politics to lead the military, and using political measures to solve political conflicts. In this process, negotiations, mediation, and compromise were emphasized, even when they were faced with open rebellion, a violent coup, or war with neighboring countries. At the same time, they also respected the framework under the constitution and used Parliamentary mechanisms as the main method of resolving conflicts between the government and various opposition parties instead of resorting to coups or using military-police forces to suppress their

opposition. This opposition included members of the old regime, royalists, nobles, conservatives, and included provincial leaders and progressives, especially the members of parliament that came from the Northeast (Isan) region.

It is undeniable that during the initial period of the democratic regime, the 'Peace Warriors' attempted to build mechanisms for conflict resolution within the military culture, as well as between the military and the political realm. Their idea was to allow politics to lead the military, while political conflicts had to be resolved with political solutions – that is, no violence should be used to decide the outcome of political conflicts. This approach represented the abandonment of using coups and suppression to decide matters. At the same time, the 'Peace Warriors' were also initiators of political reconciliation. While the military had successfully effected the revolution, there remained a potent opposition force, especially among the nobles, who did not immediately accept the new system. Thus, the government had to be delicate in its approach and strive to build political reconciliation and consensus and, from there, develop national politics towards competition under the constitutional framework, i.e. acceptance of politics under the rule of Parliament.

Non-violent measures that were aimed towards the aforementioned goals was continuously evident. These measures included the inclusive nature of the government, as reflected in the cabinets of the Phya Phahon Phonphayahasena Governments, which was composed of all political factions. Most importantly, there was also an acceptance of the role of the opposition and the will of the people as illustrated by the case of the opposition to the military budget that was led by members of parliament from Isan region throughout the period of 1933 to 1938, which resulted Phya Phahon Phonphayahasena's Government having to resign twice and one dissolution of

Parliament due to the loss of the vote in the Parliament.

In addition, the 'Peace Warriors' also demonstrated their courage in a similar manner to that of civil disobedience. For example, they opposed the violent suppression of the Boworadet rebels in 1933, especially among the senior and junior naval officers within the People's Party, as well as opposing the use of special courts to execute 18 of the regime's opposition in 1938. In the latter case, it was the first instance where the Phibunsongkhram Government used violent measures to quell the opposition. They also opposed engagement in the Thai-French War in 1940-1941, joined the Seri Thai Movement, while continuing to oppose the government within the Parliamentary structure throughout the Second World War.

Most importantly, the 'Peace Warriors' did not participate in the 1947 coup and acted as a peaceful opposition to the post-1947 government. They did not employ violent methods nor did they participate in the rebellions that attempted to overthrow the Phibunsongkhram Government, such as those in 1948 (the military staff officer rebellion), 1949 (Wang Luang Rebellion, under Pridi Phanomyong), 1950 (refusal to participate in the Korean War), and the Manhattan Rebellion in 1951. Throughout these incidents, this group of officers adhered to the path of non-violence, which, while demonstrating principle, also marginalized them from the centre of power. (For further details regarding the political history of this period, see Ngamcachonkulkid, 1988; 2005 and 2014)

Therefore, if we consider their non-violent policies and actions, the historical importance of the 'Peace Warriors' is undeniable. The legacy that the first generation of 'Peace Warriors' bestowed on the subsequent generations of military leaders and Thai society is the concept that politics should lead the military, ideas for bringing about political reconciliation, and

the idea that political issues should be solved via political means. These concepts have been useful and valuable for democratic development and the reduction of the use of violence, especially against the opposition or those that held different views from that of the government, and formed the basis of peaceful co-existence on the foundation of diversity and mutual respect. On the other hand, if we consider the 'Peace Warriors' on the basis of their ideas and theories regarding non-violence, what then is their importance in this context and where should we place them in the general context of non-violence?

6. 'Peace Warriors': Initial conclusions on the military's ideas and theories on non-violence

Although the 'Peace Warriors' may tangibly reflect the non-violent concepts and actions, especially in terms of strategy and tactics that have a distinctive characteristic, the researcher thinks that these ideas and actions are similar to the Thai and international concepts and theories of non-violence as expressed by Professor Dr. Chaiwat Satha-Anand and Gene Sharp. Thus, the senior naval officers could be seen to be belonging to Sharp's Group 2, that is those engaged in active reconciliation, while if the senior and junior naval officers were taken as a whole, they may be closer to those who engage in selective non-violence. However, if the 'Peace Warriors' were considered as a whole, they are more similar to Chaiwat Satha-Anand's Group 6, where those in this group considered non-violent tactics, as well as Sharp's Group 6, which wanted non-violent revolution. However, these similarities are superficial; in terms of the details, there are significant differences and no model perfectly fits the Thai model of 'Peace Warriors', which may be a distinctive group of their own. (See Satha-Anand, 1990; Sharp, 2005)

Nevertheless, if we consider the ideas and experiences of the 'Peace

Warriors' throughout the two decades of their influence, it can be seen that they conform better to Johan Galtung's framework which categorized violence into 3 aspects: (1) Individual or direct; (2) Structural or social justice; and (3) Cultural, which form the legitimacy for violence in the first two categories. The stance of the 'Peace Warriors' began from the refusal to use direct violence, such as refusing to use violence to suppress the opposition to the government or to themselves, be they a legitimate opposition or rebels. This non-violence extended to their own opposition to the illegitimate military governments that took power following the 1947 coup.

Furthermore, the 'Peace Warriors' attempted to reduce structural violence, although this policy did not bear much fruit at the time nor subsequently. These measures included reducing the military budget and de-emphasizing military development in favor of socio-economic development during the Phya Phahon Phonphayahasena Government, as well as the regimes under the Seri Thai Movement that enjoyed the support of 'Peace Warriors'. Thus, these measures contributed to the decrease of structural violence in Thai society and encouraged social justice. On the other hand, the over-emphasis on military development increases structural violence, since the diversion of the budget to the military leads to the neglecting of development in other sectors of society, leading to social inequality and intangible structural violence.

Finally, the 'Peace Warriors' also attempted to build a new political culture, especially in terms of the transfer of power post-1932. They did not support nor lend legitimacy to governments that came from coups, as can be seen from their lack of involvement in subsequent coups, with the exception of the 1932 one. On the contrary, they encouraged and supported democratic changes in government, such as voting to oppose important government policies, which resulted in the fall of the

Phibunsongkhram Government in 1944. This incident demonstrates the creative culture of conflict resolution, at least among the ruling classes and government (Bangkok leaders) and the members of parliament (local leaders).

The struggle of the 'Peace Warriors' in the latter issue, that is between Bangkok and the provincial leaders reflect their real understanding of politics under the democratic system and creative ways to manage conflicts. This understanding also opened spaces for a political culture that did not support violence. The space was open to those from other sectors of society, especially provincial leaders, people from the lower classes, as well as rural residents.

Most significantly, the 'Peace Warriors' had changed the language of security, which had been exclusively military to become more civilian and political in nature, in accordance with the open democratic regime. This change effectively opened new space for non-violence, whether through negotiations or compromise to solve various conflicts. Those who previously were unable to engage and participate in politics could now participate in national decision and policy-making. For example, civil leaders in provincial areas could now enter this new space and participate in finding solutions to political conflicts in Parliament in a creative manner.

The aforementioned examples reflect the role of the MPs (of one sort), especially the progressives from the Isan region that was especially evident following the first election in 1933. These MPs had a significant role and influence throughout the tenure of General Phya Phahon Phonphayuhasena, as well as during and after the Second World War until 1952. This group was led by Thong-in Puripat (Ubon Ratchathani), Tiang Sirikant (Sakhon Nakhon), Thawin Udol (Roi Et) and Chamlong Daorueng (Maha Sarakham). These MPs acted as the opposition in vigorously checking the military government's performance,

especially in their criticism or active hostility to the Defense budget and other measures aimed at political control, such as using special courts to suppress the opposition, banning the formation of political parties, and eroding the rights and freedoms of the press. Nevertheless, this phenomenon ceased following the 1947 coup, since the non-peace leaders turned to suppressing local leaders and the opposition under various charges, such as rebellion or communism. This environment resulted in the violent elimination and suppression of many local leaders that had conflicts with central government from the non-violent platform of Parliament or otherwise pushed them to take up arms in an attempt to use violence to settle the issue, oftentimes in conjunction with the Communist Party of Thailand during the Cold War. (See Mettharikanond, 2000; Tejapira, 2001; Aphornsuvan, 2004)

7. Conclusion: Do we need 'Peace Warriors'?

At this point, we may conclude that there will hardly be anyone who can refuse the status and importance of 'Peace Warriors', both in terms of their ideas and theories. Therefore, Thai society should not rush to conclusions or remain attached to the traditional authoritarian/non-peace image of the military. Society should also remain open to alternative perspectives that may contradict the basic or long-held assumptions and allow social space for 'Peace Warriors' to assert themselves. Their narratives should also be seriously studied so that a new body of knowledge can be built that will let society learn and pass on their lessons for further studies and development.

Most importantly, we must also be brave enough to accept facts, through which we may be able to imagine a new future. The stories of the 'Peace Warriors' is a new body of knowledge that will allow us to change our understanding of the Thai military's influence, as well as the

dynamics of modern politics. We must be bold enough to overcome the paradigm of seeing the military as an enemy or obstacle to democracy and non-violence.

If we can overcome the view that the military is an enemy or opposition, we will be able to see the value of and potential allies among the military. Furthermore, we will see the need for 'Peace Warriors' to form the backbone of the Thai military as a new force that will allow for the development of the democratic regime and the use of non-violence. This is not a mission exclusive to rights activists, anti-dictatorship protesters, or non-violent actors but a new mission for all Thai people who wishes to see peaceful democratic development. Academics in peace and military studies should also join in the search for and encourage these 'Peace Warriors', who share the objective of forming a new paradigm and body of knowledge that will establish a firm and peaceful foundation for Thai society.

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