

DEFENCE



Thailand maintained its sovereignty throughout its history, defined by its successive capital cities, namely, Sukhothai in the 13th to 14th centuries, Ayutthaya from the 14th to the 18th centuries, Thon Buri late in the second half of the 18th century, and Rattanakosin or Bangkok, from the late 18th century onward.¹ At times of warfare, monarchs including King Naresuan the Great and King Taksin the Great led their armed forces into battle.²

As defined in the Constitution promulgated in 1997, the designated responsibilities and roles of the armed forces are the defence of the nation if threatened by warfare, the conduct of peace-keeping missions and the rendering of related services, the provision of emergency response, and the offering of development assistance, as and if so required.

Responsibilities and Roles of the Royal Thai Armed Forces

Engagement in Combat or Warfare

During the second half of the 20th century, Thailand's armed forces were engaged notably in the Korean War (1950-1953). Military assistance to the Republic of Korea, also known as South Korea, was rendered by contingents of the land, naval and air forces under the unified command led by the United States of America.

Engagement in Upholding the Korean Armistice

Thailand's naval force served until 1955, as an attachment to the fleet under the UN unified command and patrolling the Korea Bay south of the Ceasefire Line. Land forces were deployed until 1972, and the air force operated an emergency aircraft staffed with medics and fitted with life-saving equipment that performed evacuation missions until 1972.

Upon conclusion of the Korean armistice on 27 July 1953, Thailand was asked by the United Nations Command Headquarters to send representatives to participate in the Military Armistice Commission, to which the Royal Thai Government responded by assigning seven military officers. Two other countries – the UK and the US – were asked to send their personnel to represent the UN. To this day, Thailand has a permanent representative at the United Nations Command Headquarters in South Korea.

¹ Henceforth, all historical dates follow the A.D. based chronology of the Western Calendar.

² See also the chapter entitled "Historical Setting".



Peace-keeping Operations abroad under United Nations Mandates

In accordance with the principle of maintaining peace and security internationally, envisioned by the Royal Thai Government in compliance with United Nations mandates, its Ministry of Defence augmented its mission by engaging in peace-keeping operations abroad and deploying especially trained army units, in close cooperation with allied nations committed to the good cause.³

In order to realize this objective and meet the corresponding criteria, the Thai Peace Operations Centre was established. It is tasked to contribute to the development of a globally binding set of rules and regulations for peace-keeping operations, a training system conducive to peace keeping, and educating UN certified instructors as well as trainers.

Moreover, the country entered into the obligation to maintain its military capability, in order to meet the standard required by the United Nations Stand-by Arrangement System (UNSAS), including the provision of a possible United Nations Strategic Reserve (UNSR), as well as rendering assistance in disaster relief and humanitarian support. Ultimately, the Ministry as a line agency of the Royal Thai Government was set to enhance its role in securing regional peace and stability.

In response to United Nations mandates, as well as requests by international and regional associations, Thailand deployed contingents from its armed forces to several peace keeping and humanitarian assistance missions.

Missions Accomplished

United Nations Guard Contingent in Iraq

On 18 June 1991, the United Nations approached the Royal Thai Government seeking its participation in recruiting a security force. Thailand sent 50 personnel from the Supreme Command Headquarters, including members of the land, naval and air forces. The main mission of the guard contingent was to provide security to staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to depots of food and medical supplies, the United Nations Guard Contingent in Iraq (UNGCI) Headquarters, to escort supply convoys in aid of refugees, and to reconnoiter refugee sites in their area of

³ See also the chapter entitled "International Relations".

responsibility. Two deployments of 50 personnel each served until September, 1991 and September, 1994, respectively.

Peace Operations in Cambodia

In January 1992, the UN Secretary General requested that Thailand send an engineer battalion to join the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC), to clear land mines, and to repair bridges, roads, buildings and public utilities. In February 1992, the 2nd Engineer Battalion Task Force consisting of 705 personnel was deployed to Cambodia. That mission was completed in October 1993. To prepare for general elections in Cambodia, the UNAMIC including a Thai contingent was incorporated into what became part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).



United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

Upon request by the United Nations, five officers were deployed to serve as military observers for a one-year term, starting from October 1999. Until the end of 2005, six rotations served one-year assignments in Sierra Leone, ultimately reduced to three officers, as the civil war ended.



United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor

In October 1999, the Royal Thai Government joined UN member countries in implementing the UN Security Council resolution to establish an International Force in East Timor (INTERFET). Its tasks consisted of securing peace, escort and support UNAMET officials, and provide humanitarian assistance to the East Timorese population. Thailand deployed 1,581 troops known as the Joint Task Force 972 Thai – East Timor, with a high-ranking Thai officer appointed Deputy Force Commander of INTERFET.

Nearing the successful completion of the INTERFET mission in February 2000, the Royal Thai Government joined the third stage of the UN operation in East Timor, namely, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to assume responsibility for peace-keeping operations, from November 1999 onward. The Thai contingent of UNTAET comprised of 937 troops, including twelve military observers. Two Thai generals were successively appointed UNTAET Force Commanders from September 2000 until August 2002. The East Timor mission was completed with the deployment of an HIV/AIDS expert officer to UNMISSET, up to November 2005.

United Nations Iraq – Kuwait Observation Mission

In April 2001, Thailand dispatched six officers to serve as UN military observers assigned to the demilitarized zone (DMZ), under UN Security Council Resolution 689 (1991) establishing the United Nations Iraq – Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM). Its mandate was to monitor the DMZ and the Khawr 'Abd Allah Waterway separating Iraq and Kuwait, in order to deter boundary transgression and observe any mounting of hostile action on the territory of one state against the other. The Thai military officers carried out reconnaissance, until UNIKOM's withdrawal, prior to the military campaign against Iraq by the U.S. led coalition forces, in March 2003.

Aceh Monitoring Mission with HDC

The Henri Dunant Centre (HDC) and the Government of Indonesia (GOI) had sought Thailand's assistance in advancing the peace process in Aceh Province, Sumatra. In December 2002, the Royal Thai Government dispatched a senior envoy, a chief of staff to the Joint Security Committee (JSC) established under the COHA, and 24 monitors. This was the first time that the Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) seconded officers to any non-governmental organization in support of peace operations. Altogether, Thailand provided 42 field monitors and four JSC officers during February 2003.



Peace Support Operations in Afghanistan

During March through October 2003, the Royal Thai Armed Forces took part in peace support operations in Afghanistan, known as Thai/Afghanistan CTF 975. The RTARF Engineering Unit deployed 130 personnel to the Coalition Headquarters in Bagram, to join efforts geared toward rebuilding infrastructure and to sustain the fulfilment of basic needs essential to stabilizing the situation.

Thai – Iraq Humanitarian Task Force

Thailand deployed personnel affiliated to the coalition forces, under the name of “Operation Iraqi Freedom”. The Thai – Iraq Humanitarian Task Force, serving a one-year term with six-month troop rotations, consisted of engineers, medical personnel and a security platoon, totalling 450 personnel. The first rotation was deployed in September 2003, and the second rotation completed operations in September 2004.

Humanitarian Assistance in Iran

In December 2003, after a violent earthquake with its epicenter at Bam in Iran's Kerman Province, the Royal Thai Government offered humanitarian assistance. This was delivered by 64 joint personnel of the Army, Navy and Air Force and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who formed a rescue unit sent to assist on location during 30 December 2003 through 13 January 2004.

Active Missions as of 2006

United Nations Operations in Burundi

Upon request by the United Nations, the Royal Thai Armed Forces sent three officers to join the observer mission on a one-year rotation basis, covering the years 2005 until 2007. Moreover, in March 2005, the Combined Engineering Company, consisting of 177 troops, was mobilized to serve in the United Nations mission until 2007.



Peace Monitoring Support in Aceh 2005

Upon the signing of the Helsinki Peace Accord in August 2005, both parties requested an international monitoring team comprised of military, police, and civilian personnel to help monitor the peace process. The Government of Indonesia (GOI) and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) invited the Royal Thai Government to deploy troops so as to join those of four ASEAN countries, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, as well as those of European Union member countries. Thailand sent 20 officers who constituted the "Thailand Monitoring Contingent – Aceh". The Thai contingent was deployed to serve 13 months of the envisioned 18-month mission assignment comprising two rotations.

The peace process mission was staggered into two phases. Phase I (August 2005 – February 2006) was mandated to monitor the demobilization of GAM and decommissioning of its armaments as well as monitoring the relocation of non-organic military forces and non-organic police troops of the GOI. In August 2005, four Thai officers were dispatched to Aceh as the "Initial Monitoring Presence" (IMP) in order to coordinate with allies for initial planning. In September 2005, the remaining 16 officers were dispatched to Medan, Sumatra, for induction and pre-deployment training and were thereafter deployed to Aceh.

Phase II (February-August 2006) was mandated to monitor the reintegration of active GAM members, upholding human rights, ruling on disputed amnesty cases, and monitoring the process of legislation change, in preparation for local elections. On 21 December 2005, the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) declared the successful completion of the decommissioning process, followed by the declaration on demobilization made on 29 December 2005, earlier than planned.

In addition to the contribution of 20 Thai officers, a high-ranking Thai officer was honorably appointed by the GOI to be Principal Deputy Head of Mission. His tour of duty was completed on 15 March 2006.

Despite the remarkably successful peace process, the election required by the law on the Governing of Aceh could not be promulgated on 31 March 2006 as was initially planned. The GOI decided to postpone the downsizing of the AMM for a period of three more months and invited contributing countries to extend their presence. The six Thai officers remained in the AMM. In addition, the AMM conveyed its intention to keep the post of Principal Deputy Head of Mission open to Thailand.

The Role of the Royal Thai Armed Forces in National Development

The role of the Royal Thai Armed Forces is, by and large, focused on development for national security particularly in remote border areas, and their responsibilities also include the improvement of citizens' living standard. The developmental operations of the Royal Thai Armed Forces "for the people" are not only a duty but an important responsibility and an honourable task. Assistance is geared to help those in need, to support sustainable lifestyles, and to be prepared to step forward in any other vital aspect, corresponding to royal initiatives as directed by His Majesty the King, the "Father of Development".⁴ Duties that the Royal Thai Armed Forces have performed in the service of national development and assistance are summarized hereunder.

Ventures in Compliance with Royal-initiated Projects

Projects carried out in compliance with royal initiatives by His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen, as well as members of the Royal Family are considered of highest priority and greatest urgency. Beginning in 1982 approximately 2,000 projects were executed with assistance provided by the Royal Thai Armed Forces.

These projects are divided into four categories, [1] enhancing the quality of life, [2] providing medical services and assistance, [3] conserving the

⁴ See also the chapter entitled "Modern Monarchy".

environment and natural resources, and [4] promoting arts and crafts.

Examples of such projects are: Development Project for the Pak Phanang Area in accordance with the royal initiative, situated in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province; Development and Promotion Project for the Growth of Vetiver Grass under the Forestation Project to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of His Majesty the King's Accession to the Throne; Sufficiency Economy Project for Villages and Royal Agricultural Projects under the "Food Bank" strategy; Plant Genetic Preservation Project of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn; Marine Park Project; Project to Rejuvenate the Andaman Coast under Her Majesty the Queen's initiative for the conservation of sea turtles; Royal Rain-making Project; and Dispersion of Plant Seeds through Aviation Project.

Development Programme for Security

The Programme for Border Self-defence Villages encompasses the installation of communication systems, promotion of agriculture and social welfare, development of water resources and community facilities, provision of medical services, religious studies, cultural promotion, public relations, and support services. Civil service agencies and private-sector units joined to assist in these activities.

Operations to Assist Other Government Agencies, Disaster-relief Operations, and Support for Urgent Government Duties

Most of the following operations were undertaken in response to urgent requirements that necessitated an effective and diligent work force. These projects included the dredging of canals; prospecting for aquifers; building dams; reforestation; improvement of waterways; construction and repair of roads and highways; disaster-relief operations (flooding, storm, earthquake, bush fires, droughts and other disasters); along with measures to prevent and solve drug-related problems. In these endeavours, the Royal Thai Armed Forces co-operated by deploying personnel and equipment, as well as all the resources needed to fully assist in relieving any problems faced by citizens, if requested or as designated by the government.



Humanitarian Assistance

Tsunami Disaster-Relief Operations in the South

Upon the impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami on 26 December 2004, the Armed Forces Supreme Commander ordered the establishment of the Disaster Relief Centre of the Army, Navy and Air Force, and assigned the Armed Forces Development Centre to provide urgent support, as well as the setting-up of a Disaster Relief Centre at the 3rd Naval Area Command, Royal Thai Fleet, Phuket Province. Operations conducted are summarized hereunder.

Rescue

Royal Thai Army medical mobile teams sent injured victims to hospitals, transported corpses to morgues, and distributed food rations to surviving victims. Furthermore, army engineering units opened the section of the national highway between Khao Lak and Bang Muang in the province of Phang-nga. The Royal Thai Navy arranged a naval force of amphibious vehicles and barges to assist victims. The Royal Thai Air Force arranged for surgical medical teams and field nurses to assist in the recovery of injured survivors. Aircraft delivered food and supplies, along with transporting casualties to Bangkok. Additionally, air surveillance captured images of the devastated areas to be used as part of a database in the search for missing people.

Relief

The Royal Thai Armed Forces united in assisting citizens through the construction of temporary shelters, providing basic necessities, and supporting forensic operations. Assistance in regard to the latter was provided through dentists to help identify corpses. Medical personnel together with a nursing team assisted in transporting and sanitizing corpses in the compounds of the monasteries of Yan Yao and Bang Muang, as well as the Bang Marang Graveyard, all in Phang-nga Province, jointly with the Prachasantisuk Foundation in Krabi Province. Assistance was also provided in the making of coffins.

The Royal Thai Armed Forces took



charge of the logistical arrangements in managing donated items by collecting, sorting, and delivering them to those in need in the various affected provinces, in an orderly manner.

Rehabilitation

Programs launched by the Royal Thai Armed Forces were geared to uplift the material well-being and morale of the surviving victims. They included the construction of permanent residential houses and the employing of local labourers in projects implemented by the Supreme Command Headquarters.

Activities to assist and strengthen the victims included arrangements for religious services and musical events. In cooperation with private-sector entities such as the Association of the Entertainment Reporters of Thailand, *Chiwit Rak* Foundation, *Luk Thung Wateethai* Programme, Community Radio, artists, Islamic Committee of Thailand, and the Muslim Housewives Association of Thailand, along with public organizations, a programme was structured to revitalize the morale of tsunami survivors. This gave rise to positive sentiments towards the government, armed forces, as well as the governmental and private sectors, while generating harmony among the regions of the country.



Establishment of the Tsunami Early Warning System

In November 2005, the Royal Thai Navy, jointly with the Hydrological Department and in partnership with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, a Thailand based regional disaster management organization, installed two digital sea-level gauge stations off the country's southern coasts near the islands of Ko Miang and Ko Tapao Noi. These stations communicate with the Seismic Research Station of the Royal Thai Navy in Chiang Mai Province. The latter station can detect earthquakes in the Indian Ocean, particularly in the Andaman Sea and in the vicinity of Sumatra and its surrounding islands. Combined with the data from the sea-level gauge stations, the system can determine the existence of a tsunami and signal an early warning to the nations along the Andaman Sea Coast and South China Sea.



Hosting the “Preserve the Andaman” Day

For 5 March 2005, the Supreme Command Headquarters, Thai Airways International PCL and the UBC Corporation, alongside agencies of the public and private sectors, as well as the Association of Divers with members from within and outside the country, arranged a “Preserve the Andaman” event. Through this joint endeavour, debris and waste deposited in the sea by the tsunami were collected in order to foster the natural restoration of the coral reefs and sea fans. Although the tsunami disaster wrought countless losses upon the country, the unity and selfless devotion shown by Thailand and its friends rejuvenated the Andaman Sea Coast.

Conclusion

The operations undertaken by the Royal Thai Armed Forces documented above selectively illustrate their duties currently performed in their mission to constantly assess the rapidly changing situation and environment, domestically, regionally and internationally. In accordance with changing demands and requirements, a re-organization in the structure of the armed forces encouraging consolidation, specialization and modernization was enacted.

Combined, joint exercises regularly conducted with foreign military forces advanced the doctrines of joint, combined operations with Thailand’s allies, if and when necessary.



The Royal Thai Armed Forces are committed to maintaining their role as an organization tasked to uphold the three institutions, Nation, Religion, and Monarchy, and to serve their fellow citizens as an exemplary organization with quality, efficiency, and modernity. The organization is united as one professional defence and development force. The vision of the Royal Thai Armed Forces reads as follows:

“The Royal Thai Armed Forces represent an important military organization capable to protect and preserve the independence and security of the nation, the monarchy, and the vital interests of the nation, as well as defend the democratic governance with efficiency. The organization is also committed to deploy its modern resources in terms of personnel, equipment, and know-how to support the development of the nation, with emphasis on sustaining security in times of rapid globalization. Furthermore, the organization is entrusted with and relied upon by its fellow citizens, to carry out military operations other than warfare, such as peace keeping domestically and globally. Regarding this latter objective, the Royal Thai Armed Forces must be prepared to cooperate with neighbouring nations, friendly nations at large, and international organizations in fostering peace in the region within the United Nations framework.” [\[C\]](#)