

PERSPECTIVE

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Singapore | 8 August 2019

The Place of the Provinces in Thailand’s Twenty-Year National Strategy: Toward Community Democracy in a Commercial Nation?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The 2017 Thai constitution calls for the preparation of a legally binding “national strategy”.
- In October 2018, the National Council for Peace and Order government published Thailand’s 2018-2037 National Strategy.
- Numerous passages in the National Strategy concern provincial Thailand. Together, they offer two complementary visions of the place of the provinces in the country’s future.
- One vision centres on the construction of a “commercial nation”. The other prescribes a quasi-integralist regime of depoliticized “community democracy”, with no apparent meaningful role for political parties or for politicians.
- These visions and the National Strategy more generally come in a long and checkered tradition of metropolitan efforts to structure and thus dominate provincial Thailand.
- While the uses to which the new government of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha or other actors will put the 2018-2037 National Strategy remain unclear, the visions of provincial Thailand articulated in the document embody the thinking and priorities of a significant segment of Thai society and of important interests in the country.

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INTRODUCTION

Thailand's 2017 constitution introduced a poorly understood innovation into the country's politics and governance. Drafted under the auspices of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) junta that seized power in Bangkok in May 2014, the charter refers in its preamble to a "national strategy" (*yutthasat chat*).¹ Various of its sections specify that the goal of this strategy is "sustainable development of the country in accordance with the principles of good governance", that the strategy will serve as a framework for other plans consistent with that goal, and that draft government budgets must demonstrate alignment with the strategy. Further, new governments' policy statements must accord with the strategy, and the Senate is to monitor compliance with it.²

By means of royal decree signed by NCPO head and Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-ocha and issued on 8 October 2018, the Bangkok government unveiled the twenty-year National Strategy, covering 2018-2037, five days later.³ The decree repeated the language in the constitution concerning the purpose of the strategy. The 72-page text of the strategy was appended to the decree.⁴

In its introduction, Thailand's first ever National Strategy spells out a "vision for Thailand in 2037" (*wisai that prathet thai 2580*). This vision is of a Thailand that "has security, prosperity, and sustainability, and is a country that has fully developed by means of development according to the philosophy of sufficiency economy".⁵ The opening paragraphs of that introduction note that the sources of "conflict over ideas and ideals in Thailand lie in inequality, a lack of confidence in legal processes, and political instability".⁶ They state that differences in the delivery of services across areas of the country are a factor in the persistent problem of inequality.⁷

Notwithstanding this attention to the geographical dimension of inequality, to its consequences, and to the turmoil that the NCPO junta ostensibly took power to end, none of the six substantive sections of the National Strategy has provincial Thailand or sub-national concerns as its primary focus. Thailand's twenty-year National Strategy is, that is, truly national in scope and purpose.⁸

The substantive sections of the National Strategy concern security, competitiveness, human resources, opportunity and social equality, environmentally-friendly growth and quality of life, and the "rebalancing" (*kanprap somdun*) and development of state administration.⁹ Those sections are studded with such buzzwords of our times as "innovation" (*nawattakam*), "big data" (*khomun khanat yai*), "social enterprise" (*wisahakit phuea sangkhom*), "social capital" (*thun thangsangkhom*), "cultural capital" (*thun thangwatthanatham*), "multi-cultural society" (*sangkhom phahuwatthanatham*), "value chains" (*huangso munlakha*), "ecosystems" (*rabopniwet*), and "digital age" (*yuk dichithan*); the first of these terms alone occurs 67 times in the 72-page document.

Its use of trendy argot notwithstanding, the National Strategy does grapple with the problem that has been central not only to Thai politics during the past decade and half but also to Thai history during the past century and half. This problem is the failure of powerful actors

in the great primate city of Bangkok to understand that city's provincial hinterlands, even as they have sought to structure and thus to dominate those hinterlands.

The National Strategy offers two visions for the place of the provinces in the Thailand of the decades ahead. The first suggests a programme of administrative reform and measures to stimulate economic activity. These measures are to promote Thailand's emergence as a "commercial nation". The second vision mandates a regime centred on "communities" and conducive to the depoliticization¹⁰ and subordination of provincial society. These visions are complementary.

PROVINCES OF A COMMERCIAL NATION

The National Strategy both argues that the state administration must be a leading driver of the country's development strategy and commits Thailand to having a smaller state.¹¹ Courting controversy from traditionalists, it affirms that there is nothing sacrosanct about the current structure and organization of the Thai state. The historical and continuing role of that state as an instrument of internal colonization means that this affirmation has clear implications for provincial Thailand.

Noting concern over conditions in the agricultural and rural sectors, the section of the National Strategy on opportunity and social equality opens with a discussion of the movement of labour into the industrial and service sectors of just a few large cities. It refers to the implications of this movement for the structure of the family and its effects on economic stability and national security. It programmes the fostering of new nodes of prosperity to create employment and thus both to bring local economic development and to revive the social structure (*phlikfuen khongsang thangsangkhom*) of the country and above all of its rural areas.¹²

In pursuit of these objectives, the same section of the document calls for the preparation of social and development plans for "groups" or clusters of provinces (*klum changwat*).¹³ It refers to modification of territorial administration to empower administration at the levels of regions and of clusters of provinces.¹⁴ Within these clusters, core provinces (*changwat lak*) will enjoy enhanced administrative capabilities and powers and ensure that secondary provinces (*changwat rong*) develop in tandem with those core provinces. The envisioned development will lie in the areas of infrastructure, public utilities, sources of water and employment, and industry.¹⁵

While bespeaking a willingness to step away from the idea that Thailand's 76 provinces are administratively and functionally equal, the treatment in the National Strategy of clusters of provinces remains impressionistic. The introduction to the document refers to the need to devolve authority and responsibility to local instruments of the state, as a component of the strategy for promoting opportunity and equality.¹⁶ But this devolution is not a significant thrust of the National Strategy. It is noteworthy that the document's discussion of clusters of provinces omits mention of local administrative organs, let alone of elections either for those organs' chairmen and councils or for provincial governors. With two exceptions, the

second discussed in the following section of this essay, roles for sub-national elites does not figure in the National Strategy.

The first of those exceptions reflects the goal of making Thailand an “entrepreneurial society” (*sangkhom phuprakopkan*).¹⁷ The National Strategy mandates the creation of opportunities for entrepreneurs. It calls for developing their skills and giving them a role in realizing the value of natural resources and of cultural and social capital at the local level and at the level of clusters of provinces.¹⁸

The discussion of those priorities occurs in the section of the National Strategy focused on opportunity and equality. Much of the content of the section on building Thailand’s competitiveness also concerns the provinces. That section affirms the role of the special economic zones (*khet setthakit phiset*) in spreading prosperity to, raising incomes in, and improving the quality of life in the regions.¹⁹ In addition to the NCPO’s pet Eastern Economic Corridor project, whose relevance to bringing economic activities to less prosperous areas of the country is not evident, the section mentions special economic zones in the West and other regions of Thailand.²⁰

The section of the National Strategy on competitiveness goes on to prescribe the development of economic centres and centres of innovation in parallel with those in Bangkok and surrounding areas.²¹ Cities are to have specialized roles — promoting agricultural, industrial, and service clusters and ecosystems for innovation in which regional universities play significant roles. Located in important provinces, these cities will have both regional functions and linkages with other cities and with Thailand’s neighbours. In addition to fostering economic activity in areas removed from the country’s primate city, these initiatives are intended both to see the emergence of “creative cities” (*mueang sangsan*) as drivers of the economy and to allow provinces to exploit their respective advantages.²²

Agriculture has long dominated the economic life of the Thai provinces. The treatment of the farm sector in the National Strategy thus bears directly on the place of the provinces in the document and in its vision for the country. The section of the document on competitiveness advances a series of prescriptions intended to increase value-added in the sector. These prescriptions include promoting branding and standardization of agricultural produce identified with particular localities, along with processing that produce into quality goods for national and international markets. They also specify the promotion of organic farming and the application of innovation and technology to create “intelligent farms” (*fam atchariya*).²³ This discussion seems to offer little encouragement to the smallholder who has long been the backbone of Thai agriculture. In contrast, much in the National Strategy’s treatment of the farm sector is likely to appeal to large concerns like the Charoen Pokphand (CP) agribusiness conglomerate or Mitr Phol Sugar. Each of these concerns is in fact a partner in the “*pracharat*” initiatives launched by the NCPO government and in what Prajak Kongkirati and Veerayooth Kanchoochat label those initiatives’ model of “hierarchical capitalism”.²⁴ At the core of that model lies the subordination to large Bangkok business groups of smaller-scale firms and other economic actors in a wide range of sectors. These latter firms and actors include what Prajak and Veerayooth term “local enterprises” and

“rural entrepreneurs”.²⁵ We must understand with this in mind the National Strategy’s mandates for assistance to entrepreneurs and for the creation of an entrepreneurial society. For one might also label the sub-contractor an “entrepreneur”.

Prajak and Veerayooth note that the promotion of tourism, including agricultural tourism, comes under the umbrella of *pracharat*.²⁶ That National Strategy emphasizes that sector, too. Insofar as that emphasis relates to provincial Thailand, the document programmes the promotion of tourism according to localities’ specific potentials, including tourism focused on conservationism, Buddhism, agriculture, and “community ways” (*withi chumchon*).²⁷

Several passages near the end of the National Strategy’s section on competitiveness refer to the goal of Thailand becoming a *chat kankha* — a “trading nation” or “commercial nation”.²⁸ Apprehension of this goal informs the promises of clusters of provinces, special economic zones, innovation-focused cities, and high-technology agriculture that mark the document’s vision of provincial Thailand and of its place in the national hierarchy. This programme for the provinces requires a sound socio-political base. The National Strategy leaves no room for doubt about the form that that base is meant to take.

COMMUNITY DEMOCRACY FOR THE HINTERLANDS

The reference to community in the National Strategy’s discussion of tourism is not casual. If the repeated invocations of innovation in the document make it a relic of the half-decade that has produced it, the 98 mentions of “community” or “communities” (*chumchon*) point to something more fundamental. They affirm an established depoliticizing, quasi-integralist, vision of the relationship between state and society in Thailand — above all provincial Thailand.

References to community occur in all sections of the National Strategy. Their ubiquity reflects the status of communities not only as the foundational units in the conception of Thailand’s socio-political hierarchy and structure in the document. But it also makes clear their status as indispensable vehicles for the realization of an altogether rather astonishing range of its goals.²⁹

“Community” is an ambiguous term: to what, we must then ask, does the National Strategy actually refer with its invocations of community or communities? The document draws distinctions between cities (*mueang*) and communities³⁰ and between the central level (*radap suanklang*) and the community level.³¹ It refers repeatedly to local communities (*chumchon thongthin*).³² As these distinctions and references reveal, the National Strategy takes communities as the basic units of provincial-*cum*-rural society in Thailand.³³ This understanding of that society is purposeful rather than merely ethnographic. The programmed revival of the social structure — rural and therefore in effect national — noted above has a goal.

Central to that goal is strong and self-reliant communities³⁴ that will serve as the basis of a regime of “community democracy” (*prachathippatai chumchon*), grounded in consensus.

This regime will reduce conflict and make reconciliation (*khwamsamannachan*) possible.³⁵ The Thai state is purportedly to have only an advisory role (*pen thipruaksa*) in relation to community democracy,³⁶ as the National Strategy stresses the importance of developing leaders to advance its objectives at the community level.³⁷ It assigns no role to provincial social or political elites at levels beyond that of the community in serving as intermediaries between state and citizen, or state and society. It demarcates the community as the salient arena of provincial Thais' concerns, the appropriate sphere of their civic participation. For the regime of community democracy will address real needs or wants (*khwamtongkan thi thaeching*)³⁸ — in ways, implicitly, that such other possible intermediators or integrative actors as elected members of local government bodies, putatively venal participants in Thailand's disorderly parliamentary politics, and political parties cannot.³⁹

Craig Reynolds argues that “‘community’ belongs to the history of the structuring of village society by the state” in Thailand since the middle of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ He notes the “demonstrable counter-insurgency functions” of “community development” — “a strategy for drawing villages and villagers closer to the sovereign government in order to keep them out of the hands of insurgents or communists”.⁴¹ Or, one might add today, the hands of politicians and political parties. Rather than capturing something organic, official recourse to the idea of community signals integrative, penetrative and depoliticizing imperatives — with a focus on social spheres that “historically eluded the attentions of government”⁴² and over which the government or the state must deny other actors influence or control.

The National Strategy is silent on the question of which organs of the state will take the lead in penetrating communities, “advising” them and fostering the integrative regime of community democracy. Neither of its references to the Army's Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC)⁴³ relates to communities or to community democracy. Nevertheless, the ISOC's central role in what Puangthong Pawakapan terms the “integration of socio-politico-economic development into the counter-insurgency strategy of the Thai armed forces”⁴⁴ in the past is a perfect match with the demands of realizing the community democracy programmed by the National Strategy for the present and near-term future. Puangthong emphasizes the ISOC's record of attention to rural Thailand, the command's transition “from counter-insurgency to counter-democracy” activities⁴⁵ in the decades from the end of the armed insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in the mid-1980s through the era of the NCPO, and its ideological role. Observers of efforts to implement the National Strategy as it applies to provincial Thailand will do well to consider the ISOC's participation in that implementation.

CONCLUSION

Journalistic coverage of Thailand's 2018-2037 National Strategy has focused on the possibility that military and other elites will use it to limit elected governments' freedom of action.⁴⁶ With Prime Minister Prayut presiding over a cabinet in which six parties hold seats, the possibility has now arisen that he will in fact use it to constrain his own ministers as they try to act in accordance with their own or their parties' interests and priorities.⁴⁷

But to view the National Strategy exclusively as shackles is to ignore its substance. The document has a grab-bag feel to it. This does not mean, however, that it is incoherent. In its treatment of provincial Thailand, it articulates a pair of clear and complementary visions. One of these visions promotes the interests of business and commerce, interests given such priority that the National Strategy envisions the adjustment of long-established structures of provincial administration. The other prescribes a regime of quasi-integralist depoliticization following principles rooted in the Thai state's and military's experience of counter-insurgency. As prescribed today, that latter regime serves purposes as much economic as political. Not only is it meant to undercut democratic politics as a form of intermediation between state and citizen or state and society. But it also represents a formula for quiescence and subordination in the face of the further empowerment of the metropolitan business sector. Those outcomes will keep the hinterlands safe for hierarchical capitalism. It is in this regard that the paired visions for provincial Thailand in the National Strategy complement each other.

Grand visions rarely come to fruition. Thailand's modern history has demonstrated that its provinces — and their elites — have wills of their own. Despite its continuing efforts, Bangkok has never been their master. Today, their growing social, political, and economic complexity means that attempts at mastery of the provinces such as those mandated in the National Strategy look especially futile.

Many well informed Thais have only a vague awareness of the existence of their country's first National Strategy. One is hard-pressed to find anyone who has read it, even among prominent students of Thai politics. Perhaps elements in power in Bangkok will forget the document and its multitude of goals. Or it may serve as a scrap of paper for government officials and others to wave in demonstrations of fealty to the prevailing order, with little actual reference to its content.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the economic and other interests that the visions of provincial Thailand in the National Strategy promote are both real and powerful. Similarly, and as Bangkok voters' and others' support for the pro-junta Phalang Pracharat Party⁴⁹ in the elections of last March illustrated, an appetite for authoritarianism endures in Thai society. "Local community" has, as a basis for understanding provincial Thailand, long been an absurdity. As a tool of attempted political control, it may have more purchase. Scrutiny of the National Strategy yields insight into the latest round in the efforts of powerful actors in Thailand to forge an understanding of the provincial reaches of their country, and to employ that understanding to dominate those reaches.

¹ *Ratthathammanun haeng ratcha-anachak thai pho so 2560* [Constitution of the kingdom of Thailand, 2017] (http://www.constitutionalcourt.or.th/occ_web/download/article/article_20170410173002.pdf (downloaded 25 June 2017), p. 2. An English-language translation of this constitution is available at

http://www.constitutionalcourt.or.th/occ_web/download/article/article_20170410173022.pdf (downloaded 25 June 2019).

² *Ratthathammanun 2560*, Sections 65, 142, 162, 270.

³ Royal Gazette, Thailand, “*Prakat rueang yutthasat chat (pho so 2561-2580)*”

[Announcement concerning the National Strategy (2018-2037)], *Ratchakitchanubeksa* (Royal Gazette), 13 October 2018a

(http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2561/A/082/T_0001.PDF, downloaded 26 June 2019).

⁴ Royal Gazette, Thailand, “*Yutthasat chat (pho so 2561-2580)*” [National Strategy (2018-2037)], *Ratchakitchanubeksa* (Royal Gazette), 13 October 2018b

(http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2561/A/082/T_0001.PDF, downloaded 26 June 2019); hereafter cited as “*Yutthasat chat*”.

⁵ That is, “*Prathet thai mi khwammankhong mangkhang yangyuen pen prathet phatthana laeo duai kanphatthana tam lakpratya khong setthakit phophiang*”; “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 5. “Sufficiency economy” is the philosophy of development introduced by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997.

⁶ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 1.

⁷ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 1.

⁸ The National Strategy does make passing reference to unrest in the Southern border provinces in its introductory section, and it devotes a single-paragraph sub-section to the need to address issues of security, justice, understanding and economic development in those provinces in its section on security; “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 12, 15. The word “Isan” never appears in the document.

⁹ Considerations of space make it impossible to discuss the authorship of the National Strategy and its various sections, or the sources of the ideas that it advances, here. A later, longer version of the present essay will address those matters.

¹⁰ For discussion of the NCPO’s recourse to an ideological programme of depoliticization in the early phases of its dictatorship, see Michael Montesano, “Praetorianism and ‘the People’ in Late-Bhumibol Thailand”, *SEATIDE Online Papers*, no. 10 (2015) (www.seatide.eu/?content=activitiesandresults&group=3, downloaded 23 August 2018).

¹¹ “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 64, 65.

¹² “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 44.

¹³ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 47.

¹⁴ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 48.

¹⁵ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 47.

¹⁶ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 10.

¹⁷ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 20.

¹⁸ “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 47-48.

¹⁹ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 29.

²⁰ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 29.

²¹ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 30.

²² “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 30.

²³ “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 22-23.

²⁴ Prajak Kongkirati and Veerayooth Kanchoochat, “The Prayuth Regime: Embedded Military and Hierarchical Capitalism in Thailand”, *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 6, 2 (July 2018): 279-305, pp. 292 ff. and esp. pp. 294, 298-300. The National Strategy neither stresses nor elaborates on *pracharat*, but the five references to the term in the document do invoke it as a basis for Thailand’s development and as a framework for cooperation among various sectors; “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 4, 5, 8, 16, 44.

Further, considerations of space make a more detailed consideration of *pracharat* and its scope impossible here.

²⁵ Prajak and Veerayooth, pp. 293-294, 300.

²⁶ Prajak and Veerayooth, pp. 296-297, 300.

²⁷ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 27. Similarly, and in keeping with the times in Southeast Asia, the National Strategy calls for the sustainable development of cities, the countryside, agriculture, and industry that takes both architectural and artistic heritage and local identities and ways of life into account; “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 58-59.

²⁸ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 31.

²⁹ Communities are to work with security forces in countering cyber-threats, international crime, and movements of capital from abroad that may affect security. They are to monitor the performance of the bureaucracy; “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 15. (At various points, the National Strategy pairs community or communities with references to “the people” [*prachachon*], as in this passage, or to “families” or “the family” [*khropkhrua*]). Sustainable creative and cultural tourism is to promote “community economies” (*setthakit chumchon*); “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 27. Modern entrepreneurs are to develop the basic economy through “community enterprises” (*wisahakit chumchon*); “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 33. Communities are to serve as means for the achievement of good health and the enhancement of human resources; “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 41. The National Strategy also mandates the promotion of “a system of community justice” (*rabop yutitham chumchon*) and the use of communities in new systems of probation for law-breakers; “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 71. Local communities (*chumchon thongthin*) are to undergird the capacity of the organs of local government to which the state devolves authority. They are to play both a developmental role and a strategic role in the extension of public services; “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 67.

³⁰ “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 26, 54.

³¹ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 33.

³² “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 10, 44, 45, 48, 49, 50, 67.

³³ Craig Reynolds notes that, “while ‘community/*chumchon*’ can apply to both urban and rural communities, it is to the countryside, villages, and villagers that the term became attached. Sometimes the word ‘village’ is combined with ‘community’ to reinforce the rural dimension (*chumchon muban*)”; Craig J. Reynolds, “*Chumchon/Community in Thailand*”, pp. 286-395 in *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*, edited by Carol Gluck and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 290. The combination of “*chumchon*” and “*thongthin*” (or local) in the National Strategy has the same effect.

³⁴ “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 50, 51, 67.

³⁵ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 51.

³⁶ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 51.

³⁷ “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 36, 50.

³⁸ “*Yutthasat chat*”, p. 50.

³⁹ On the role of political parties in intermediation between state and society in the political thought of the Thai military, see Michael Montesano, “As Thai military holds on to power, a 1980 order by former PM Prem looms large”, *TODAY*, 6 June 2019 (<https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/thai-military-holds-power-1980-order-former-pm-prem-looms-large> , downloaded 10 July 2019). Puangthong Pawakapan, “*Moradok khong phon ek Prem: kankhayai muanchon chattang khong rat*” [The Legacy of General Prem: the expansion in the state’s organized masses], *The 101 World*, 4 June 2019

(<https://www.the101.world/heritage-of-prem-tinsulanonda/>, downloaded 12 July 2019), treats another crucial dimension of the military's socio-political vision and strategies.

⁴⁰ Reynolds, p. 291. Discussing the rise of the “community culture” (*watthanatham chumchon*) school or movement associated above all with Chattip Nartsupha, Reynolds, p. 301, argues that “community” has in Thailand “shaken off its postwar history in the bureaucracy of development to acquire decidedly Gandhian meanings”. The 2018-2037 National Strategy suggests that, at least as far as the Thai state and its military are concerned, this conclusion may be premature.

⁴¹ Reynolds, p. 291. Also see the discussion in Charles Keyes, *Finding Their Voice: Northeastern Villagers and the Thai State* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2014), pp. 106-107. Intriguingly, Prajak and Veerayooth, p. 301, note important role of the director-general of the Department of Community Development of Thailand's Ministry of Interior in the NCPO's *pracharat* initiatives. That involvement demands further attention.

⁴² Reynolds, p. 291. On this integrative function, also see Michael Montesano, “Book Review: *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* by Daniel Immerwahr”, *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 30, 2 (July 2015): 594-607, esp. pp. 604 ff.

⁴³ “*Yutthasat chat*”, pp. 14, 19.

⁴⁴ Puangthong R. Pawakapan, “The Central Role of Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command in the Post-Counterinsurgency Period”, *Trends in Southeast Asia* 17/2017 (https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TRS17_17.pdf, downloaded 11 July 2019), p. 7. This paper forms part of Puangthong's ongoing book project on the contemporary role of the ISOC, as does Puangthong, “*Moradok khong phon ek Prem*”.

⁴⁵ Puangthong, “The Central Role of Thailand's Internal Security Operations Command”, p. 26. On some of the continuities in this transition, also see Michael Montesano, “As Thai military holds on to power”.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Tan Hui Yee, “Concerns over Thailand's 20-year plan”, *The Straits Times*, 22 April 2017 (<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/concerns-over-thailands-20-year-plan>, downloaded 12 July 2019); “Thai parliament approves bill which critics say will prolong military role”, *Reuters*, 22 June 2017 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-thailand-politics/thai-parliament-approves-bill-which-critics-say-will-prolong-military-role-idUSKBN19D0TA>, downloaded 12 July 2019); Sheith Khidhir, “Is Thailand holding future leaders to ransom?”, *The ASEAN Post*, 11 September 2018 (<https://theaseanpost.com/article/thailand-holding-future-leaders-ransom>, downloaded 12 July 2019); and “20-year plan irreversible: PM”, *The Nation*, 27 September 2017 (<https://www.nationthailand.com/politics/30355356>, downloaded 12 June 2019).

⁴⁷ Suggesting another possibility, Puchada Sirivunnabood argues that tensions between the dictates of National Strategy on the one hand and the interests and priorities of parties in Prime Minister Prayut's coalition — or of influential factions of those parties — on the other may destabilize his government; Puchada Sirivunnabood, “Thailand's 2019 Puzzling Election and its Impact on Thai Politics”, ISEAS Thailand Studies Programme Seminar, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, 24 July 2019.

⁴⁸ For indications that this may already be happening, see, for example, “*Athibodi so tho chu lak pratya phophiang khapkhluan yutthasat chat su khwamyangyuen*” [Director-general of Department for the Promotion of Local Government holds to the principles of the philosophy of sufficiency economy to drive the National Strategy to sustainability], *Ban mueang*, 20 June 2019 (<https://www.banmuang.co.th/news/politic/154571>, downloaded, 11 July 2019); “*Pho do tang pao thamngan baep 'mue achip' mungsu ongkon 4.0*” [Department of Land Development sets the target of working like

‘professionals’ to become a 4.0 organization], *Deli niu*, 24 June 2019 (<https://www.dailynews.co.th/article/716498>, downloaded 11 July 2019); and “Pho mo chat prachum radom khwamkhit-hen to (rang) yutthasat pho mo 20 pi” [Ministry of Social Development and Human Security organizes meeting to mobilize views on (draft) 20-year ministry strategy], *Krungthep thurakit*, 24 June 2019 (<https://www.bangkokbiznews.com/news/detail/838739>). At the same time, and in conformity with constitutional requirements, the new Prayut government’s policy statement, released and presented to parliament in the fourth week of July, draws heavily on the National Strategy; Termsak Chalermphanupap, “Talking Past One Another in the Thailand’s Policy Debate”, *ISEAS Commentaries* 2019/64, 25 July 2019 (<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/medias/commentaries/item/10057-talking-past-one-another-in-the-thailands-policy-debate-by-termsak-chalermphanupap>, downloaded 5 August 2019).⁴⁹ That is, “Power of *Pracharat* Party”.

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