

**Thai Foreign policy adaptation in 2001-2006:
Theory and practise**

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Abstract

Investigating the drivers of change in foreign policy is important to understand how government foreign policy is established. Prior research has revealed some of the explanatory aspects of foreign policy change in international politics; however, much remains to be learned. Examination of foreign policy in Thailand throughout the post-Cold War period can help us understand these drivers of change. This paper specifically examines Thailand's foreign policy change in different policy areas such as foreign economy, security, and the regional perspective during the Thaksin government from 2001 to 2006. His substantive foreign policy goals are identified in relation to policy shifts, whereby previous policies were considerably replaced. By adopting a recently developed model to clarify the change, the mechanism of change is revealed to identify how changes occurred. The analysis reveals that external conditions of change such as influences of a great power like the US was found to significantly impact on pushing policy-makers to instigate successful changes in international security. Further, in terms of foreign economy, and regional perspectives, the influence of policy-makers' attitudes were highly powerful in directing the changes, regardless of the influence of domestic or external conditions of change.

Keywords: Change, Foreign Policy, Thailand

Introduction

The study of foreign policy change is an important subject. Being a young discipline with a narrow focus on the theoretical concept, many foreign policy scholars analyse where government foreign policies face new opportunities and constraints, and how governments respond to global change.

After the end of the Cold War, the world was in a period of change and revolution. The dramatic change in global politics has affected many states, especially their foreign policies. Debate regarding the features of change in foreign policy obviously centres on the question of why the state's foreign policy change occurred. The change steers us to consider how leaders can best decide to shift state's foreign policies. The shift may challenge states' capacity to deal with the complexity of international politics. An understanding of the phenomena of change in foreign policy therefore becomes an important element.

Although many scholars are keen to further our understanding of foreign policy change, the puzzle remains of how internal and external conditions influence the change. Mainly theoretical camps in international relations, referring to neo-realism (structural) and behaviouralism, have debated and provided various critiques, in terms of explaining the fundamental aspects on foreign policy change.

A realist approach was developed by Kenneth Waltz who simplified the realists' idea in assuming anarchy as the cause of conflict and uncertainty, due to the world as split in structure, powerful and coercive, and agents (Waltz 1979). It does not need to consider the behaviour of individual states, and it is not necessary to give a truly theoretical clarification of it. (Waltz 1979, pp. 71-72). So, the structural realists believe that the state is the central actor of studying international relations (Smith 1981). Although the key idea of structural realists' perspective on foreign policy essentially focuses on the influence of the international system or global structure on state behaviour, it provides limited explanation on internal features which becomes like "black boxes". The outcomes of state interactions regarding what states try to achieve in the external realm is a major thought of neo-realism, but it does not explain all elements of state behaviour (Rose 1998, p. 145).

Rather than the abstract of the state that appears on the structural realists' assumption, domestic conditions such as the governmental structures and the decision of leaders, relying on different perceptions of leaders, can direct state's foreign policy in shaping an international consensus (Kissinger 1966, p. 503). Rosati (1995) also states that shifting domestic politics can be a significant influence determining the sensitivity of change in foreign policy.

Consequently, studying foreign policy connects both the study of international relations and the study of domestic politics (Kaarbo et.al 2002, p. 2). Both external and domestic influences had brought many challenges to many states' foreign policy towards the change, including Thailand. An examination of Thailand's foreign policy can advance our understanding of foreign policy change.

Since post-Cold War, the interactions between domestic sources of foreign policy and international levels provides interesting insights, in relation to the processes of continuity and modification of Thai foreign policy to the dynamic of global change. The case study that is investigated in this paper is a period in which Thailand was governed by Prime Minister

Thaksin Shinawatra between 2001 and 2006. The paper seeks to examine an understanding of why and how the change in Thai foreign policy during his administration occurred. Due to complex roles of interplay between drivers of change and policy-makers' attitudes, changes in his foreign policies can be recognised in international security, foreign economic and regional policies. Therefore, it can be argued that change in international security was likely to happen when external forces played important roles, whilst it is also possible that policy makers' attitudes influenced changes in foreign economic and regional policies.

This paper is organised into four sections. The first section describes literature of foreign change, regarding the concept of change. The next section clarifies Thailand's foreign policy adaptation, consisting of the context of small states foreign policy change, policy-makers' attitudes on foreign policy change, potential conditions of change, and possible mechanisms of change. The third section examines the process of change that emerged in international security, foreign economic and regional policies respectively. The paper concludes by examining Thai foreign policy adaptation in 2001-2006.

Foreign Policy Change Literature

The first development in foreign policy change literature is examined by Goldmann's study in 1988 which examined the pressures influencing change and foreign policy continuity. He emphasized that foreign policy either will continue or change. Goldmann (1988, pp. 3-4) identifies three key causes of change in foreign policy which are: a change in environment, the impact of learning from feedback, and the shift in domestic politics. Additionally, he argues that the change is likely to happen when new governments come into power.

Furthermore, a significant and growing literature on influences of change – internal and external – such as economic, domestic political sources, as well as dramatic shifts in global and regional politics leads us to consider how they affect the change in state's foreign policies (Gustavsson 1999; Hagan 1995; Rosati 1995). For example, in Eidenfalk's study (2009) an initial understanding of conditions of change is presented that 'the change comes from the conditions of change that put pressures on and forces to key-policy makers to decide to facilitate a change'. His research findings provide good insight into domestic conditions that become major players to facilitate the change in Australian foreign policy towards East Timor and the Solomon Islands. Mazumdar (2011) also entirely presents that domestic forces such as the unstable coalition government, the role of provincial governments in international affairs, and the development of institutional system of foreign affairs have forced Indian's policy makers to redefine its foreign policy to be a traditional way. Yet, it hardly believes that there are not any influences from international conditions have led to the change in a grand strategy of Indian foreign affairs.

More explicitly, the combination of conditions of change such as weak bureaucracy, changes in party and public opposition, and external pressures possibly facilitate foreign policy change. An obvious research is early discovered by Volgy and Schwarz (1991; 1994) who provide great consideration for possible source of conditions towards the change in twelve case studies of Western Europe's foreign policy. They observe that five major 'webs of restraint', such as the bureaucratic web, the regime web, the resource web, the global web, and the regional web were likely to facilitate foreign policy change. Similarly, Atanassova-Cornelis (2010) offers her knowledge to express that the combination of conditions likely pushed Japan to refine its role

in the world politics. It can be observed from her study that the combination of a changed domestic politics and the external threat in the form of US alliance led to the shift in Japanese foreign policy in the post-Cold War period.

Other interesting work in the literature presented by Putnam (1988), examines that due to the change in domestic politics, the length of time involved in governments' propensity towards foreign policy change becomes a consideration. In the twelve cases of foreign policy restructurings, Holsti (1982, p. 13) mentioned that the timeframe for change is always varying depending on internal and external influences.

Analysis of conditions of change which direct to Thai foreign policy adaptation is therefore important and seems appropriate to be tracked. Thailand's foreign policy change is likely to occur because of a pressure of single domestic condition, single external condition, or multi-condition. Potential conditions will be added into the analysis by responding how conditions had determined the change occurred.

Another aspect that relates to the idea of foreign policy change is the analysis of policy-makers' attitudes. It can be drawn by some of the remarkable examples such as Hermann (1990); Kingdon (1995); and Walsh (2006). The policy makers reveal significant capacities to cope with the state's crisis by involving with the policy-making process towards the change. Blavoukos and Bourantonis (2009) argue that policy makers can manage foreign policy action, relying on their special skills, vision, and their leadership capacity. For example, the Howard government responded to the US's anti-terrorism initiatives after the 9/11 attack; this increased a stress, in terms of the security challenges for Australia's role in Asia-Pacific's great powers (Clarke 2008, p. 3). Reconsidering policy-makers perception/ attitudes is thus still an interesting feature of analysing foreign policy change.

As earlier discussed, we can summary that not only conditions of change can be solely explain foreign policy change, but also policy-makers' attitudes towards the change becomes an important element that needs to be add into an understanding of why the change in Thai foreign policy occurred.

In order to trigger the process of change in Thailand's foreign policy as a case study, possible mechanisms of change is significant to be examined. Two mechanisms of change – 'policy-makers' attitudes –led change and conditions-led change' – that are adapted from few important scholars such as Charles Hermann, J.K. Holsti, and Jakob Gustavsson, who work on theoretical perspective towards the change will be initially reviewed as follows. Both mechanisms can help us explore the process of change in Thai foreign policy during 2001-2006, as the original elements of my contribution.

Firstly, Hermann's (1990) paper entitled 'Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy', is widely recognised in the field of foreign policy change, and is the primary theory adapted for use in this paper. The reason for this is Hermann's model uses a clear framework that can help us to scrutinise the continual process of change in the orientation of Thai foreign policy history. It also brings us to investigate the possible cause of change and to analyse the level of change in Thai foreign policy.

Hermann firstly illustrates that 'foreign policy change' and foreign policy restructuring are similar. Based on his framework, the influence of change affects various foreign policy areas such as domestic politics, bureaucratic decision making, and cybernetics. He further develops his model from his literature view and labels the agents of change which are leader driven,

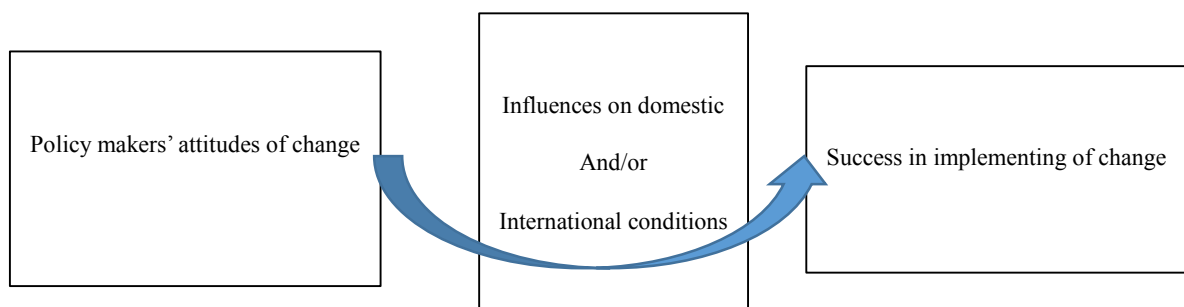
bureaucratic organizations, domestic circumstances, and external events. The rest of Hermann's study focuses on a range of phases of foreign policy decision making.

Moreover, Gustavsson's foreign policy change model (1999) demonstrates international and domestic factors do not create foreign policy change in a vacuum, but the prism of investigation is an individual leader's personal beliefs. The change will happen when new environmental stimuli challenge a leader's beliefs about his or her status quo foreign policy. Similarly Holsti's framework (1982), he presents the cause of change in foreign policy by creating independent variables, which are domestic, external factors, and background history and culture. Intervening variables consists of decision-makers perceptions, personalities, and attitudes, and the policy-making process. However, he implicitly considers the effects of bureaucratic politics, and systemic factors.

Based on above important reviews, there are two different types of mechanism of change which are condition-led change and policy makers-led change. These mechanisms can be examined as follows:

Policy-makers' attitudes-led change

The first mechanism, referring to policy-makers' attitudes-led change, is explained by the traditional process of change in foreign policy. Individual policy-makers strongly established their attitudes to change. The attitudes proceeded along the successful process of implementing the foreign policy change regardless of whether conditions were favourable to change.



Condition-led change

Secondly, the mechanism of condition-led change emphasises the influences of both domestic and/or international conditions on individual policy-makers' thought. Without the attitudes towards the change, policy makers were forced to facilitate the change by conditions that coerced them in light of serious situations or problems, leading to the successful process of foreign policy change implementation.



As per the aforementioned explanation, two relevant types of mechanisms of change will be analysed and investigated more in section three by responding to the relevant inquiries in this study which are: how the change occurred; what the Thai policy-makers attitudes towards the change were; and what conditions pushed the process of change. Next, the concept of foreign policy adaptation during the Thaksin government will be clarified.

Thailand's foreign policy adaptation

The prologue of studying Thai foreign policy is required to have a certain level of understanding of the historical background of Thai foreign policy. The context of Thai foreign policy as a small state will be reviewed in this section. Further, policy makers' attitudes towards policy adaptation in 2001-2006, including potential conditions of change will be examined.

Thailand: a small state foreign policy towards the change

When reviewing the literature on Thailand's foreign policy, one may consider how Thailand responds to the global shift and domestic influences. In terms of the scale, size, role, and power, Thailand can fit the characteristics of small powers, based on Pattman's explanation (1976, p.11) in a state's size relative to the global comparison; the standing of leaders in the world; and a state's strategic power towards its interest. As Baillie (1998) notes, many small states conduct different foreign policy choices and behaviour, relying on three factors: a country's particular context; their decision-making process and institutional framework; and their negotiation behaviour.

While examining Thailand based on the three categories above, there are no conventional views to support that Thailand can act alone or make a significant impact on the global system. The state is still regarded by other states, especially greater powers, due to its limited capacity. The state may work to enhance its power to overcome these weaknesses. Thus, Thailand can be justified as a small power or a small state in the international system.

The selection of Thailand as a case study, in terms of the analysis of foreign policy change is appropriate because it can contribute a more powerful understanding of how a small state can adopt its foreign policy as an effective instrument to overcome its vulnerability in the global system. By investigating Thailand's foreign policy adaptation, policy makers' attitudes becomes an important feature to help us consider what attitudes towards the change were.

Policy makers' attitudes towards adaptation in 2001-2006

The individual policy-makers' attitudes on Thailand's foreign policy change in 2001-2006 (referring to the Thaksin government, his Cabinet, and his political teams) likely impacted on facilitating the change. A limited number of individual policy-makers are focussed on in this paper to enable a more concise investigation. Thailand's policy makers publicly announced their attitudes towards the change, via policy statements, annual government reports, and interviews. These forms of evidence are used to illustrate the areas of policy attitudes, direction, and strategy in this paper.

Their attitudes towards the change can be seen by the policy statement and the annual government report that is developed prior to governing the state¹. Policy statements, resulting from major political campaign, are officially written by the Cabinets and relevant advisory teams who are experts in particular areas such as law, economy, politics, and security². The government's attitude is publicly stated showing their attitudes on adjusting Thailand's foreign policies or not. However, individual psychological motivations are too private and therefore not considered in this paper.

During the Thaksin government, attitudes towards the change in Thai foreign policy demonstrate a strong feeling of renewing Thai foreign policy, particularly in foreign economic and regional policies. Thaksin and his team demonstrated their attitudes on foreign economy, saying: 'we insist to shift Thailand's economy to be closer with other foreign countries, aligning with the concept of neo-liberalisation, in order to gain wider economic benefits' (Secretariat of the Thai Prime Minister 2004). Due to the concept of 'one-party and one-man rule' of a mainland Southeast Asia model, Thaksin's aspiration was to enhance Thailand's position in regional economic growth (Phongpaichit 2004, p. 2).

Potential conditions of change

Rather than reviewing the large literature of foreign policy change in international relations, examination of drivers of change in Thailand's foreign policy is essential. Sanitwongse's (1988, 2001) and Maisrikord's study (1992) generally reveal that an external condition such as the influence of greater powers, international organisations, and non-state actors directed Thailand to adapt and develop its foreign policy.

In this paper, the primary influence of the policy shift in the Thaksin government was the US pressure on Thailand's international security policy. As Storey (2011, p. 135) noted, Thailand shifted its role by following the US concept of counter-terrorism although the state initially announced its neutrality in response to the 911 terrorist attack. Similarly, Chayanam (2004) argues that Thailand changed its role to support America by sending troops to Iraq, to maintain good relations with the US.

By responding to what matters led the government to undertake Thailand's foreign policy adaptation in areas of international security, and foreign economy and the regional perspective during the Thaksin government, we can summarise that policy makers' attitudes towards the change, and a potential condition of change, the US pressure, significantly impacted on the change that took place. In order to investigate how the changes emerged, the process of

¹Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2007.

²Phone Interview a Thai legal officer, Bangkok, 2nd June 2012.

implementing successful foreign policy changes in various policy areas will be clarified in the following section.

Analyses of Thailand's foreign policy adaptation

Facilitation of change in Thai foreign policy during 2001-2006 was possible launched, based on the policy-makers' attitudes of change and a potential condition. This section aims to explain the way in which the Thaksin government processed the change in international security policy, and foreign economy and regional affairs.

International security policy

The Thaksin government governed the state from early 2001 (before the 9/11 attack). On 17 Sept 2001, Thaksin deemed that Thailand needed to redirect its perception on terrorism in South East Asia by supporting the US grand strategy, 'war on terrorism'. As he noted, 'we insist that terrorism is harmful as a matter of a global problem, we need to overcome. Thailand is pleased to collaborate with the US and other states to get rid of it' (Thai National Security Report 2001).

Although Thaksin provided his government's attitude on counter-terrorism, the attitude on impeding terrorism was not presented, especially when his government formally proclaimed Thailand's foreign policy statement in early 2001. It can be argued that policy makers' attitudes towards policy shift impacted less on Thailand's foreign policy adaptation in international security policy than the influence of an external condition, being the US anti-terrorism initiatives.

After the 9/11 attack, under the Bush administration, the gravity of America's war on terrorism essentially pushed Thailand to be concerned about the increasing security ties between Thailand and the US. The shift in Thailand's international security position resulted from the US effort prevent worldwide terrorism.

Thailand had shifted its position in international security from strictly neutral to extremely supportive of anti-terrorism action. Initially, Thaksin officially visited Washington in December 2001, and Thailand took its first action to cooperate with US anti-terrorism by offering troops, such as a military engineering battalion and five medical teams to join in the Afghanistan war (Chambers, 2004, p. 466). Furthermore, when Thailand hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leader's meeting in 2003, a major challenge Thailand faced was to ensure the safety of the visiting leaders. Some APEC members were concerned over their safety in Thailand just prior to the summit, due to the Bali bombing and American invasion of Iraq. Meanwhile, Bush used the opportunity of the APEC meeting in Thailand to pursue his anti-terror agenda as a widespread campaign in anti-terrorism among Asian and APEC membership leaders (Funabashi 2007).

Regionally, Thailand promoted its counter-terrorism to support Washington. Thailand collaborated with other ASEAN countries to sign the Agreement on Information Exchange and Establishment of Communication in a Declaration on Terrorism in 2002 (Rose and Nestorovska 2005, p. 186). In addition, the arrest of Hambali, the leader of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) who was suspected in the Bali bombing of 2003 emerged in Ayutthaya, in Thailand (*The Straits Times* 2003). His arrest was a display of Thailand's support for the US counter-terrorism initiatives. In addition, Thailand deployed troops to join the Iraq war in 2003.

As per the analysis above, the mechanism of change in Thailand's foreign policy that occurred during the Thaksin government was 'condition-led change', due to the strong influence of American anti-terrorism. The influence of the US exerted pressure on Thailand, leading to its present standing in relation to counter terrorism in global and regional politics. Policy makers were forced to facilitate the change by conditions that coerced them to resolve a serious situation or problem. Eventually, the Thaksin government successfully shifted its international security policy. Next, facilitation of changes in foreign economic and regional policies will be examined.

Foreign economic and regional policies

Thailand strengthened its economic policy toward its neighboring countries in coordination with domestic regional development during the Thaksin government. The policy makers attitude was important as Thaksin, using his business background, influenced policies regarding wide-ranging economic zones, regional economic cooperation and special border economic cooperation.

Since Thaksin moved into power in early 2001, the policy makers' attitudes during his term were influential in shifting foreign economic and regional policies, whereas conditions of change seemed less powerful in driving change. Their attitudes towards the change formally presented in an official policy statement which was formed since his political campaign late 2000. As he notes 'I wish to see Thailand firmly stand in Southeast Asia as a leading country where we can collaborate well with neighbours when they need our aid' (Shinawatra 2001).

In terms of investigating Thaksin's foreign economy, Thaksin planned to propose an 'inward-looking' policy regarding Thailand's economy, due to the desire to restore Thailand's economy following the 1997 Asia financial crisis. His policy action focus on improving the domestic situation through foreign economic policy initiatives. Thaksin and his team developed extensive economic ties with foreign countries in the form of free trade agreement (FTAs), aligning with the concept of neo-liberalisation (Secretariat of the Thai Prime Minister 2004).

Dent's research (2010, p. 57) reveals that the origin of significant free trade agreements was initiated under the period of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006). The country had embarked on free trade projects by dealing with influential trade partners, due to Thaksin's foreign economic-speed ideal. In the closing phase of his term in April 2006, Thailand conducted free trade agreements with Australia, New Zealand, Bahrain, China, India, one pending with Japan, and was in negotiation with the USA, Peru, and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (Sussankarn 2006, p. 322). Therefore, Thaksin and his Cabinet succeeded in their goals to develop FTAs and pursue foreign economic policy initiatives.

In the regional area, Thaksin and his team kept pursuing their strong attitudes towards policy adaptation. The Thaksin government's initiative – 'forward engagement' became a mindset to generate the idea of Asian community promotion throughout the region, as well as portraying the policy as economic-led regional strengths. This initiative aims to link the levels of regional groupings especially in Asia (Secretariat of the Thai Prime Minister, 2002, p. 17). It can also be evidenced by various regional cooperations such as the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD³),

³ The ACD consists of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

and the Ayeyawady Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS⁴). Thaksin was of the view that there were many layers of regional cooperation; however, the connection between them was fragile, and that Thailand may possibly bridge that gap (Busbarat 2012).

ACD was established in 2002 under the belief in multi-cooperation diplomacy that can create wide ranges of policies. As Thaksin suggested (2005, p. 12), “the realization of the ASEAN Community and promote the ACD would enhance confidences and relations among the countries of Asia, as well as being an important foundation towards the establishment of an Asian Community”. This sharp vision led to Thaksin’s aspiration of the Pan-Asian regionalism.

Moreover, strengthening foreign relations in various dimensions e.g. neighbouring countries relations was strategised in the form of the ACMECS. The root of the ACMECS initiative came from Prime Minister Thaksin who proposed it during the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) meeting on 29 April 2003 in Burma (Sucharithanarugse 2006). Thaksin and his team promoted it as significant goal of regional cooperation, in terms of the economic cooperation with neighbouring countries under the Bagan Declaration 2003. As Thaksin declared, the “Thai government wish to encourage many countries to have a strong integration to follow an action plan of the ACMECS, so that growth, including collective interests are likely to be increased” (Secretariat of the Thai Prime Minister, 2002, p. 42).

At the first ACMECS Ministerial Meeting in 2004, Thailand announced that the budget had approved US\$2.5 million for 42 immediate projects, and intended to inject another US\$250 million into development schemes (Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). Thailand additionally proposed a contract farming arrangement for its neighbors in order to grow economic crops such as cassava and sugar cane. This increased investment in rural areas of Indochinese countries so that their famers could earn more stable incomes (Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). Under this contract, linkages with regional and global value chains and markets through Thailand such as China and Vietnam would be established (Zola, 2007).

Thus, during the Thaksin government, the shift in foreign policy adaptation in foreign economic and regional policies can be identified in the form of the ‘policy-makers’ attitudes-led change’ mechanism. Whether conditions of change were influential or not, policy-makers’ attitudes significantly influenced the instigation of the changes. Next, Thaksin’s foreign policy change will be summarised.

Conclusion

In the post-Cold War period many researchers have been prompted to explain why governments instigate their foreign policy adaptation. From the theoretical perspective taken in this paper, a question we have asked is why foreign policy adaptation during the Thaksin government took place. Answering the question leads to the conclusion that being as a small state in global politics based on its power dimension, Thailand sought to stand and shift its position into peace and stability by using its foreign policy as an instrument. In terms of international security policy, an external condition – the US influence was influential in pushing the Thaksin government to facilitate the change. It was also evident that the type of mechanism was

⁴ The ACMECS consists of Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam

‘condition-led change’. This mechanism revealed that the change in international security policy emerged because of a strong force of the US anti-terrorism agenda. The policy-makers’ attitudes obviously came later, aligning with the pressure from Washington. In foreign economic and regional policies alteration, it can be illustrated that policy-makers’ attitudes in the Thaksin government significantly impacted on these changes, regardless of the influence of domestic or external conditions of change. Strong attitudes to shift foreign economic and regional policies eventually led to the successful change took place. The analysis of mechanisms of change in areas of foreign economic and regional areas can be examined in the form of ‘policy-makers’ attitudes-led change’. In conclusion, it is doubtful that whether the change in Thai foreign policy will take place or not. For a further study, it will become an imperative survey what patterns of Thai foreign policy adaptation are.

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