

Revisiting Thailand's Aggression Against Cambodia, 1953–1962: An Expected Utility Theory of War Initiation

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ABSTRACT

The expected utility theory of war initiation is used to examine Thailand's bellicosity against Cambodia between 1953 and 1962 in order to evaluate whether Thai political decisions to start a war-threatening conflict were rational. An expected utility model analysis using EUGene, the data management utility software, suggests that Thailand's decisions to initiate war with Cambodia were rational in accordance with the expected utility decision rules. Hence, despite being counter-intuitive, Thailand's aggression against Cambodia as well as Thai foreign policy in general during the specified period is not unreasonable.

Keywords: Thailand, Cambodia, Preah Vihear temple, expected utility theory of war initiation, EUGene

INTRODUCTION

“We Thai bend like the bamboo but we do not break,” a Thai senior official once said to a foreign diplomat (Singh, 1979, p.123). Thailand's foreign policy behaviour functions as a barometer for the shifting balance of political power in Southeast Asia. By rapidly aligning itself with the strongest actor in the region at all times,

the bamboo-in-the-wind tradition has been long acknowledged as the achievement of Thai diplomacy that preserved the kingdom from external invasions (Singh, 1979). In addition, it has signified the acumen of Thai leaders, as Chachavalpongpun (2010, pp.63-64) pointed out, that “Thai diplomacy has been inherited through time in the hands of kings, warriors and generals,” and therefore, admiration for it has been utilised by leaders as an ingredient of Thai nationhood and nationalism in order to attain political goals, and sometimes to serve their own personal aspirations. Without the participation of the public, it can be argued that nationalism is a

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seed that could grow into a catastrophe, from disagreements through interstate conflicts to great wars (Hinsley, 1972; Schrock-Jacobson, 2012) as it made foreign policy irrational (Hudson, 1972; Layne, 2006). Because of their anomalous policy, some nationalist dictators have been accused of being insane; Muammar Gaddafi is a good example (Mandel, 1984). Likewise, Thailand's military dictators, Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram and Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, particularly the former, have more often than not been called insane. Plausibly, they might be as accused; however, it can be argued that the foreign policy under such nationalist dictatorships, even that leading to the aggression against Cambodia, initiated in 1953, and the subsequent armed conflicts, is not necessarily irrational.

This paper examines whether the Thai foreign policy from the 1950s up until the early 1960s was rational. In particular, the article probes if the two despots' political decisions to initiate war-threatening conflict with Cambodia between 1953 and 1962 were reasonable. This research adopted the expected utility theory of war initiation, formulated by De Mesquita (1981), to evaluate these decisions scientifically. Then, to process the data, EUGene, the data management utility programme developed by Bennett and Stam (2000), was employed to compute Thailand's expected utility in starting a war with Cambodia in the specified period. The hypotheses of this research were:

The nationalist and dictatorial nature of the Thai regimes did not inexorably lead to

an irrationality of Thailand's foreign policy toward Cambodia during the designated period.

The expected utility scores of all war-threatening conflicts initiated by Thailand between 1953 and 1962 were more than zero; hence, the political decisions were based on rationality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Thailand's foreign policy during the 1950s, like that of other developing nations, was shaped by nationalism and irredentism (Viraphol, 1976), particularly during the regimes of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram and Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat. This was based on the self-image of Thai nationhood: the chauvinist cult of the 'Greater Thai Empire' superimposed on the idea of a golden land (Suwannaphum) (Bunyavejchewin, 2013; Busbarat, 2012; Chachavalpongwan, 2005; Suwannathat-Pian, 1996). The chauvinist image of the nation not only shapes how Thais see themselves but also how they view their neighbours: "Southeast Asia is composed of small nations. [...] Siam [Thailand], being situated in the centre of the group and the only independent country so far, naturally will be looked up to as an 'elder brother' nation" (Tarling, 2006, p.71). That might be the reason why many scholars interpreted Thailand's belligerent policy towards Cambodia between 1953 and 1962 as a product of Thai nationalism (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2005; Bunyavejchewin, 2013; French, 2002; Kasetsiri *et al.*, 2013; Walyapechra, 1975; Winichakul, 2008).

Although there are a number of studies on the Thai-Cambodian conflict over the Preah Vihear temple, they mostly emphasised the forces of nationalist sentiment and historical legacy, rather than explained the conflict via the lens of international theory. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is no study using the theory and models of international politics to explain the conflict between these two states. This leads to a gap in research, which becomes obvious when researchers tend to blame “unreasonable patriotism” (Kasetsiri *et al.*, 2013, p.10) as being an irrational motive leading to war. Kasetsiri *et al.* (2013, p.1) stated that “Thai-Cambodian relations...have been marred by hatred, mutual suspicion, and even wars. The hostility that has existed in this relationship has largely been sustained by the force of nationalism on both sides.” Nevertheless, this research contends that a political decision to initiate war-threatening conflict, even when driven by nationalist fire, is not necessarily irrational in itself. Rationality, De Mesquita (1981, p.31) argued, “simply implies that the decision maker uses a maximizing strategy in calculating how best to achieve his goals.” In other words, “The rationality assumption tells us nothing about how actors form their preferences but rather shows how actors behave, given their preferences.” In this sense, rational and normal behaviour are not the same: “Most normal people are rational, but some rational people are not normal.” A decision-maker like Adolf Hitler, for instance, is “completely rational though aberrant and abhorrent.” Likewise, decision-makers

like Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram and Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat are certainly rational, notwithstanding their chauvinistic idiosyncrasy.

This study assumed that all decision-makers are rational; therefore, conflict does not occur unintentionally. The premise of rationality allowed the researcher to examine Thailand's bellicose behaviour using the scientific theory of international conflict and war. In particular, the expected utility theory of war initiation, pioneered by De Mesquita (1981), was applied in this research to enable the testing of hypotheses in accordance with the scientific tradition. The theory and its richness, as Woods (1996, pp.21-22) pointed out,

*shed all complex historical and social details from the analysis, and enable us to arrive at a range of outcomes and alternatives, including some which are counter-intuitive. A second strength [...] is that assumptions and ‘intuitions’ are not buried within the analysis but are, to some extent, laid out as *a priori* assumptions, enabling others to assess or alter them. A third strength [...] is that it enables prediction [...] Finally, because [it] attempt[s] prediction [...] the results [...] can be readily and transparently tested against actual outcomes which they are supposed to have predicted.*

Thus, the theory offers a scientific, as well as new, explanation, which is a missing link in the existing literature on the Thai-Cambodian conflict primarily dominated by historical research. The expected utility theory is delineated in the next section.

The Expected Utility Theory of War Initiation

The expected utility theory originally emerged as an explanatory and forecasting model of microeconomic behaviour based on logical deduction and is generally accepted as the cornerstone of microeconomics because of its predictability and logical elegance (De Mesquita, 1989). In the field of international politics, the expected utility theory was first introduced by De Mesquita as a rational-choice model for investigating the initiation of interstate conflict and war, in particular, the indispensable conditions in terms of material costs and benefits for initiating war. The expected utility theory of war initiation, therefore, is the hypothesised model to “discriminate between those who might expect a gain from war and those who would rationally expect to suffer a net loss if they started a war” (De Mesquita, 1981, p. 46).

De Mesquita (1989) portrayed the kernel of the expected utility model as follows:

1. Decision-makers are rational in that they can rank options as to their preference.
2. The preference order is transitive.
3. Decision-makers recognise the intensity of their preference, with that intensity of preference constituting utility.

4. Decision-makers consider possible options of attaining favourable ends with reference to the product of the probability of achieving possible outcomes and the utility related with the outcomes.
5. Decision-makers always opt for the option with the topmost expected utility.

Thus, like decision-making in a microeconomic model, the expected utility model assumes that decision-makers will make an effort to achieve the maximum available net gain, based on collating cost and benefit of options given the risk levels associated with specific outcomes, through probability calculation (Geller & Singer, 1998).

According to De Mesquita (1980; 1981), the expected utility theory of war initiation consists of five major assumptions:

1. States are viewed as ‘black boxes’ or unitary actors in that their foreign policies are the product of transitive preferences determined by a strong leader, the single decision-maker; accordingly, decisions to initiate interstate conflict and war are the product of unanimous decision-making calculated by a single decision-maker.
2. Decision-makers are rational expected utility maximisers and the maximising behaviour of the leaders is conditioned by two assumptions: 1) one state’s utility for another state is a positive function of the extent to which both states share the same policy view; therefore, states’ utilities are dictated by the congruence

of foreign policy intentions between states; and 2) one state's probability of victory in conflict with another state or alliance is a positive function of the relevant state's capabilities collated with those of each other relevant power. For this reason, a strong state has a higher probability of positive results against a weaker state than against a stronger one.

3. Differences in decision-makers' tendencies toward risk-taking have an effect on their decision-making. In this model's usage, risk-taking refers to a situation in which an actor knows the probability of achieving favourable outcomes before manoeuvring a course of action.
4. Decision-making is affected by uncertainty concerning the behaviour of other states. Uncertainty, in this context, refers to a situation in which an actor must make a decision when the probability of success of a course of action is unknown.
5. State's power diminishes over distance. Geographical distances impact the extent of a state's power, despite the fact that armed forces can be moved to operate in other regions of the world. The diminution of national power, as indicated by Kenneth Boulding (cited by De Mesquita, 1981), is caused by at least four factors: military operation over a long distance 1) generates organisational and command problems; 2) endangers military morale; 3) induces

domestic disagreement; and 4) reduces the strength of soldiers and military equipment.

With regard to assumptions (3) and (4), the model recognises that decision-makers with the same outcome preferences may make decisions differently due to the sensitiveness to risks and uncertainty (De Mesquita, 1980).

In expected utility calculations, cardinal utilities must be assumed according to De Mesquita (1980). Additionally, to formulate expected utility decision rules, the model assumes that utility values are attached to the perception of the level of agreement on policy options: the perception of perfect agreement on policy options is shown in a utility score of +1 and the perception of perfect disagreement in a utility score of -1.

These are the expected utility theory's assumptions. The theoretical foundation of the expected utility model requires a closer look as well. However, only the formulation of the equation (De Mesquita, 1981) applied by EUGene in computing the expected utility of war initiation (Bennett & Stam, 2000) is outlined here. In his expected utility model, De Mesquita (1980; 1981) classified state actors who could have an impact on war-threatening conflict initiation into seven types as follows:

1. The potential initiator (henceforth called *i*);
2. The potential defender (henceforth called *j*);

3. Those states whose policies are perceived by i as friendly towards i , but not towards j (henceforth called k_1);
4. Those states whose policies are perceived by i as friendly towards j , but not towards i (henceforth called k_2);
5. Those states whose policies are perceived by i as friendly towards both i and j (henceforth called k_3);
6. Those states whose policies are perceived by i as neither friendly towards i nor towards j , but as friendly towards other third parties (henceforth called k_4);
7. Non-aligned states whose policies are perceived by i as neither friendly towards i , nor towards j , nor towards other third parties (henceforth called k_5).

When decision-makers consider the expected utility of war initiation, the anticipated gains and losses significantly depend on three important factors: 1) the relative capabilities of the initiator and the defender; 2) the value the initiator places on changing the defender's policies in comparison to the changes in policies that the initiator must accept if the defender wins; 3) the relative power and interests of third parties that could intervene in the war (De Mesquita, 1981).

In a bilateral war-threatening conflict, the war initiator believes that the positive results of war provide an opportunity to change the defender's policies to align them with the initiator's own national interest (De Mesquita, 1981). In this sense, the differences in policies leading to war

show the maximum utility of change the initiator wishes to achieve. If U_{ii} is the utility that the initiator i attributes to its most desirable policy option (therefore $U_{ii} = 1$), the maximum change in the policies of the defender j is the difference between the policies i demands j to execute and j 's existing position: that is, $U_{ii} - U_{ij}$ where U_{ij} is less than or equal to U_{ii} . On the contrary, the utility of i 's defeat in war is $U_{ij} - U_{ii}$ (i.e. the war ends in favour of j).

Apart from calculating the current relationship with j , i also analyses the estimated future of its relations with j . If i postulates that the relationship will improve i.e. j 's policies will move closer to the position demanded by i the existing conflict may be moderated. This can be indicated as follows:

$$\Delta(U_{ii} - U_{ij})_{t0 \rightarrow tn} < 0$$

Conversely, if i expected the worsening of relations, then the current conflict may be intensified. This can be indicated as follows:

$$\Delta(U_{ii} - U_{ij})_{t0 \rightarrow tn} > 0$$

As a consequence, De Mesquita (1981) defined i 's expected utility of a bilateral war with j $[E(U_i)_b]$ as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} E(U_i)_b = & [P_i (U_{ii} - U_{ij}) + (1 - P_i) \\ & (U_{ij} - U_{ii})]_{t0} + P_{(it0)} [\Delta(U_{ii} - U_{ij})]_{t0 \rightarrow tn} \\ & + (1 - P_i)_{(t0)} [\Delta(U_{ij} - U_{ii})]_{t0 \rightarrow tn} \end{aligned}$$

[Equation 1]

where

$U_{ii} = i$'s utility of i 's favoured perception of external affairs; $U_{ii} = 1$ by definition;

U_{ij} = i 's utility of j 's policies which can deviate between 1 and -1;

$(U_{ii} - U_{ij})_{t0}$ = i 's perception of the expected gains from winning a bilateral conflict with j so that i can redirect j 's policies in a way that serves i 's interest i.e. it is i 's calculation concerning the differences between the policies i wants j to execute and i 's view of j 's existing policies; hence, it is assessed at time t_0 ;

$(U_{ij} - U_{ii})_{t0}$ = i 's perception of the possible loss when failing in a bilateral conflict with j where j then can align i 's policies with j 's interest. This term, like the previous one, is evaluated at time t_0 ;

$\Delta(U_{ii} - U_{ij})_{t0 \rightarrow tn}$ = i 's perception of the expected shift in the difference between i 's view and j 's policies over the period from t_0 , the present time, till t_n , a future time. This term indicates i 's perception of expected future policy gains from j under the assumption that there is no war;

$\Delta(U_{ij} - U_{ii})_{t0 \rightarrow tn}$ = i 's perception of the expected shift in the difference between the possibility that j would change i 's policy view in the future and the current policies of j . This term indicates i 's perception of expected future policy losses to j over the period time t_0 to t_n under the assumption of no war;

P_i = i 's current perception of the probability of victory against j in a bilateral war-threatening conflict; and

$1 - P_i$ = i 's current perception of the probability of failing against j in a bilateral war-threatening conflict.

It should be noted that as $(U_{ii} - U_{ij}) + (U_{ij} - U_{ii}) = 0$, the model treats a bilateral war as a zero-sum game; thus, the result is solely determined by the relative capabilities of the initiator i and the defender j (De Mesquita, 1981).

Nevertheless, more often than not decision-makers do not calculate only the strength and interests of their opponent. Rather, the plausibility that third parties may intervene both directly and indirectly in the conflict is also factored in the calculation. Thus, apart from the bilateral conflict equation, De Mesquita (1981) proposed two more equations that represent a multilateral war i.e. scenarios where third parties are involved in the conflict. Nevertheless, third parties' contributions in aiding the initiator or the defender vary by the third parties' expected utility of each side's victory. Decision-makers therefore have to assess to what extent third parties are anticipated to contribute to the victory or defeat of the initiator or the defender. The second and third equations represent i 's calculation of the value the third party k is expected to contribute to support i 's or j 's policies. i 's expected utility from a scenario where each third party k aids the policies of i is as follows:

$$E(U_{ik})_{k1} = (P_{ik}U_{iki} + (1 - P_{ik})U_{ikj})_{t0} + P_{ikt0}(\Delta U_{iki})_{t0 \rightarrow tn} + (1 - P_{ik})_{t0}(\Delta U_{ikj})_{t0 \rightarrow tn}$$

[Equation 2]

i 's expected utility from a scenario where each third party k supports j is as follows:

$$E(U_i)_{kl}^2 = [(1-P_{jk})U_{iki} + P_{jk}U_{iki}]_{t0} + (1-P_{jk})t_0 \rightarrow t_n + P_{jkt0}(\Delta U_{iki})t_0 \rightarrow t_n$$

[Equation 3]

where

U_{iki} = i 's perception of the utility to be gained from each third party actor;

U_{ikj} = i 's perception of the utility to be gained by j from each third party actor;

P_{ik} = i 's perception of its probability of victory against j assuming that third party k supports i ;

$1-P_{ik}$ = i 's perception of its probability of losing against j assuming that third party k supports i ;

P_{jk} = i 's perception of its probability of losing against j assuming that third party k supports j ;

$1-P_{jk}$ = i 's perception of its probability of victory against j assuming that third party k supports j ;

$\Delta U_{ikit0 \rightarrow tn}$ = i 's perception of expected future changes in the utility i can expect to gain from k ;

$\Delta U_{ikj t0 \rightarrow tn}$ = i 's perception of expected future changes in the utility j can expect to gain from k ;

t_0 = the time at which i is estimating the expected utility;

$t_0 \rightarrow t_n$ = the time period for which i estimates expected changes in the utility;

$\sum_{l=1}^5 E(U_i)_{kl} = i$'s overall expected utility from a multilateral war with j assuming that i perceives all third parties kl (where l includes third parties of types 1 to 5 as mentioned above) as potentially supporting i ;

$\sum_{l=1}^5 E(U_i)_{kl} = i$'s overall expected utility from a multilateral war with j assuming that i perceives all third parties kl (where l includes third parties of types 1 to 5 as mentioned above) as potentially supporting j .

To sum up, equation 2 indicates i 's evaluation of the utility anticipated to be derived by each third party k from i 's victory or defeat as well as the probability of i 's failure with k 's support. It also represents i 's calculation of the value anticipated if k joins i . Equation 3 indicates i 's evaluation of the utility anticipated to be derived by each third party k from j 's success or failure as well as the probability of i 's success even if i supports j . It also represents i 's calculation of the value anticipated if k joins j . Consequently, i 's calculation of its net expected value from the assisting decisions of all third parties k equals (De Mesquita, 1981):

$$\sum_{l=1}^5 E(U_i)_{kl} = \sum_{l=1}^5 E(U_i)_{k_l 1} - \sum_{l=1}^5 E(U_i)_{k_l 2}$$

[Equation 4]

Thus, the expectation of support or hostility is dependent on k 's relative utility for i and j . If the expected utility of k for i is above zero, i supposes that k would tend

to aid i rather than j . Conversely, if the expected utility is below zero, i supposes that k would tend to aid j rather than i . If the expected utility is zero, k is expected to be neutral. However, even if the contemplated expected utility of k for i is negative, this does not mean i will not initiate war. Rather, i will rationally go to war if the expected utility of a bilateral war is positive and still greater than the contemplated expected utility of k for i (De Mesquita, 1981).

Taking all the equations together, i 's total expected utility in initiating a war against j under the condition of no uncertainty was defined by De Mesquita (1981) as the following equation:

$$E(U_i) = E(U_i)_b + \sum_{l=1}^5 E(U_i)_{k_l}$$

[Equation 5]

This equation shows the total gains and losses i expects for starting a war against j , where the overall anticipated value of the war is determined by the relative capabilities in the bilateral war and dependent on the tendency of third parties' involvement in the war. However, the latter is neither necessary nor adequate as a basis for i to determine the benefits from the war against j , while the former is also not sufficient as a decisive factor to determine i 's projection, although it is essential. Hence, according to the equation, three scenarios are possible for i in war: 1) fighting against its opponent on its own; 2) fighting with the support of third parties; 3) fighting in the face of opposition

from third parties (De Mesquita, 1981). By combining all equations, i can estimate whether the initiation of war is likely to return gains or losses. Hence, the expected utility decision rules for i , the war initiator, are as follows:

1. If $E(U_i) > 0$, the war is expected to provide benefits; initiating war therefore is rational.
2. If $E(U_i) < 0$, the war is expected to cause losses; initiating war therefore is irrational.
3. If $E(U_i) = 0$, i is indifferent insofar as the material estimate is concerned.

Although the expected utility model of war initiation is a precise tool for analysing and predicting war through the deductive axiomatic modus operandi, the model is not flawless and has limitations. The expected utility of war initiation, for example, merely indicates if minimal essential conditions have been met. The scientific nature of the model is also an important limitation in that it does not allow the model to illuminate the rich details and composition of incidents. For this reason, the expected utility model of war initiation only aims at scientifically 'explaining' the war-threatening conflict, not insightfully 'understanding' the mind of decision-makers. Finally, and importantly, the application of the model is integrative. Therefore, it can be complementary to other qualitative methods applied in conducting research. In other words, it can serve as a missing link in qualitative research.

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Even though the application of the expected utility model of war initiation is mathematically complex, the method used in this paper was simple. The research employed the data management utility software EUGene (Expected Utility Generation and Data Management Program) developed by Bennett and Stam (2000) that allows the computation of the expected utility value.

According to Bennett and Stam (2000, p.182), EUGene aims to “[serve] as a tool to facilitate and simplify the process of merging and creating data sets in international relations, especially data sets created with the directed dyad-year as the unit of analysis.” EUGene also “serve[s] as a computational tool for the creation of expected utility data to apply the so-called expected utility theory of war across time and space [...] by directly operationalizing key utility and probability concepts” (Bennett & Stam, 2000, p.189). EUGene therefore enables users to:

1. construct data sets with different units of analysis;
2. choose variables for inclusion in final data sets from a variety of input sources;
3. easily select subsets of data based on common criteria;
4. make clear the variety of critical but often unstated assumptions about the construction of key dependent variables and the inclusion of problematic cases that go into the construction of

international relations data sets, and force users to make informed decisions about these items;

5. facilitate replication by providing a single programme for data set creation that will produce the same results for all users.

In addition, the software is free and available for download at <http://www.eugenesoftware.org/>.

EUGene allows users to designate the variables to be contained. The software consists of more than 60 variables from substantial international relations data sets. For example, the data sets of the Correlates of War Project (COW), such as the COW Militarized Interstate Dispute data (COW MID), and the expected utility’s computation based on the methods of *The War Trap* (De Mesquita, 1981), equation 5 in this article, are part of the data bank (Bennett & Stam, 2000). Further details concerning the variables can be found in the documentation section of the software’s website.

Using EUGene for the case study, a directed dyad-year data set was created, specifying Thailand and Cambodia as a dyad and the period of 1953 to 1962 as a specified range. Thailand and Cambodia were labelled country 1 and country 2 respectively. Apart from prerequisite variables automatically selected by the software, the needed variables were specified as follows:

1. The expected utility scores (tau-based) were selected to compute the values of the expected utility of war initiation

for each directed dyad-year. The computation follows equation 5, that is, the generating scores are the total of the bilateral and multilateral expected utility elements.

2. COW MID was selected as the population of cases to provide the output data set because COW is widely recognised by scholars as the most comprehensive database on war.

It should be noted that there is no third party actor intervening in the dyadic conflict; therefore, more advanced techniques for assessing intricate conditions were not applied.

After generating the expected utility scores and associated data, the data were interpreted using the expected utility decision rules to determine whether Thailand's decisions to initiate war-threatening conflicts against Cambodia between 1953 and 1962 were rational, regardless of other elements in the decision-making. The results for Thailand, the war initiator, were compared with the historical evidence, primarily diplomatic history, to explain the behaviour of the Thai state during the years of conflict, as being especially counter-intuitive or seemingly anomalous.

RESULTS

To examine the expected utility scores of Thailand in initiating a war-threatening conflict with Cambodia from 1953 to 1962, the researcher followed the aforementioned methods and procedures. Table 1 shows the results: Thailand's expected utilities in a war

against Cambodia throughout the specified time are all above zero.

In 1953, when Thailand started occupying the Preah Vihear temple, its expected utility was 0.439814, which increased to 3.149374 the following year. The hostility level created by Thailand was the use of force, with the occupation of territory being the highest action, while the hostility level of Cambodia's response, in contrast, was no militarised action. In 1958 and 1959, the expected utilities of Thailand and Cambodia were 3.208554 and 3.191159 respectively. The hostility level reached by Thailand, the initiator, was a display of force and being on alert as the highest action. For Cambodia, the hostility level in response to Thai belligerence was war. In 1961, the conflict continued and Thailand and Cambodia's hostility levels were both demonstrations of force. For Thailand, its expected utility dropped to 2.13669 and being on alert was the highest action it performed. Lastly, in 1962 Thailand's expected utility was 2.469712 when it again initiated a war-threatening conflict with Cambodia. This time, the hostility level it reached was the use of force and the highest action was clash. The hostility level of Cambodia's reaction likewise was the use of force.

Hence, the results suggest that Thailand's aggression against Cambodia in the period from 1953 until 1962 was perfectly rational in accordance with the expected utility decision rules.

TABLE 1
Thailand's Expected Utility Scores for Initiating a War Against Cambodia

year	euwtT1v2a	cwongob	cwinitc	cwhost1d	cwhost2e	cwkeynumf	cwhiact1g
1953	0.439814	0	1	4	1	1225	14
1954	3.149374	1	0	4	1	1225	14
1955	3.218512	0	0	0	0	0	0
1956	3.217309	0	0	0	0	0	0
1957	3.21497	0	0	0	0	0	0
1958	3.208554	0	1	3	4	1226	8
1959	3.191159	1	0	3	4	1226	8
1960	2.24023	0	0	0	0	0	0
1961	2.13669	0	0	3	3	1227	8
1962	2.469712	0	1	4	4	1228	17

NOTE: Variable names and descriptions are as follows:

- euwtT1v2 is an expected utility, Thailand vs. Cambodia, by War Trap methods (Tau).
- cwongo is an MID that was ongoing at the beginning of the respective year, based on 'dyadisation' of the COW MID data set to 1992, and dyadic MID data from v3.0 from 1992+ (0 = no, 1 = yes).
- cwinit is MID Initiation: Thailand initiated an MID with Cambodia in this year (0 = no, 1 = yes).
- cwhost1 is the relevant hostility level reached by Thailand in an MID with Cambodia in the respective year (0 = No hostility [no MID], 1 = No militarised action, 2 = Threat to use force, 3 = Display of force, 4 = Use of Force, 5 = War).
- cwhost2 is the relevant hostility level reached by Cambodia in an MID with Thailand in the respective year (0 to 5, as in hostlev1).
- cwkeynum is the number of the MID for which all other MID variables are reported in dyad-year data (0 = No MID, 1225 = Occupation of Preah Vihear Temple, 1226 = Preah Vihear Temple dispute I, 1227 = Preah Vihear Temple dispute II, 1228 = Preah Vihear Temple dispute III).
- cwhiact1 is the highest action by Thailand in dispute (0 = No militarised action, 1 = Threat to use force, 2 = Threat to blockade, 3 = Threat to occupy territory, 4 = Threat to declare war, 5 = Threat to use CBR weapons, 6 = Threat to join war, 7 = Show of force, 8 = Alert, 9 = Nuclear alert, 10 = Mobilisation, 11 = Fortify border, 12 = Border violation, 13 = Blockade, 14 = Occupation of territory, 15 = Seizure, 16 = Attack, 17 = Clash, 18 = Declaration of war, 19 = Use of CBR weapons, 20 = Begin interstate war, 21 = Join interstate war).

ANALYSIS

Thailand's belligerent actions against Cambodia between 1953 and 1962 examined in this paper support the second hypothesis. As the results have shown, all political decisions by Thailand's decision-makers, Phibun and Sarit, initiating war-threatening

conflicts with Cambodia had expected utilities of more than zero under a risk-taking condition: that is, both men knew of the possibility of positive outcomes. Favourable upshots expected by Thai leaders are neither unrealistic nor irrational. This expectation was derived from the fact

that Thailand in the 1950s was a loyal ally of the United States and also a spearhead in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, an anti-communist military alliance led by Washington. As a US ally, Thailand's small border conflicts with its neighbour were not supposed to be of much interest to the great powers, not only the US but also the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Hence, military intervention by outside powers was unlikely, if not impossible. In addition, even without support from the US, Thailand's military power was much stronger than Cambodia's; therefore, Thailand could afford to invade Cambodia on its own in order to fulfil its demands. As a result of strategic calculations which were almost flawlessly reasonable, Thailand did not hesitate to use force against Cambodia in the period from 1953 to 1962.

Because Thailand's strategic calculations for war initiation against Cambodia were rational, as this study proved, Thai leaders, to some extent, were not well aware of any negative outcomes. Thailand's overwhelming confidence was exemplified by its agreement to present the case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). As Nuechterlein (1965, p.250) commented, "So sure were Thai leaders that their case would be upheld that they did not seriously consider the possibility that the court might rule against Thailand. This is partly owing to the fact that, as a major ally of the US in Southeast Asia, Thailand expected the verdict of the ICJ to be trivial in practice, if not in favour of Thailand. Therefore, when the court on

June 15, 1962, ruled in favour of Cambodia and the Thai government was faced with the obligation to surrender the disputed land to Cambodia. [...] [T]he situation was [...] distasteful and humiliating for Thailand." Thailand under Field Marshall Sarit was shocked and irritated by the verdict. Rather than complying with the judgment, Thailand reinforced its presence around the vicinity of the Preah Vihear temple. In addition, the plausibility of war was also discussed in Bangkok. However, under pressure from Washington and other western powers, Thailand eventually, but reluctantly, relinquished the temple and withdrew its troops from Cambodian soil (Bunyavejchewin, 2013).

The question then arises: what went wrong in Thai political decisions? The decisions, as the analysis shows, were entirely rational. This includes even the decision to reinforce the Thai troops' presence in the disputed area after the ICJ delivered its verdict. I argue that there was nothing wrong with Thailand's political decisions to initiate war against Cambodia even when it did violate the verdict of the court. Nevertheless, what was at fault was Thailand's anticipation of the US' possible political reactions in response to a war between Thailand and Cambodia. Even though Thailand was the US' major ally in Southeast Asia, a US decision to support, or even to ignore, Thailand's belligerence against Cambodia could lead to a catastrophes, including a direct confrontation with Communist great powers. In particular, the expected utility of

several possible scenarios was seemingly hazardous for the US because unlike Thailand, the US had to face uncertainty in a situation possibly leading to a war trap.

For Washington, turning a blind eye on Bangkok's increasing presence on the Preah Vihear temple issue was like giving the green light to Thailand's hostility toward Phnom Penh; such hostility bore the possibility of a full-scale war. This derived from the fact that Thailand shared a number of war-prone state attributes, for example, the regime characteristics and the capabilities. Regarding the former, a high degree of government centralisation was more likely to create a war participant (Geller & Singer, 1998, pp. 52-56). In addition, where hardliners dominate leadership, there is a greater tendency of stepping into war (Vasquez, 1993, p.155). This trait was evident in Thailand from 1953 to 1962, during which two military dictators, Phibun and Sarit, ruled the country with absolute centralised power in their hands. This is particularly true in the case of Sarit as Saritocracy "developed into an explicit personalist and direct dictatorship without any aura of constitutional foundation" (Chambers, 2013, p.159).

Concerning the latter attribute of war-prone states, national capabilities, especially military might, have strong and consistent relationship with the frequency of war as well as war initiation. A high level of militarisation or military spending, especially, has a positive correlation with foreign conflict (Geller & Singer, 1998, pp.56-60). During the pro-American

and anti-communism period in Thailand between 1953 and 1962, the volume of US military assistance to Bangkok had increased significantly; in May 1962, 6,800 American troops were even temporarily stationed in Thailand to assist the right-wing regime in South Vietnam (Chambers, 2013, p.65). With the increasing militarisation and the absolutist power in the hands of the junta, there was a greater tendency for Bangkok under Sarit to initiate war against Cambodia under the postulation that Washington would ignore, if not assist, its action.

As the analysis has demonstrated, it is not an exaggeration to say that Bangkok had a chance to win the war, even if going into it alone. If Bangkok had chosen to go to war after the delivery of the verdict, either with or without Washington's support, its decision would have been reasonable according to the expected utility theory of war initiation. However, this postulation would have dragged Washington into direct militarised conflict that might have pushed Washington to face the worst-case scenario: a confrontation between Washington and the two Communist giants, namely, Beijing and Moscow (Bunyavejchewin, 2013, p.23). Thus, allowing war between Bangkok and Phnom Penh to occur would have been an unnecessary risk for policy-makers in Washington to take. According to an American diplomat, Washington in fact "hoped to improve relations with Cambodia [...] while continuing to support Thailand and South Vietnam as allies not against Cambodia but against the Communists" (Bunyavejchewin, 2013, p.23).

In short, notwithstanding its flawed anticipation of the US reaction, Thailand's political decisions to initiate war-threatening conflict with Cambodia between 1953 and 1962, as proven scientifically by this study, were rational in accordance with the expected utility decision rules. It is true that the Thai decision-makers failed to read Washington's regional strategic calculus, especially the collation of costs and benefits based on the probable scenarios, correctly and accurately. Nevertheless, Bangkok's misleading expectation of Washington's response does not equate with the irrational decision of Thai dictatorship. For this reason, the outcome supports the first hypothesis of the research that the nationalist and dictatorial nature of Thai regimes did not make Thailand's foreign policy irrational.

CONCLUSION

This paper started with the question whether Thailand's decisions made by two military dictators, Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram and Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, to initiate war-threatening conflict with Cambodia from 1953 to 1962 were rational based on a scientific study of international conflict and war. The paper adopted the expected utility theory of war initiation to examine the decisions of both military juntas always accused of being arbitrary, nationalist and foolish. In other words, their decisions were assumed to be irrational.

Using the data management utility programme EUGene to calculate the expected utility value, the paper showed how the expected utility theory of war

initiation can offer a counter-intuitive explanation of foreign policy behaviour of Third World states, particularly states ruled by authoritarian leaders. As the case of Thailand's aggression against Cambodia in the 1950s and the early 1960s suggests, counter-intuitive actions, such as war initiation, are not necessarily irrational as long as the probability of gain is greater than loss.

The expected utility theory of war initiation, nevertheless, is not flawless. It does have limitations. By excessively focusing on the material or military capabilities, for example, the expected utility theory can downgrade the roles of other variables and disregard normative variables that are not empirically quantifiable.

In conclusion, despite its limitations, this paper argues that the expected utility theory of war initiation can contribute significantly to research on conflict and war in general, and particularly on war-threatening conflict in the Third World. The theory offers a scientific explanation grounded on a scientific methodology rarely used by the existing literature mostly dominated by historical research. Lastly, but most importantly, if there is any implication suggested by the finding of this research, it is to remind that it is important to reconsider the foreign policy of those we call insane, from Kim Jong-un's North Korea to Bashar al-Assad's Syria and Vladimir Putin's Russia. Their decisions to initiate conflict that could lead to war, looked at from a different perspective, may not be insane at all.

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