The concept of "development" and the Thai government's policies to develop the Northeast, 1951-1966

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Abstract

After World War II, modernization theory was developed and became a dominant idea, employed by the United States to oppose communism and expand capitalism. The Thai and US governments saw the importance of developing the Northeast region of Thailand, because of both the region’s “natural disadvantages” and its strategic location bordering Laos, Kampuchea, and Vietnam. The Phibun government (1951–1957) launched programs to develop water resources and diversify crops, but initially had no overall plan. During the Sarit regime (1957–1966), a more structured plan emerged under the concept of “development for national security.”

This article examines the concept of development in Thai society focusing on the policies to develop the Northeast between 1951 and 1966. During this period, “development” for the Northeast was based on the project to upgrade impoverished third world countries, as determined by American economists. This definition was founded upon an economic perspective in which growth and equity were the key indicators. The governments of third world nations had to plan policies to accelerate their economic growth and productivity in order to become a “developed” country. At the same time, this development was employed by the United States and Thailand as a means to strengthen Thailand as an anti-communist force in Southeast Asia during 1951–1966.

The concept of “development”

Development under modernization: the economists’ perspective

Coralie Bryant and Louis G. White argue that the concept of

development among economists during the 1950s and 1960s was heavily influenced by modernization. These economists tended to claim that industrialized societies were much more civilized than societies clinging to tradition and agriculture.

Such economists became important economic planners in Western society. Modernization became the main concept employed by Western economists to plan the industrialization of other regions.

There were two approaches for industrializing a society. The first approach was to encourage mass production which would, together with the development of the trade goods needed to feed an industrial system, lead the society to industrialization.

The second approach was to create freedom of labor. This was the main factor that tempted rural laborers, who used to live an agricultural way of life, to join the industrial process. These laborers in rural areas had a high potential for becoming a resource for industry.

The perspective of these economists inspired the rulers of rich industrialized countries, such as the United States, to present their societies as role models for growth. The concept also inspired poor countries to industrialize.

*Defining “development” upon underdevelopment*

Since World War II, the debate on “development” has provoked painful questions about values, techniques, and choices. It raises queries about the nature of a “good society,” as well as the problem of who decides on society’s content and course. Because these are large and difficult problems, it is easy to lose them in generalizations, or to use the term “development” as a euphemism for change, modernization, or growth. “Development” has been “defined” for the countries of the world. In the *World Book Encyclopedia*, it states that:

Underdeveloped country, sometimes called developing country, is any one of the world’s poor, or “have-not” nations. A typical underdeveloped nation has a low national income, a shortage of food, and few sources of power other than people or animals. The average annual income in underdeveloped countries is about $125 per person. This compares to an average of about $1,200 in
developed countries, and more than $3,100 in the United States. Most underdeveloped countries have an increasing population, chiefly because death rates are decreasing and birth rates remain high. These population increases put new pressures on scarce resources. Physical capital, such as machinery and efficient transportation systems, is scarce in underdeveloped countries. So is social capital, such as good education and health systems and stable government. Disease, illiteracy and inadequate equipment keep agricultural and commercial production low. These factors are most harmful in rural areas, where most of the people live. The people depend on one or two main crops, and are in serious trouble when these crops fail. Richer nations are helping some underdeveloped countries conquer poverty. But three-fourths of the world’s people still live in underdeveloped countries.²

Most of the countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are defined as underdeveloped countries. Thailand has been defined as “underdeveloped” too.

This definition of development became a key concept of the anti-communist policies of the United States during Harry S. Truman’s presidential term. In 1949, in his inaugural speech, Truman introduced his Four Point Program, which aimed to provide aid to under-developed countries.

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas...make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life.³

The announcement to give assistance in order to ward off communism reflects the fear that underdeveloped countries, which were primarily poor rural economies, could be easily seduced by the leaders of communist regimes such as the Soviet Union and China. At that time these two countries were trying to extend their power into Europe and Southeast Asia.

The Korean War and Vietnam War between 1949 and the 1960s made the United States more aware of the threat of communism. The United States considered Thailand to be a strategic defense against communism in Southeast Asia, since Thailand shares borders with Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.
The Thai government's policies to develop the Northeast

So the Thai and United States governments cooperated to develop the Northeast of Thailand, which was at that time inferior in terms of both resources and development compared to other regions, and, as such, was considered to be a risk to both national and international security.

The relationship between Thailand and the United States: the concepts of “development” and “security”

The relationship between Thailand and the United States began in 1831 in terms of diplomacy and trading. After World War II, the United States, faced with a dwindling number of Asian allies and the deteriorating situation in Vietnam and China, was more than willing to form a close relationship with Thailand. In 1950 Thailand and the United States became even closer. Thailand’s leader at that period was Field-Marshal Phibun Songkhram (hereinafter, Phibun); the United States President was Harry S. Truman. The United States granted economic aid to develop Thailand. Most of the projects were aimed at developing the Northeast, the critical area because of proximity to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam which were falling to communist insurgency. Ambassador Phillip C. Jessup was sent to investigate the situation at the beginning of 1950 in order to find out the needs of the countries in the region to help strengthen the potentiality of their military and economies. Later on, a second working group, led by Allen R. Griffin, was sent to Thailand to initiate assistance programs to prevent the “loss” of the Southeast Asian region as had happened in China.

In June 1950, the Korean War began with a US invasion. The situation affected the Thai–US relationship, and the two countries became closer friends. Educational assistance was supplied to help develop the country and strengthen international political security among Southeast Asian countries. The government led by Phibun decided to send 4,000 troops to Korea under UN command. In September 1950, Thailand and the United States agreed on several mutual contracts, namely: an educational exchange under the Fulbright program; an agreement on economic aid; and supply of military equipment and training to the Royal Thai Army.

“The Monarchy and the nation will be destroyed, if the
communist subversion were to invade the kingdom," warned Edwin F. Stanton\(^5\) in 1951. This warning was made to the government during the war for independence in Vietnam and Laos. The United States believed the fundamental factor pushing the two countries to be free was that they were backed by communist-led Chinese and Russian armies. At the same time, in 1952 the United States changed administrations to a government led by Dwight D. Eisenhower, an even stronger anti-communist than Harry Truman. He announced his containment policy against communism invasion, as well as offering help in the form of economic assistance and military equipment for countries fighting communist guerrillas. Thailand’s Northeast region bordered on Laos which was under the control of the communist Vietminh army. The Northeast region was bound to become embroiled in this situation. This led to the plan to develop the Northeast in 1953 under the mutual military assistance package. A US army base was established in Bangkok, later called the Joint United States Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG), to provide both economic aid and security assurance. In 1953 assistance in ground transportation was provided and the main highway from Bangkok to the Northeast region was constructed. This was a part of the Northeast Emergency Development Project\(^6\) planned to generate the following: road construction, irrigation, education, forestation, public health (hospital construction and drug manufacturing), industry, fisheries, livestock, and relocation of Vietnamese immigrants from the Northeast to the South.

The government’s policy in this development plan shows the concept of “development” and “security.” Also it was rooted in the United States’ international policy for Thailand to become an anti-communist bastion in the Southeast Asian region.

The aid to upgrade the country’s economic situation was made in a statement of the US budget estimates for the fiscal year 1952, with a brief overview of Thailand’s economy and the expected plan of assistance to achieve the objectives of both nations:

Thailand’s resources are substantial and increasing. It has a good credit rating and has received IBRD loans. There is nevertheless an urgent need for technical assistance, accompanied by moderate
grant aid to help secure prompt and practical application of all resources available to the Thai economy.

Thailand’s economy is based on the production of food, which engages the activities of 90 percent of the working population. Despite relative prosperity in Asian terms, most Thai live at or near subsistence level. Their productivity is greatly restricted by wide incidence of malaria and other diseases. Their access to markets is severely limited by inadequacy of transportation. The assurance of regular crops is lacking because droughts and floods are insufficiently compensated by modern irrigation. Their food processing, mining and other industries are handicapped by inadequate electric power. The (aid) program in Thailand in FY 1952, as in FY 1951, is chiefly directed toward helping find remedies for a number of these situations.

While Thailand receives, in the FY 1952 proposal, the smallest grant of any Southeast Asia country, this aid covers equitably the requests and need of the Thai Government for such aid, supplementing the utilization of its own resources and IBRD loans. The socioeconomic improvement that can be achieved through the aid program will tend to sustain the present intimate political alignment with the United States. The stability, cooperation and economic progress thereby induced could well provide a clear example to all Southeast Asia. Moreover, this joint effort will create more rice for deflect areas and more tin and tungsten for the free world generally.... Though small, Thailand is a staunch and stable outpost of the free world in a threatened and turbulent area.

This statement reflected the United States positive view of Thailand’s economic situation, and its belief that Thai government’s policies could help initiate development by increasing the export of rice and minerals, and by moving towards industry, through investments in irrigation and transportation.

Economic development focused on increasing the production of rice, and developing impoverished villages. The United States sent economists to Thailand to lecture on the ideas and concepts of industrialization, the fundamental belief of economists during the 1950s. The total income of the population was used as the indicator of development to judge when the country would “take off” to become a “developed’ country.

A major Thai economist of this era, Sanoh Unakul, referred to
Since 1950, the year the National Economic Council was founded with its main function to analyze and do a research on the general economic condition, the Council has appointed a committee to generate the country's economic plan. This will be used as the criteria to consider the budget proposal for investment which is dramatically increasing. It is the first objective job done by this national council and it is the first step to economic development planning in the future.

In 1951 the government appointed a "Mutual Security Agency" (MSA) with responsibility to liaise with the United States on the economy and education. This was in accordance with the Thai-US agreement on Cooperation on Economic and Education signed in the same year.

According to Sanoh Unakul, the National Economic Council and the Mutual Security Agency used both the government's budget and foreign monetary aid and loans for development. These agencies analyzed the economy in more depth than had been done before. Officials had the opportunity to experience the analysis of economic development programs. Nonetheless, the system was fragmentary. Projects were not coordinated with one another. Implementation was not well planned. Clear objectives were not set for either the overall economy or specific sectors. Some major projects needed long-term operation, such as the Northeastern Irrigation System Development and the Northeastern road construction, but were handicapped due to the lack of long-term planning, and a yearly budget estimation leading to uncertainty in implementation. Even though the government increased the budget for agriculture development each year, the results were modest.

However, when the government acknowledged its antiquated governmental system and the natural disadvantages hampering the improvement in the economic growth of the country, Phibun laid down policies to confront these problems. In 1956, the government requested that the World Bank send representatives to survey the country's economic condition and issue a report that would be used as a guideline to modernize the bureaucratic system and to develop natural resources. This modernization reflected the influence of the concept of development underlying the Thai-US relationship.
Between July 1957 and June 1958, the World Bank survey commission carried out research on Thailand’s economic situation. The period coincided with a coup d’état where power was transferred from Phibun to Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat. The survey commission produced a report entitled *A Public Development Program for Thailand*.10

The report mainly contained suggestions for a national economic development plan. The report also called for institutional changes to promote economic development. A coordinating agency was needed to operate the program. The report also highlighted problems and potentialities in each region of the country and suggested solutions to develop each region. The Northeast, of course, was the first priority to be developed.

In conclusion, the definition of development was revised, dependent upon the world situation and relations between Thailand and the United States. The concepts of “development” and “security” in the 1950s and 1960s involved policies to modernize the government system. The twin aims of development planning were to overcome natural disadvantages,11 and to increase political security. These aims were applied to the Northeast.

**Policies to develop the Northeast, 1951–1966**

*Overcoming natural disadvantages*

The Northeast of Thailand has always been disadvantaged owing to its geographical characteristics. The main problems are water shortage and soil infertility. Agriculture in the region was mainly for household subsistence. Under the new development policy, government aimed to promote the expansion of agricultural area and increase the agricultural output.12

Only 22 percent of land in the Northeast was under cultivation (see Table 1), while twice that area was estimated as available for cultivation.13 Rice cultivation requires the retention of water. Rainfall in the Northeast is almost the same as the central and northern regions, but the soil in the Northeast is mostly loamy sand, unable to retain water and lacking in minerals.14
Table 1: Land exploitation in the Northeast of Thailand, 1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land</th>
<th>1,000 rai</th>
<th>percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land in cultivation</td>
<td>22,585</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest and grazing land</td>
<td>64,165</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swamps and lakes</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
<td>17,269</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>104,415</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Division of Agricultural Economics, Ministry of Agriculture, 1961.\(^\text{15}\)

In addition, much land is in low-lying areas near rivers, and sometimes becomes flooded during the rainy season, but cannot hold the water for cultivation when the rainy season has passed. This resulted in farmers being reluctant to grow crops in these low-lying areas even though floods and drought were not regular occurrences.\(^\text{16}\)

Table 2: Irrigation in the Northeast in 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Project Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lumtakhong Project, Nakhon Ratchasima</td>
<td>Water storage and water supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thong Samrit Project, Nakhon Ratchasima</td>
<td>Water storage and water supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Huai Saneng Project, Surin</td>
<td>Water storage and water supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Huai Namman Project, Loei</td>
<td>Water storage and water supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Huai Luang Project, Udon Thani</td>
<td>Water storage and water supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Baan Toom-Baan Tiew Project, Maha Sarakham</td>
<td>Flood control (dike construction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Thong Saengbadan, Roi Et</td>
<td>Flood Control (Dike Construction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Mekong Project, Nong Khai</td>
<td>Flood Control (Dike Construction)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Royal Irrigation Department, Irrigation Development in the Northeast and Lamtakhong Development, p. 5\(^\text{17}\)

Government had launched an irrigation scheme for the region in 1939 (Table 2), with five projects for water storage and supply, and three for flood control through dike construction. However, all of the projects were suspended two years later due to the war, and only restarted in 1948.\(^\text{18}\) In 1951, there were twenty-seven reservoir
construction projects in fourteen provinces in the Northeast (all except for Sakon Nakhon). The director-general of the Royal Irrigation Department, Chuchat Kambhu, stated the rationale for these reservoirs as follows:

The Royal Irrigation Department proposed the policy in September 1949 on the grounds that: 1) we are trying to distribute irrigation in all regions in order that farmers can grow crops sufficiently for local consumption. Basically, the population should increase 2 percent each year; 2) the project of expansion on rice productivity up to 2,000,000 tons for exportation means the remaining amount left from local consumption...in the Northeast.... I have been on the trip to inspect the Northeast region in 1939, 1940 and 1941. I think that there should be construction of small reservoirs. After asking FAO and ECAFE to survey, they have all agreed. So, I have proposed the project to the prime minister. He has proposed this project to the National Economic Council and received the positive principles on construction of the tank.... and when I visited the Northeast in the beginning of 1950 together with His Excellency, we were asked by the District Chief to inform the citizens.... later on we shall construct the tanks...because when we reserve water in small reservoirs, we can collect some water to use during the drought and feed the cattle during summer.¹⁹

Clearly these projects were designed to reduce the natural disadvantages of the region in order to promote the modern export-oriented economy. However, the construction of reservoirs was not very successful. On 29 March 1954, the cabinet received a report on water shortage in the Northeast. Phibun went on a trip to inspect the situation and called for a brainstorming to find solutions.²⁰ The meeting assigned the Ministry of Interior, Royal Irrigation Department, Public Works Department, and Department of Agriculture to generate projects to solve the problems.²¹ The cabinet also discussed diversification of crops including beans and sesame, and assigned the Ministry of Commerce to overcome problems of marketing such new crops.²² Between 1951 and 1957, there were also plans to promote jute, cotton, and tobacco²³ which dramatically expanded to replace rice during the 1960s.

But development of irrigation was inadequate. In 1956–57,
government became concerned about mass immigration into the city of Bangkok from the Northeast. Seeing this as a national problem, the government appointed the Northeast Affairs Committee to provide various forms of assistance to the Northeastern people immigrating to find a career in Bangkok, assistance to farmers failing to harvest the rice to find independent work, and permanent assistance to the Northeastern people to have a normal career and a comfortable living as they deserved.24

The World Bank's 1957 survey made specific recommendations on the Northeast as follows.

The restoration of crop growing in Isan could be a special problem for this region infamous for its arid lands. In fact, there is enough rain in the region; but, in the rainy season, it is not suitable to grow rice, the major crop of the region, because rice requires an abundance of water. Also, the nature of the soil, water resources and characteristics of the land in this region limit the effectiveness of the irrigation for growing rice that requires efficient water supply. Isan needs to change the way of growing crops by reducing rice growing and increasing other crops that can grow with a limited amount of water and the natural moisture in the soil from the rain. Moreover, raising livestock can replace rice. All kinds of agriculture may become popular and successful.25

After Phibun was ousted in a bloodless coup on 16 September 1957, the Revolutionary Party government led by Field-Marshal Thanom Kittikhachon viewed the Northeast as its primary target for projects to address natural disadvantages and the lack of economic development through water schemes, roads, industry, cooperatives, markets, education, and community development.26

In 1962, the government of Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat drew up a Northeast Development Plan 1962–1966 with the following rationale:

His Majesty the King has decreed the National Economic Development Plan aiming to improve economic development must be more rigorously implemented and in return provide Thai citizens with a sufficient and comfortable living. Subsequently, I have considered that the Northeast of Thailand is important to the economy, politics, and military strategy. The region deserves improvement to achieve equity with other regions in the
The Thai government's policies to develop the Northeast

kingdom. On several occasions in my trip to inspect the region, to monitor the life of the people, I have seen with my own eyes that the Northeast is deficient in two necessary factors: the insufficiency of transportation and the water shortage in general. Often, there are floods in the rainy season and drought in the summer. This causes failure in harvesting rice and other crops. So, I believe that improving the Northeast is not only an essential but also an urgent task which must be implemented as soon as possible.27

In sum, Phibuns's government's policies to develop the Northeast reflected the concept of overcoming the natural disadvantages which were an obstacle to the nation's economic growth. At the same time, development was seen as important for political security. This combination led to the promotion of "economic development for security" under Sarit's regime.

The development of political security under Phibun, 1951–1957

Since the end of World War II, the Northeast had become an important area for political strategy in the Southeast Asian region, as a result of the US containment policy against communism. As a result, the political situation became an essential factor in planning policies to develop the Northeast.

Table 3: Members of parliament elected in 1952

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party or Leader</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field-Marshal Phibunsongkhram</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pridi Phanomyong (the left)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Phibun's government (1951–1957)29 faced opposition from politicians from the Northeast. This trend of regional politics had begun since the 1930s. By 1940, northeastern MPs cooperated to demand greater benefits for their region. As a result, several northeastern politician leaders were murdered in 1949 and 195230 to reduce the political disturbance to the government. Phibun executed a silent coup d'état in November 1951 to clean out the
cabinet and regain favor with the people before a new election in February 1952.

Table 3 shows that leftist supporters of Pridi Phanomyong, opponents of the government, were elected to be the people’s representatives as members of parliament. Most of them were northeastern politicians. They demanded government help overcome the natural disadvantages of the Northeast. The major northeastern politicians included Thep Chotnuchit (Si Saket) and Klaew Norapati (Khon Kaen). Both called for the government to remain neutral in international politics. At that time, Phibun had declared Thailand as an American ally against the rise of communism in the region. Phibun saw these politicians as a threat to national security, and believed they had a secret relationship with the Vietminh. A memo written by officials working in the Northeast recorded the movement of the opposition politicians:

From the investigation of the Police Department, it is clear that lately there have been abnormal movements both inside and outside of Isaan. It is said that the Northeast has been neglected. The government does not take good care of the region nor help relieve difficulties. When considering the situation in detail, it is essential to take preventive action as appropriate... in this case, I think...it is appropriate to send the military and police to train on the border for the sake of publicity.

This memo revealed the weakness in the political stability of the government. Later in 1952, the government passed an Anti-Communist Act, not only to encourage the Thai-US relationship, but also to get rid of the opposition politicians. The government also put more emphasis on military and police operations, especially in 1956–1957.

There was mass immigration into the city, Bangkok in 1957 due to a severe drought. The immigration worried the government and became a major social issue headlined in newspapers. Phibun’s government appointed the Northeast Affairs Committee to manage assistance to the farmer immigrants with a budget of 53 million baht to develop the Northeast and solve this specific situation. But Phibun was ousted by Sarit’s coup before the policy was implemented.
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Table 4: Government budgets in 1956 and 1957 (million baht)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1956</th>
<th>1957</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Interior</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Industry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Mutual cooperation</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pitubhum Weekly, p. 18.

In sum, during Phibun's government, plans to develop the Northeast failed because of their complexity, because of confusion between economic and security objectives, and because of political instability.

Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat's revolutionary regime, 1957–1966

After the government of Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat's Revolutionary Party took over the nation on 21 September 1957, the policies to develop the Northeast were continued. Field-Marshal Thanom Kittikhachon served as prime minister from January to December 1958. In February, Thanom went to the Northeast to survey the natural disadvantages and the performance of the previous government's policies to develop the region, in order to design a Northeast Development Plan in the future. This survey trip may have been considered as politically correct as there had been a coup d'état. Also, it may have been a bid to gain political popularity.

The political situation was critical in the Southeast Asian region. Communism had succeeded in Vietnam. In Laos, a coalition government was set up in 1954 with support from the communists in accordance with the Geneva Agreement. The situation affected the Thai-US relationship because the United States reduced its assistance to Thailand. There was thus less budget to develop the economic infrastructure in such areas as transportation, agriculture, industry, education, and public health. Many projects begun in the Phibun era required continued funding. In the meantime, there were questions about the policies to develop the economy in the Northeast from both government and opposition MPs.

In August 1958, several northeastern MPs, both government
and opposition, were included on a trip to visit China and the Soviet Union. Sarit denounced these politicians. On 21 October 1958, Sarit ousted Thanom through another coup, and ordered the arrest of those politicians as “communists.” Sarit continued Phibun’s policy of labeling opposition politicians as interested in communism. The hidden agenda was that the government wanted to encourage the United States to maintain its aid to Thailand and return to being an ally of anti-communism. This agenda succeeded when the government tried very hard to eliminate communists in the Northeast. Khrong Chandawong was arrested on May 1961, accused of being a separatist revolutionary, and sentenced to death. Sarit made a report to the King on the situation in the Northeast, especially Khrong Chandawong’s case:

1. The Northeast of the Kingdom is a region packed with a condensed population. Most of the provinces have more than half a million inhabitants. Some have more than 1 million. The number is increasing rapidly, more rapidly than in other regions. People in the Northeast have their own dialect and traditions as others do in the North. But the land in the North is far more fertile. People in the North are better able to earn their living while people in the Northeast are hardly earning a living.

2. People in the Northeast have never experienced invasion or battle in their history as they have in other regions. People in the North, in central Thailand or in the South have fought against Burma shoulder to shoulder in the past. People in the Northeast have always been far from the battle. Therefore, people in the Northeast have not had the opportunity to be part of a battle like Thais in other regions. Because of this reason, the characteristics of the Thais such as industriousness, bravery, loyalty, and harmony are quite low in people in the Northeast. People tend to be less industrious; they feel content with their daily lives. These characteristics make them easily led into misconceptions.

3. The Northeast is the most critical area for communism because there has been communist subversion in the area since the battle between Indo-China and France. Ho Chi Minh has also been staying secretly in the area for quite a while. Communism subversion is spreading to these suspected detainees; some of them with a low educational background can talk about dialectic communism. I, for this reason, am afraid that if the Kingdom of Laos were under the communist guerrillas, the
invasion of communists into the Northeast would be a most difficult situation to prevent.

4. Simply, the number of people sharing the same language, the same traditions, and genetically related to the people in the Northeast is about 2 million; less than one quarter of the population in the region. They could have the opportunity to found a kingdom, to invite the King to succeed to the throne, to have a government, and to have an entity named the Kingdom of Laos. This could encourage the separatists to believe that if merely 2 million people could have an independent kingdom, why could 4 million in the Northeast not separate for another independent kingdom. The people could even merge with the Kingdom of Laos. For this reason, the issue of separatism in the Northeast is not really new. It has been around for some time.

These aforementioned factors should receive close attention. I, myself, have closely monitored development in the region. Actually, the Northeast has received the same attention as the other regions have. Comparing the number of roads constructed, the Northeast has the highest. In the period of the assembly, the northeastern, so-called Isaan, MPs were the most powerful group receiving a considerable proportion of the budget claimed to improve the region. Under this government, as I have been aware of the importance and the critical situation of the Northeast, I myself have paid regular visits to the region, more often in some years. I have appointed the Northeast Development Committee, chaired by myself, to monitor the development in the area. Road construction has gone very fast; irrigation operates more effectively, now that the projects on dam construction for hydropower electricity generating plants have been initiated. Some projects have even been proposed for international loans and are under construction on my initiative.

This report to the King, describing the condition of the Northeast, helped to define a new concept of development. It shifted towards governmental and national security, the same concept that other countries of the free world claimed in order to secure aid. This definition of development was clearly stated in Sarit's speech as Supreme Commander on the occasion of the academic year commencement ceremony of the Army War College, second semester of the 1960 academic year at the Royal Thai Army Auditorium on 4 May 1961.
The enemies of the Kingdom nowadays are not appearing as troops marching on the battlefield as in the ancient wars. Rather, the enemies of the state are penetrating in different forms, which are more difficult to distinguish. Some are hidden in the persuasive media to destroy our spirits, our souls and the nation’s harmony. Some are infiltrating to ruin the economy and the happiness of our people.\textsuperscript{43}

In January 1962, the policies to develop the Northeast were designated as the Northeast Development Plan, 1962–1966. This plan was to overcome the natural disadvantages and to develop the security of the Northeast for economic and political stability, in line with the slogans of Sarit’s regime, “Running water, shining electric light, good transportation,” and “Jobs bring money; money creates work; work brings happiness.” The aim was to improve economic security in the Northeast and increase the total income and quality of life. Still, the total income of the population of the Northeast was the lowest compared with other regions in the country. The region was classified as “poor.”\textsuperscript{44} The total income of Thailand took off during the period of the first National Economic Development Plan, drafted along the concept of economic stability and political security as stated in the Northeast Development Plan, 1962–1966.\textsuperscript{45} The plan was designated by Sarit’s Revolutionary Regime under the title “economic development for security.”

Summary

The model, diagrammed below, of the Thai government’s policies to develop the Northeast between 1951 and 1966 reflects the concepts of overcoming nature disadvantages and improving political security. This led to a new definition of the concept of “development” as “economic development for security” by the Sarit regime. The model differs from the present concept of development. Though the Northeast faces natural challenges, there is some potential to develop in accordance with the local wisdom of people who are the grassroots of Thai society. The concept of development for security reflected contemporary discourses at governmental, national and international levels.
Phibun's initial plans for developing the Northeast had no formal framework, only efforts to make the land more fertile by developing water sources and diversifying crops. Political issues, including the rebellion of opposition politicians and the success of communist regimes in neighboring states, gave greater urgency to the issue of the Northeast's development, leading to the "Project on urgent development of the Northeast." Between 1953 and 1957 the Thai government cooperated with the United States government in return for financial aid and technical assistance with planning to
resolve the problems of the Northeast. Over 1962–1966, this cooperation between the two governments led to a set of policies based on modernization theories. Sarit defined the policy for developing the Northeast as "economic development for security." The policy was directly aimed at halting the spread of communism in the Northeast. It became the basis for the Northeast development plan under the second National Economic Development Plan 1962–1966 and the Northeast development plan under the third National Economic Development Plan between 1972 and 1976.

Notes

5 Bangkok Post, 24 January 1951.
11 The natural disadvantages here refer to the geographical challenges in the Northeast causing drought in summer and floods in the rainy season. The soil is loamy sand, unable to retain water. Also the outdated way of living is included.
12 See James C. Ingram, Economic Change in Thailand since 1850 (Stanford University Press, 1955).
14 Royal Irrigation Department, Water Development in the Northeast and Lumtakhong Development, royal charity printing on the occasion of His Majesty the King's command to the Director-General, Mr. Sawaeng Punsuk to donate His Majesty the King's holy cloth to make merit on the occasion of the end of
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Buddhist Lent at Sangkha Union at Wat Wachiralongkorn Wararam, Pakchong, Nakhon Ratchasima on Wednesday 15 November 1972, p. 3.
17 Royal Irrigation Department, Water Development, p. 5.
18 Royal Irrigation Department, Water Development, p. 5.
18 Royal Irrigation Department, Water Development, p. 5.
21 Same as previous note.
22 Same as previous note.
24 Office of the Secretariat of the Cabinet, Minutes of the Meeting of the 23/1957 Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 14 August 1957, on Appointing the Northeast Affairs Committee.
26 Thanom Kittikhachon, 'My trip to Isaan,' a lecture at Thammasat University on 7 March 1958, pp. 49–56.
29 During Phibun's regime, 1948–1951, there was a coup by the Revolutionary Party (8 October 1948), the Palace Revolt by Pridi Phanomyong's supporters (26 February 1949), the Manhattan coup Party (26 June 1951), and the bloodless coup by Phibun himself in November 1951.
30 These politicians, including Thong-in Puripat, Chamlong Daoruang, and Thawin Udon, were arrested and murdered at the 14-15 kilometer pole, Bangkhen, Phahonyothin Road on 4 March 1949. Later, Tieng Sirikhan was murdered and "put on fire" and buried in a forest in Kanchanaburi in December 1952. See Charnwit Kasetsiri, and ThamrongSAk Pettert-anan, Pridi Phanomyong and 4 Isaan Ministers + 1 (Bangkok: Foundation of the Project of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbook, 2001).
31 Bangkok Post, 28 January 1954.
32 National Archives. SR.0201.32/14 the Movement in the Northeast, 7 June 1951.
34 National Archives. K/P7/2500/ MI.10 Pile 2 the case of Poverty in Isaan. 1957.
35 Office of the Secretariat of the Cabinet, Department of Collection, 3.8.2/27 The Governmental Area Segmentation for Ministers in Each Regions, 14 August-5 October 1957.
37 During Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat's regime, three prime ministers were appointed: Pot Sarasin (21 September to 26 December 1957); Field-Marshal Thanom Kittikachon (1 January to 20 October 1958); and Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat (9 February 1959 to 8 December 1963). The author refers to the three governments as Sarit's revolutionary regime since the three were appointed by the Sarit's revolutionary party.
38 Thanom, 'My trip to Isaan.'
41 National Archives. K/P7/2504 Separatist Revolutionary; Sarnseri, 18 May 1961.
42 Office of Secretariat of the Cabinet, Document Conservation Department, the Minutes of the 23/1961 Cabinet Meeting on 6 June 1961, Title: The Report to HM the King on the Situation in the Northeast (Khrong Chandawong's case), pp. 17-20.