

# The Thai Military and Country Development

Thai military is one of many important institutions responsible for the protection and maintenance of the country's independence, sovereignty, national honour, peace and state security. One of the duties of the military set out in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E.2560 (2017) is advancing national development. From past to present, the military has consistently played a vital role in assisting national development efforts.

Past engagements of the military in national development has led to the improvement and upgrade of the institution's internal structure so as to increase its readiness and capability to facilitate the country's development in cooperation with other sectors. In supporting development, it has applied the wisdom of the Sufficiency Economic Philosophy of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great (Rama IX) and other relevant approaches to beneficial usage. In this illustrated publication, the Ministry of Defence compiles the stories and development approaches including the experience of the Thai military's (Thailand's Model) participation in the country's development missions from past to present, so that it can serve as a published source of information and knowledge on the subject for our allies and interested readers to use or study further.

We would like to convey profound thanks and appreciation to ASEAN Member States and Plus countries for their continued support for the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Thailand, especially during our chairmanship of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) in 2019. Both the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus have reaffirmed their resolute commitment to bringing about sustainable security in this region, ensuring prosperity, security, sustainability for all, and to grow together without leaving anyone behind.







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## Preface

The Origin of the Thai Military's Role in National Development:  
“In wartime we fight, during peacetime we develop the country”

The application of military force in pursuit of national development has long been parallel with its use for war. In addition to the military's mission in defending the country, the military simultaneously engages in building the nation, as evident in military history of every country in the world. Throughout history they have served as pioneers and innovators bringing countless of benefits to society. Therefore, it is an irrefutable fact that another vital role the military assumes is “national development.” The goal is to establish security in all dimensions, from economic, political stability and social psychology to the rendering of assistance to the people when crises arise within the country.

### The Role of the Military in National Development

The history of the Thai armed forces has existed for as long as Thailand has been in existence. In the Sukhothai period, King Sri Indraditya enlisted all eligible Thai men and engaged them in forming the kingdom. The King used the military principle that all Thai men must be soldiers with the duty to defend the kingdom. Later in the Ayuddhya period, the year 1448 saw the establishment of a treatise on war strategy, which required all able-bodied Thai men to enlist in military service, and separated military from civil affairs. Since then, the soldiers, when free from war or not on active duty, would be involved in national development because they themselves were also the people. They would participate in assisting the nation, building roads, canals and reservoirs to protect against invading enemies, all of which had been considered to be development work. In these two periods in Thai history, although the use of soldiers in pursuit of country development was neither systematically codified nor entrenched in the law, historical records show that during peacetime or when there were no wars, the soldiers would join the locals in construction works that would benefit the people, for example building temples, bridges and roads.



# The Chronology of Periods: The Use of Thai Military Power for Country Development





## First Act

### Early Period (1962 - 1982): The Development of Rural Areas and Basic Public Utility System for National Security in Accordance with the First to Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plans

The Royal Thai Armed Forces' concrete role in country development started concurrently with the first National Economic and Social Development Plan (1961 - 1966). The Chief of Defence Forces, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarath, proposed a recommendation for the cabinet to approve an establishment of a special agency named as "National Administrative Center for Security" on 10 April 1962.

This agency was given authority to coordinate and integrate capabilities and operations of 13 government agencies encompassing civil, police, and military sectors in order to expedite the process of rural area development and increase the efficiency of solving infrastructure problems. The main responsibility of this agency was to prevent threats and strengthen security in areas that had security issues. Mobile development units were utilized to support these tasks in remote areas.

It had been explicitly stated in the Kingdom's 1974 Constitution that "military forces can be used for country development." Therefore the mission of "country development" had been assigned as one of the various missions of the Royal Thai Armed Forces. This mission was divided into three categories as follows.

1. Organization of military forces for an entire developmental task. This category of force organization was used for security development tasks along the border such as border self-defence community project and road building for security project. The objective was to maintain security in the areas of responsibility, emphasizing unity of command in the operation area with an aim to develop the local civilian force to have capabilities of providing early warning and basic self-defence.

2. Organization of military forces for joint developmental task. Military units were given missions to jointly operate in various programmes and projects with other agencies in developmental areas for internal security. The armed forces could assume the role of either principal operator or supporter depending on the severity of circumstances at the time. Specifically, if the developmental area was under severe security issue, the armed forces were to take leading role in creating safety in the area. And when the environment had been made more conducive for development, the armed forces could jointly operate with other agencies so that the local population can safely resume their normal living.

3. Organization of military forces to support developmental task. For general areas, which were not border area or area with security issue, the armed forces might be involved as supporting agency in urgent or immediate situations, mostly in humanitarian assistance or relief of the people's hardships missions.

## Second Act

### **Sustaining Period (1983 - 1996): Maintaining Continuity on the Development of Rural Areas and Basic Public Utility System for National Security in Accordance with the Fifth to Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plans**

After the issuance of the Prime Minister's Office Order Number 66/2523 on 23 April 1980, the Kingdom's internal security issue started to lessen. This enabled the government and private agencies to continuously develop rural areas. However, there were still risks involved in the operations in some remote areas. Therefore military units still played important roles in joint operations with local agencies in order to maintain continuity on area development.

Emphasis was made on transportation into the area, movement of agricultural products, and facilitation for government agencies to reach the local population as well as development for basic utility system for the people in remote areas.

Later, in 1987, people in the northeastern region suffered from severe lack of water to be used for consuming, utility, and agriculture. The government then initiated the "Green Northeast" (E-sarn Khiew) Project and tasked the Royal Thai Army to coordinate with various government and private agencies in order to solve the problem for the local people.

It can be seen that during the year 1962 to 1988, there were three main military contingents involved in country development, namely 1) the National Administrative Center for Security which emphasized operations in remote areas or areas that still had security issues, 2) all military units that were assigned the missions of country development support, encompassing combat, combat support, and combat service support units in accordance with the Royal Thai Armed Forces' mission on country development since 1974, and 3) military units that were assigned missions to support the government in country development in the E-sarn Khiew Project.

Nevertheless, no military units had been given a direct or primary responsibility on country development or country development support until the year 1989. During that year, the Royal Thai Army had established "Development Division" and "Engineer Division" to be units with primary responsibility in country development, in order to relieve combat units that were assigned country development missions at the time so that they could focus on their primary missions of country defence.

One Development Division is deployed for each Army Area and assigned missions to promote and support country development in various aspects such as political, economic, and socio-psychology as well as giving assistance to the people during natural disaster. As for the Engineer Division, it has been given a mission to promote and support country development in large-scale constructions which are the Kingdom's special projects such as deepwater port, tunnel, transport pipeline, airport, dam, transportation route including road, railway, and waterway as well as other special projects as assigned.



## Third Act

### Development Period (1997 - 2016): Laying Foundation for Sustainable Development in order to be a Model for Solving Problems Involving the People's Living Condition and for Country Development as a Whole in Accordance with the Eight to Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plans

As the situation of conflicting ideologies among the people affecting national security had improved, in the year 1996, the National Administrative Center for Security was transformed into a new agency called "Armed Forces Development Command." Missions of this unit were to carry out development projects according to the People Assistance Development Programme and other special programmes as assigned while adopting the Royal Initiative on Sufficiency Economy to be applied to existing operations. The operation area had been divided into three areas as follows.

1. Areas with security issues along the border. The Royal Thai Armed Forces had leading role in carrying out short term projects (not over three years) such as youth training in Voluntary Development and Self Defence Village Project and Border Self Defence Village Project, medium term projects (five to six years) by building proper structures in aspects such as social, economy, and politics within the area, and long term projects (ten to twelve years) to create sustainability for security in social, economy, and politics aspect. Afterwards, the Royal Thai Armed Forces would conduct public relation tasks in order for the local population to have a positive attitude toward government officials.

2. Areas with internal security issues. The Royal Thai Armed Forces assumed either leading or supporting role, depending on the severity of the situation at that time. The armed forces would assume leading role, especially in the short term, for tasks such as giving guidance and training to the people such that they could have knowledge and understanding of self defence and how to report information to government officials. For medium term tasks, the armed forces carried out joint operations with civilian agencies to promote means for the people to make their living. Civilian agencies were the main responsible parties for long term projects which strengthen network of existing systems whereas the armed forces acted as coordinator for tasks that are beyond the capacity of civilian agencies.

3. Areas within military posts. These were areas that generally did not have security issues. Three target groups were identified within these areas.

3.1 Conscript soldiers. The main task was to carry out development of human resources. This was done by giving non-formal education to advance the soldiers' qualification and providing vocational training so that they acquired the necessary knowledge and skills for future career beyond the military.

3.2 Contract and career soldiers. Personnel development was conducted by providing main and supporting education and training courses according to their career paths as well as coordinating with government and private agencies to give training on additional skills such that they could do part-time jobs during free time that would also result in a more positive development on their families, community, social, and country.

3.3 Families of career soldiers. Improvement on the soldiers and their families' quality of life was essential for raising the standard of living. This was done through various programmes such as educational tour or working visit to gain ideas

and knowledge on part-time jobs, establishment of soldiers' wives association, organization of youth sports camps so that they could have good health while being kept away from drugs.

Another important role of the Royal Thai Armed Forces that affects the country development at the strategic level has been the deployment of forces in overseas operations. This mission serves as a mean to take experience, identity, and unique beauty of Thailand to be seen in international arena as well as to develop international relations.

## Fourth Act

### Sustainability Building Period (2017 - present): Thai Community and Social Development for Security and Sustainability in Accordance with the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan

Even though basic elements for the people's livelihood have been markedly developed, the armed forces and their related units are still conducting country development missions such as promoting jobs for the people, transportation routes improvement, agricultural development, disaster relief, and giving assistance to the underprivileged. Development in this period is emphasized on building sustainability for country development where the people can sustainably make living for themselves, with the government sector assume a supporting role.

During this sustainability building period, a nexus project that the Royal Thai Armed Forces take part in is the development of human resources with an emphasis on creating volunteer spirit, willingness to sacrifice, and mindfulness of helping out one another. This deems to be the main effort in country development during this period where the armed forces assume the leading role and as the people gain understanding of the process, the armed forces will then take the supporting role. Since all the development activities would ensue from the people's true volunteer spirit and sacrifice for community at large, concrete and sustainable country development can be successfully achieved.



## Epilogue

From the past to the present day, the main mission of the Thai military has always been the protection of sovereignty and independence of the country from both internal and external threats. The role of the military in the country's development is, however, no less important than its role in defending the country. Thailand's defence concept, which fuses defence policy implementation with a resilient foreign policy, enabled the country to successfully overcome the threats associated with colonialism and other perils of the Cold War. The accomplishment of a flexible defence concept capable of adjusting its strategy to the constantly-evolving threats has raised the expectation that the country can overcome the threats emanating from present ideological conflicts and violent extremism. Nonetheless, its implementation will neither be possible nor effective without the cooperation and approval from the people within the country.

Therefore the concept of total defence is one that relies on inclusivity - the contribution and participation from all sectors, especially in areas along the borders. Due to the vast expanse of the border areas, the utilisation and deployment of main combatant units and local para-military forces by the armed forces alone as the main defensive force along the borders may not be viable. Given this limitation, it is necessary for the armed forces to resort to the local populace residing in border areas as auxiliary defence forces. In order for the armed forces to utilise these auxiliary forces optimally, the provision of education and training to the local populations and improvement work to areas concerned are imperative. A prerequisite for a successful total defence force is effective human resources. Effective human resources development must take into consideration the local environment, social psychology and wishes of the local populations. This will enable the public sector to operate in a more effective and results-oriented manner because of the support and participation by the local populace. Such a collaborative effort will support security operation and lead to the fulfillment of all objectives and the realisation of "Sustainable Security," which put the people in the entire country at the heart of development without "leaving anyone behind." The ultimate outcome is where the people receive maximum benefit, and the country makes true progress in development.





# The Thai Military and Country Development





Military and International Relations Development

Military and Sports and Tourism Development

Military and Social Development

Military and Agricultural Development

Military and Transportation Development

Military and Environment and Natural Resources Development

Military and Economic Development

Military and Energy Development

Military and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Development

Military and Labor Skill Development

Military and Cultural Arts Development

Military and Innovation and Science Development

Military and Education Development

Military and Public Health Development

Military and Industrial Development



## Military and International Relations Development

















## Military and Sports and Tourism Development





















## Military and Social Development













































## Military and Transportation Development





















## Military and Environment and Natural Resources Development













## Military and Economic Development



















# กองการกลั่นปิโตรเลียม

## ศูนย์พัฒนาปิโตรเลียมภาคเหนือ

กรมการพลังงานทหาร









## Military and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Development

























## Military and Labor Skill Development









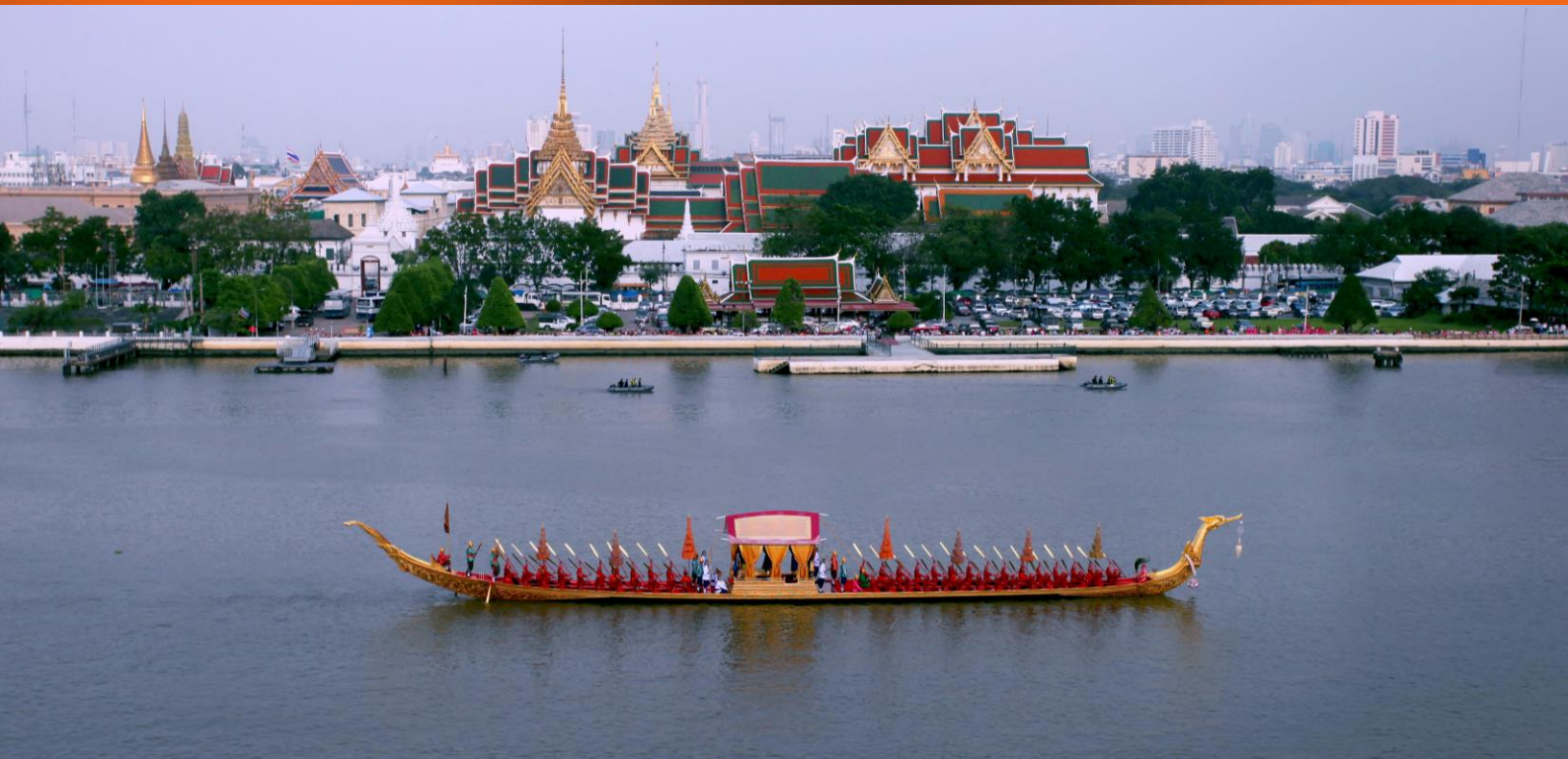








## Military and Cultural Arts Development





















# Military and Innovation and Science Development







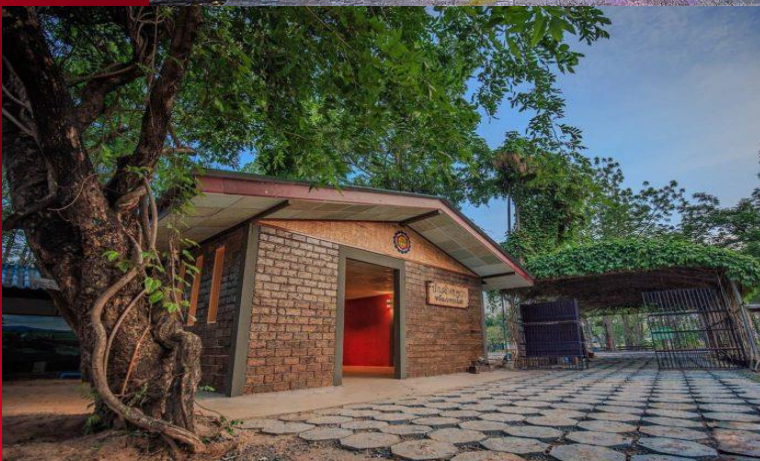














## Military and Education Development





















## Military and Public Health Development













## Military and Industrial Development

















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