

Assignment 2 - ICGS112

During the latter half of the 20th century, Thailand was one of the major recipients of foreign aid - especially during the peak of communist regime. However, the dynamic of the country in the post 20th century has shifted - due to its economic growth. The country has converted from aid awardee to something more like a public-private partnership or a strategic investment hub: these investments still play an important role in transportation, infrastructure, green energy, banking, economy, etc. - these investments accounted for over a billion dollars annually in the country's development. Moreover, in the past few years, Thailand has been increasingly active in providing aid to neighbours: billions of Thai currencies were distributed in the form of goods and financial aid during the COVID-19 pandemic.

USAID has been issued to Thailand for over half a century now - even though reduction is the trend. The aid can be seen as part of the US taking responsibility for all the chaos they caused in the region during the cold war - the consequences still remain clearly visible until this day. Nowadays, USAID mainly focuses on humanitarian rights, health and education - especially for the migrants. Though the sum might seem small, the effect is substantial; Trump's second presidential aid freeze exposes the fact that Thailand's health and humanitarian right system in the border still heavily rely on it.

From my perspective, taking the balance approach is the best for fast economical growth, public welfare, sustainability and international relationships. While being self-reliant promotes national sovereignty, having these fundings as a safety net is crucial in the time of disaster. These foreign fundings often come with other intentions: geopolitical advantages to competitors, trade treaties and a chance to profit from a certain sector - providentially, we receive technologies, domestic labor training and a chance to intensify both countries' relationship. Considering both benefits and drawbacks, the practical approach would be to broaden our recipient and donor network, gradually reduce our reliance on a single source of supply while prioritizing on assisting the development of domestic industries and young talent.

USAID doesn't seem to make modern day Thailand dependent on foreign assistance - in terms of economy or development, but it does create foreign labor dependencies - especially unskilled workers from our war torn neighbouring countries. The aid focused on health care, humanitarian rights and education - our main public services system only has minimal reliant to these fundings. However, migrants and foreign laborers heavily rely on these provisions to survive and ensure a decent future for their offspring - ironically these groups of people are extremely important to our country's development.

I don't see any clear and instant solution to these problems; in the face of declining USAID support. But, we could derive some guide lines based on our historical events - the Chinese migration to Thailand during their civil wars. The answer isn't to reject them, but to integrate their child into our society through education and citizenship, providing them with health care services and humanitarian rights - which the USAID used to backed. Even though employment competition, crime and the inclusion of these labors in our public welfare system are likely to cause problems and tax payer money - the fact remains that these workforce are the ones driving a great portion of Thailand's economy thus, the pragmatic path forward is to invest long-term integration, ensuring they contribute not only as laborers but as future citizens that will strengthen our society.

In many aspects, Thailand is analogous to Turkey in many ways: noisy neighbours, great geopolitical locations, regularly felt between two global powers - just that Turkey is 1.5 times larger in every scale. Both countries experience international relationship nightmare, so we could use Turkey as a prime case study for problems here - just my speculation.