

The Global South Turn? Repositioning Thailand's International Relations amid the Indo-Pacific Geopolitics

Abstract

This seminar critically addresses whether and how Thailand is in pursuit of a hedging strategy amid intense geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region. Given the fact that China's assertive rise and the return of Trump 2.0 trigger existential and discursive anxieties, Thailand, a long-time US ally, hesitates to counterbalance China. Post-2014 coup, the military government aligned with China due to necessity, persisting post-2019 elections.

Professor Jittipat Poonkham reevaluates Thai foreign policy under Prayut Chan-o-cha, suggesting default hedging, not strategic hedging. Various agencies pursue diplomacy without a whole-of-the-government, coherent strategy. The seminar unfolds in three parts. First, it examines Thailand's reluctance to embrace the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy, stemming from differing threat perceptions and bureaucratic politics. It then discusses Thailand's absence of a comprehensive Indo-Pacific narrative and its default hedging via military, economic, and ideational aspects. The seminar will conclude by exploring Thailand's Global South turn in post-Prayut foreign policy, such as its recent aspiration for BRICS membership. Rather than repositioning itself a middle power, Thai foreign policy is entrapped in the small-state narrative.