The Royal Thai Navy’s Maritime and Naval Strategic Thought in the Post-Global Financial Crisis Period
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Abstract

The traditional narrative about the Royal Thai Navy in the post-global financial crisis period is that the blue-water naval ambitions of the 1990s and early 2000s were still upheld. This narrative is incorrect. Instead, this article argues the Royal Thai Navy moved away from pursuing a blue-water navy towards something more comprehensive in its strategic thought immediately after the global financial crisis of 2008. This is explored through the rise of new historical indicators that have come to light through infield and archival research, open sources, and personal interviews with Royal Thai Navy officers. This article concludes that the Royal Thai Navy stands at an existential crossroad with the advent of the grey-zone warfare era. Consequently, certain recommendations are offered for the Royal Thai Navy to adopt to outmanoeuvre the maritime hybrid threats already distinguishable on the horizon.

Keywords: Thailand, Royal Thai Navy, Maritime Strategy, Naval Strategy, Maritime Security, Maritime Hybrid Warfare, Network Centric Warfare.

Introduction

In the condensed English version of the “History of the Royal Thai Navy,” the former Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Navy (RTN or Navy), Admiral Satirapan Keyanon, reflected that its history is long and distinguished, beginning with the Sukhothai period in 1238 A.D.1 More recently, Mark David Chong and Surin Maisrikrod analysed Thailand’s maritime security policies from 1932 to 2012. At the outset, the authors expressed ‘the charting of, and accounting for, Thailand’s maritime security policies has been a somewhat challenging

endeavour'.\textsuperscript{2} In testament to both of these aforesaid statements, indeed, any research conducted on Thailand’s naval history or contemporary maritime policies is arduous considering its dense yet under-explored past and infamous lack of governmental transparency.\textsuperscript{3}

This article begins by looking at the RTN’s traditionally attributed “historical structure,” arguing that academic attention has not granted sufficient weight to the impact of the global financial crisis onto the Navy’s maritime strategic thought. It therefore offers a novel structure assisted by the presentation of historical indicators not hitherto introduced in the Western literature. With the resurfacing of ‘maritime hybrid threats,’ the RTN’s contemporary search for new strategic thought is timely as it once again stands at an existential crossroad.\textsuperscript{4} The article consequently concludes that this ‘second-tier naval power,’ as Eric Grove and Steven Haines have come to classify the RTN, must embark upon a new period of Thai naval history.\textsuperscript{5} A few recommendations are provided so as to facilitate this transition.

**RTN Maritime and Naval Strategic Thought in the Sixth Period (2008–2019)**


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\textsuperscript{3} Appendix I.


This article accepts the first four periods by virtue of its historical accuracy. It is the contention of this article, however, that the fifth period ended sooner than originally identified and that a sixth period formed somewhere amid the post-financial crisis up to the present day.

The rationale for diverging from the historical structure set by Chong and Maisrikrod is that insufficient weight was accorded to the impact of the financial crisis on the RTN’s maritime strategic thought. There are undiscussed “historical indicators” in Western literature that testifies to the RTN’s shift away from the purely “blue-water navy” ambition of the 1990’s and early 2000’s. These indicators are the publications, Total Defense Strategy of 2008, Defense of Thailand of 2008, Naval Strategy of 2008–2017 and 2017–2036, and the National Maritime Security Plan of 2015–2021. As well as the expansion of the Thai Maritime Domain/Situation Awareness concept alongside the Network Centric Warfare Master Plan of 2015, reformulation of the Thai Maritime Law Enforcement Coordinating/Commanding Centre, transformation of the amphibious operations command structure, and implementation of the RTN’s Naval Procurement Plans of 2015–2024 and 2017–2036.

2008: Total Defense Strategy, Defense of Thailand and Naval Strategy Documents

The turn in strategic thought was first exemplified in the Total Defense Strategy of 2008 and Defense of Thailand 2008 released by the Thai Ministry of Defense. Both documents looked beyond the acquisition of blue-water naval assets. While the former ‘relied on maximum cooperation between civil defence programmes, paramilitary formations, and mainstream conventional forces’, the latter was specifically directed towards cooperative security building, collective national defence, and proactive defence.

The now-renowned excerpt by Commander-in-Chief Admiral Khamthorn Pumhiran in 2009 corroborates this shift, proclaiming in the RTN mission statement that the Navy will focus on,

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7 Gregory Raymond, Thai Military Power: A Culture of Strategic Accommodation (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2018), 168.
maritime security threats that have changed from dealing primarily with international conflicts to the more complex circumstantial environments, which are politically, economically, and socially interrelated. These threats—maritime terrorism, transnational crimes, piracy, drug-trafficking, illegal immigration, human trafficking, illegal labour, and natural and environmental disasters—adversely affect national security.\(^8\) A reduced force structure at the operational level due to budgetary constraints amid the financial crisis, Khamthorn restated later, would severely hamper the effectiveness of the Navy’s strategic deterrence requiring a whole new set of thinking.\(^9\) This shift was similarly noted by veteran journalist Kavi Chongkittavorn, when,

after decades of ambivalence and recalcitrance, Thailand has now embarked on a whole new security scheme—maritime security cooperation—that would allow the country to provide full surveillance and protection of its territorial waters as well as ensuring the safety of nearby international sea lanes for communications.\(^10\)

From these internal and external statements, it is conceivable that the RTN’s Naval Strategy of 2008–2017 followed an equivalent démarch as the other two documents going beyond ‘traditional threats’; albeit, this conclusion remains unverified and speculative at this moment due to its classified status.

In lieu of declassified governmental documents, naval scholars like Ian Speller and Seong Yong Park, deemed the increased defense budgets between the 2009 and 2011 fiscal years and naval anti-piracy operations to Somalia as indications of deeply rooted blue-water navy ambitions.\(^11\) While looking at the same trends, W.A. Herrmann contrarily reasserted that the financial crisis’s impact absolutely ‘underline[d] the existence of a new security in Thailand’s defense strategic thinking toward taking on more international/regionalsecurity responsibility’.\(^12\) Increases in the naval budgets could be explained by the,
RTN [having] switched its acquisition priorities from “blue-water” capable warships with surface, underwater and air warfare capabilities to “Offshore Patrol Vessels” (mostly helicopter capable), suitable for cost-effective patrol, enforcement, response and surveillance duties ... with the main missions [being] maritime territorial sovereignty and offshore resource protection; fight against resurgent piracy and terrorism; search and rescue; and, in the wake of the 2004 tsunami, disaster relief operations.\textsuperscript{13}

W.A. Herrmann interpreted this shift from a holistic approach towards security that classified the RTN as a green-water navy retaining ‘an increased ambition to be able to perform some (long-term and long-distance) missions in blue-waters.’\textsuperscript{14}

In spite of having identified that a shift had occurred, Hermann still partially overestimates these supposed ‘long-term and long-distance missions’ in blue-waters, as they could only be affected during an existential crisis. More importantly, due to the limited naval capabilities at the time, this could not have been sustained without external national assistance, most likely by the United States Navy.\textsuperscript{15}


The evidence in the impact of the financial crisis with the RTN’s shift away from blue-water ambitions is also visible in subsequent years. In 2015, the Office of Thai National Security Council established the \textit{Maritime Strategy B.E. 2558–2564 [2015–2021]}. Thereafter, the Cabinet of Thailand approved its renaming to the \textit{National Maritime Security Plan of 2015–2021}. The publication of the document is significant as it remains the Royal Thai Government’s only ever produced official maritime strategy.\textsuperscript{16}

Before discussing it further, it is imperative to understand that, despite the fact the Thai language possesses two different definitions, Thai national documents typically use the words \textit{plan} and \textit{strategy} interchangeably. This contrasts significantly with Anglo-Saxon governmental documents where the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Information courtesy of two Captains and one Vice Admiral of the Royal Thai Navy.
words denote different processes.\textsuperscript{17} Notwithstanding the interchangeableness, while the first aforementioned version remained an outline, the second renamed version provided a commitment that was supplemented with a vision on the creation of specific laws of national maritime interests. This renamed document was in time released to the public in concert with recently penned national documents. The National Maritime Security Plan effectively derives its legitimacy from the \textit{Six Strategies} in the Thai national strategy document, the \textit{Twenty Year National Strategy (2018–2038)},\textsuperscript{18} but, also, from the strategic points outlined in the \textit{Social Economic Development Plan No. 11 (2012–2016)} and directional framework of the \textit{12th National Development Plan (2017–2021)}. It therefore follows that the Navy’s maritime strategy is subsidiary to both the national strategy and development plan frameworks. This conclusion is sustained by the overt and incessant reiteration in the document that Thai maritime strategy facilitates maritime interests cascading down from the national interests, which are themselves formulated by the upper echelon in the Royal Thai Government.

Prior to the publication of the National Maritime Security Plan, the Navy had only ever written classified naval strategy documents, each affixed with their own respective procurement plan.\textsuperscript{19} Along with the naval strategy document briefly mentioned beforehand, there is the classified entry of the RTN’s \textit{Naval Strategy of 2017–2036}.\textsuperscript{20} Given that the Royal Thai Government does not have a declassification process, the classified status prevents intrigued readers from knowing any specifics. Internal academic commentaries from central figures in the naval organisation on the conceptualisations of the RTN’s naval strategy may nonetheless fill some of the larger gaps.

First, the two naval strategy documents presumably focus exclusively on the Navy. This can be assumed as the term ‘naval strategy’ in the RTN context is narrowly applied for those activities strictly performed by the ‘Navy as the mean’; whereas, ‘maritime strategy’ is characterized by the focus on broader activities by ‘maritime agencies as the mean’.\textsuperscript{21} Second, the naval strategy documents are products of certain ‘pull-factors’ originating from the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Lawrence Freedman, \textit{Strategy: A History} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xi.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Online Reporters, “20-year National Strategy comes into effect,” \textit{Bangkok Post}, October 13, 2018, www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2561/A/082/T_0001.PDF.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Information courtesy of a Royal Thai Navy Captain.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Khamron Pisonyuthagarn, “The Reformation of the Naval Strategy,” 137.
\end{itemize}
development plans of the Thai National Security Council and military strategy documents of the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters.

However, internal questioning as to the compatibility between the National Maritime Security Plan and the latest naval strategy document does persevere unabatingly within the Navy. There is real concern with ‘the form and process of defining naval strategy’ in the latest documents, which accordingly might necessitate a general revision in order to acknowledge the variety of maritime operations undertaken: naval strategic warfare, naval military operations other than war, constabulary operations, and benign operations.\(^22\) Simply put, the Thai naval strategy concept does not derive its legitimacy and existence from the Thai maritime strategy concept, as structured in United States Navy maritime documents, but rather from the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters’ military strategy.

Even with the unknowns in naval strategy documents and inconsistencies between them and the National Maritime Security Plan, any brief reading of the latter document exposes the great strides taken by the RTN towards incorporating non-traditional security threat management, maritime security cooperation and collective defense in the ways penned in the *Total Defense Strategy Document of 2008* and *Defense of Thailand 2008* immediately after the financial crisis.

The shift away from solely writing naval strategy documents premised on the military strategic thought of the Royal Thai Armed Forces to the introduction of a maritime strategy document affixed to a broader concept of security evinces a Navy that is expanding the scope of its strategic thought beyond the traditional threats and blue-water ambitions towards something much more comprehensive. Additionally, the fact that the maritime strategic document is indeed restricted to social and economic national development priorities of the three national-level documents reveals that the impact of the financial crisis is still very much present in limiting the RTNs blue-water ambitions.

*Network Centric Warfare Master Plan of 2015*

In Thailand, the network centric warfare concept originated in the Royal Thai Air Force and subsequently adopted by the RTN through the *Network Centric*...
While the document remains classified, the core intention of the NCW-MP allegedly emulates U.S. Vice Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski’s original NCW concept. If the interpretation stands analogous to the original, then the rational is centred on the shift from platforms to networks, the shift from viewing actors as independent to viewing the battlefield continuously in an identical picture, and the importance of making strategic choices to adapt or even survive in such changing warfare philosophy. The RTN Naval Communication and Information Technology Department is presently responsible for its development with support from the Operations and Electronic Departments. All three departments work in tandem to affect the NCW-MP of 2015. The network backbone established by them supports all naval operations, including special operations, mines and countermines, and the forthcoming submarines.

It is first necessary to grasp the Navy’s use of the maritime domain awareness (MDA) concept in order to fully comprehend the impact of the NCW-MP onto the RTN’s transition away from blue-water ambitions; for, the two are perceived by the RTN’s Intelligence Department as a reciprocate pair: the RTN’s use of the MDA concept enhances the operationality of the NCW-MP and vice versa.

Maritime Domain/Situation Awareness

In 2012, prior to the implementation of the NCW-MP of 2015, the Naval Strategic Studies Center of Thailand with the Institute of Defense Technology clarified the Navy’s MDA principles:

a concept of maintaining security by using information technology and communications, [including the concept of network centric warfare,] to track the various situations occurring in the maritime domain, which [are] affecting the safety of security, including the economic and marine environment. Therefore, MDA is a system that will ensure the safety of

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24 Information courtesy of a Royal Thai Navy Vice Admiral.
26 ThaiPR.net, “January 13th: The day of the establishment of the Department of Communications and Naval Information Technology,” RYT9, 13 January 2010.
27 Information courtesy of a Royal Thai Navy Captain.
maritime security by being aware of the situation at sea, and the ability to maintain maritime security by developing the ability to gather, integrate, analyse, display and disseminate information to any responsible agencies.\textsuperscript{28}

The Naval Strategic Studies Center also defined an ‘effective MDA’ as ‘the optimisation of intelligence capacity and ability to render the [maritime] situation (or, effective MDA = GMI (Global Maritime Intelligence) + GMSA (Global Maritime Situation Awareness))’.\textsuperscript{29} It is crucial the use of \textit{global} in the equation does not seek to evoke the \textit{international} dimension of the word. Rather, its \textit{comprehensive} dimension. Although favoured by some, this equation is nevertheless presently not widely applied by Royal Thai Government officials or bureaucrats. The term Maritime Situational Awareness remains the only one in application, capturing within it all of the aforementioned descriptors. To complicate the matter further, the Maritime Threat Awareness and Maritime Situational Understanding concepts are also affixed onto the RTN’s \textit{Maritime Domain or Situation Awareness (MD/SA)} concept.\textsuperscript{30}

The previous section on MD/SA is worth mentioning on account that the classic MDA concept has been historically employed for police-like operations in littoral waters. This is the case because numerous western naval doctrines that discuss MDA continue to separate surface from sub-surface operations, especially anti-submarine warfare. Although the RTN does include anti-submarine warfare within the scope of MD/SA, the high-end warfighting dimension is not included.\textsuperscript{31} Meaning, in the coming years, the newly acquired (~three) submarines will most likely above all play a police role. In an effort to amass greater MD/SA effectiveness, the Navy also planned to procure three patrol aircrafts and coastal radars that incorporate Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) both ashore and aboard ships.\textsuperscript{32} These maritime procurements show the RTN does not strive away from MDA’s historical legacy of police-like operations.


\textsuperscript{29} Kiatiyut Tiansuwan, “commentary Paper,” 1.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{31} Information courtesy of a Royal Thai Navy Captain.

in littoral waters. That the Navy is not investing or allocating funds towards material capabilities that would integrate ‘high-end seabed warfare’—the use of automated seafloor sensor networks through the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea—within its NCW framework validates the claim that both the MD/SA and the NCW-MP are focused on police-like operations in littoral waters.\textsuperscript{33} In contrast to the US Navy model, the RTN’s NCW model shows the effort with which the RTN sought to move beyond traditional security threats and blue-water ambitions towards something entirely more comprehensive. More importantly, the Navy formulated its MD/SA around the time of the financial crisis in partnership with an organisation called the Thai-Maritime Law Enforcement Coordinating/Command Center. This is an organisation that prioritizes the constabulary over the military role.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Thai-Maritime Law Enforcement Coordinating/Commanding Center}

The Thai-Maritime Law Enforcement Coordinating Center (Thai-MECC) was originally approved by the Thai National Security Council in 1997 and established in 2006 to increase coherence in maritime law enforcement between “six maritime entities” in the Royal Thai Government: Fisheries Department, Marine Department, Custom Department, Marine Police, Maritime and Coastal Environment Department, and RTN. The Thai-MECC organisation is supported by relevant partners possessing a maritime role or responsibility: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Office of the Narcotics Control Board, Immigration Bureau Thailand, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Excise department, Pollution Control Department, Fine Arts Department, and the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation. The Thai-MECC’s headquarters is in Bangkok, and its political authority is reflective of the three Naval Area Commands of the RTN.\textsuperscript{35} However, the command structure differs greatly with the RTN as the navy sits both inside and outside the organisation.\textsuperscript{36} The Thai-MECC command structure reveals a government that recognizes the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{34} Appendix VII.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Appendix II and III.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Appendix IV and V.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
need to achieve cooperation between all sectors—the government agencies, the private sector, and the civil society—going beyond the “whole-of-government approach” model of security towards a “whole-of-society approach” model. Although a highly inclusive command structure, the RTN acts as the ‘focal point’ or ‘primary coordinating unit’ with the result that ‘close coordination between different agencies [will] streamline unified activities without duplication of efforts’ by more than twenty related agencies.37

Since its implementation around the time of the financial crisis three general challenges have been attributed to the Center: First, only coordination role powers; Second, friction on institutionalisation; and Third, manning and resource limitations. Seeking to consolidate the shift away from blue-water ambitions, a 2018/19 fiscal year parliamentary bill initiated new structural reforms to correct the first two challenges by ‘enhancing closer and efficient maritime security management, permitting tactical control of maritime assets, and empowering Thai-MECC officers to search, arrest, investigate and make a case for an indictment.’38 Supporting the consolidation and reforms is an investment of roughly USD$700 million between 2018 and 2021. This money assures the Center possesses sufficient manning and resources towards collecting, analysing, and sharing maritime information, and satisfying its nine maritime missions.39 Part of the funds allocated for the 2018–2021 fiscal years contribute to the urgent need to augment the Center’s capabilities via ‘modernizing its operations by combining technological advances with personnel development and improving its management and organisational structure.’40 The new bill’s ultimate goal is to develop a unified agency by reformulating Thai-MECC from a ‘Coordinating Center’ to a ‘Directing Center.’ Another relatively unmarked illustration is the entry of an operational plan that will provide a ‘guideline for all of the THAI-MECC’s direct reports in order to streamline unified activities without duplication of efforts’.41

39 Ibid., 14.
41 Ibid., 11.
Amid increased funding, the new Thai-MECC now possesses a Maritime Information Sharing Center to monitor maritime activities working to enhance the RTN’s MD/SA by integrating the operational plans of different agencies. It is noteworthy that the Center divides its ‘maritime information network systems’ between the domestic and international contexts reflective of the historical MDA bifurcation.42 As envisioned by the RTN, the future Thai-MECC ameliorates the RTN’s Maritime Information Sharing Center as it requires an alteration to the practice and mindset of the participating entities by updating the ‘maritime information sharing mechanisms’ in the domestic domain, while the international context aggrandizes the Maritime Information Sharing Center information pool through coordination with akin information gathering partners.43 Increased attention to the MD/SA concept through reforms enacted on the Thai-MECC organisation depicts a Navy utilizing a concept inwardly (e.g. near-shore or brown/green-waters) and defensively rather than outwardly (e.g. blue-waters) and offensively. Be that as it may, the new Thai-MECC Maritime Information Sharing Center organisational arrangement remains problematic. Even if it is capable to reduce the maritime information gap between participants by forty to ninety percent,44 maritime antagonists may still efficaciously exploit the domestic and international domains.

Transformation of the Amphibious Operations Command Structure

Transformation in the amphibious operations command structure was a result of the aspiration to fully optimize ‘joint operations’ with internal actors, such as the Thai-MECC and Royal Thai Armed Forces, and ‘combined operations’ with external partners and allies. The shift in the command structure inside the Navy was influenced from two articles written by David W. Elwing and Russ Jones at the United States Naval War College.45 In both articles a shift from the Commander Amphibious Task Force and Commander Landing Force command structure to the ‘supported/supporting’ command relation structure is prescribed as a tool to complete such optimisation. The original idea was to transition from having two separate Commanders during the amphibious

42 Appendix VI.
43 Royal Thai Navy, “Thailand’s Maritime Enforcement Coordinating Center (Thai-MECC),” Slide 10.
45 Information courtesy of a Royal Thai Navy Captain.
operations to one Commander. The model had a Navy Commander directing operations over the water portion of the operation and then an Army or Marine Commander directing operations after ground forces reached land.

One interpretation on this transformation is it hoped to give the RTN a limited blue-water navy status through combined operations with international partners. The idea would be that in mastering the flexibility of the supporting command relations structure during joint operations between service branches, the RTN could replicate this flexibility in combined operations with other partnered navies.\textsuperscript{46} In reality though, the transformation in the amphibious operations command structure was devised in an attempt to enhance the operationality of the NCW-MP in brown/green-waters or near-shore operations.\textsuperscript{47}

**Procurement Plans**

Open sources provide some information on the newest RTN’s procurement plans. Over the next ten years, the Thai-MECC and RTN will spend 116,000 million Baht or USD$3,315 million, with USD$2,735 million allocated to the navy and USD$700 million allocated to Thai-MECC. Through these means the RTN and Thai-MECC will procure:

- Unified Maritime Assets: 2 Off-Shore Vessels (2000 tons) and 4 Patrol Vessels (600 tons) by 2021
- SAR Training Center: 4 SAR helicopters
- MD/SA Systems and NCW: 3 Patrol Aircraft and Coastal Radars (incorporating C4ISR ashore and aboard ships)
- SAR: 5 Patrol Vessels; 3–4 Off-shore patrol vessels; 1 SAR helicopter
- Maritime Distress Relief: 1 LPD.\textsuperscript{48}

Although the list is in all likelihood only a portion of the planned maritime procurements for the coming years, this initial finding indicates the seriousness with which the RTN is attempting to remodel Thai-MECC into an integrated, efficient organisation. It moreover confirms that the RTN is looking beyond


\textsuperscript{47} Information courtesy of an unnamed Captain and an unnamed Vice Admiral of the Royal Thai Navy.

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traditional threats and acquiring a blue-water navy status, evidenced by the development of SAR capabilities with the purchase of equipment, development of a training centre, and further investment in maritime distress relief.

**RTN Maritime and Naval Strategic Thought in the Seventh Period (2019–Future)**

In July 2019, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy launched an assault on a British flag tanker in the Gulf of Hormuz. Four fast boats supported by masked gunmen dressed in camouflage slid down from one helicopter, referred to by the then Defence Secretary Jeremy Hunt as an act of ‘state piracy.’ Sidharth Kaushal suggested the significance of the event was the Royal Navy ‘underscored Britain’s lack of capacity for the sort of low-end missions that constitute the bulk of what we might describe as “grey-zone warfare.”’

The lack of capacity and strategic thought for maritime conflict in grey-zones is not only present with ‘first-tier naval powers,’ but, likewise, with second and ‘third-tier naval powers.’

As described above, over a decade ago, the RTN moved away from seeking a pure blue-water navy status towards something much more comprehensive in its strategic thought. With the advent of the grey-zone warfare era though, the RTN stands once again at an existential crossroad. As Hicks remarked succinctly, the continued use of MDA in solely its historical police-like form is problematic in the era of grey-zone warfare, seeing that it divorces low-end from high-end warfighting.

In an environment where future novel maritime threats will challenge the works and strategic thought previously developed in the sixth period (2008–2019) of modern Thai naval history, a seventh period (2019 onwards) must thus be conceived. In this latest period, the RTN will have to place less emphasis on what came before and yield more enthusiasm for the advancement of multi-dimensional maritime strategies and concepts that focus on fighting in “ambiguous areas” or grey-zones. The RTN must get comfortable operating in the “war-conflict-peace spectrum” or “hybrid-peace”

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52 Metrick and Hicks, “Contested Seas,” 16.
context, both roughly defined as a security environment blending peace and war. It must ameliorate its capability to utilise “grey-zone deterrence” principles, too. A concept catalogued as a multi-dimensional maritime strategy, successful in the hybrid-peace context, that would, at the very least, assist the RTN in commencing such a system-wide transformation is the “maritime hybrid warfare” concept.53

This recommendation is promising for three reasons. First, the Royal Thai Army is promptly seeking to engage in new strategic thought. The Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army, General Apirat Kongsompong, announced internal reforms pursuant to the removal of antiquated doctrine and archaic strategic thought by modernizing textbooks, tests, and military principles.54 The overall purpose of these reforms is to implement the ‘complex wars’ and ‘hybrid warfare’ concepts.55 As second-tier branches in the Royal Thai Armed Forces, the RTN and Royal Thai Air Force are required to stay in comparative lockstep. This argument is grounded on the experience of the adoption of the NCW concept and transformation from the CATF and CLF command structure to the “supported/supporting” command relations structure as detailed atop. Second, in the post-2014 coup environment, the Sino-Thai comprehensive strategic partnership perseveres. Although the purchase of Chinese military equipment captures the major headlines and imagination of media pundits, the “increasing number of Thai officers studying in China” is a much more poignant indicator.56 After having attained the right policy or strategic positions, the returning students will eventually infuse new strategic and doctrinal concepts into the Royal Thai Armed Forces. One of these will assumedly be the maritime hybrid warfare concept, which has been attributed to China since April 2012.57 Third, the concept may be viewed as an attractive option for navies that earnestly believe their maritime geographic location imposes upon them an inherent naval asymmetrical relationship in all maritime conflicts. The difficulty in executing full

fleet concentration manoeuvres by the Navy without first leaving a coast increasingly vulnerable, owing to the Kra Isthmus, makes the RTN a perfect match.

Conclusion

This article argued that the financial crisis had a more significant impact on the RTN than leading literature had originally considered. The trauma of losing large naval procurements shifted blue-water navy ambitions towards something much more comprehensive: maritime security cooperation, collective defence, and non-traditional security threat management. This is clearer than previously identified with the rise of new historical indicators that have manifested through infield and archival research, open sources and personal interviews with RTN officers. The shift concretized through the reformulation of the RTN’s Maritime Domain/Situation Awareness synergised with the network centric warfare concept, the Thai-MECC organisation and publication of the National Maritime Strategy Plan of 2015-2021. However, this maritime strategic thinking will be insufficient to deal with future identified maritime hybrid threats. Henceforth, a seventh period of RTN naval history must be conceived. In this forthcoming period, the RTN will have to place less emphasis on what came before and yield more enthusiasm for the use of multi-dimensional maritime strategies and concepts, war-conflict-peace spectrum, and grey-zone deterrence principles. A concept that could hold promising success for the RTN in this system-wide transformation is the maritime hybrid warfare concept.
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Appendixes I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VIII and IX are courtesy of the Royal Thai Navy.
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Appendix III: The Royal Thai Navy Naval Area Commands

- **1st Naval Area Command**
  - Upper Half of Gulf of Thailand

- **2nd Naval Area Command**
  - Lower Half of Gulf of Thailand

- **3rd Naval Area Command**
  - Andaman Sea
Appendix IV: The Thai-MECC Commanding Structure

[Diagram of the Thai-MECC Commanding Structure]
Appendix V: The Thai-MECC Organisational Structural Reforms (2018/19)
Appendix VI: The Maritime Information Network Contexts: Domestic vs. International

![Diagram of Maritime Information Network Contexts]

- Domestic Information Sharing Network
  - RTN Intelligence Center
  - RTN-IC
  - Thai – MECC and PTTEP
  - Private Sectors

- International Information Sharing Network
  - MSP - IS, ReMIX
  - MAA
  - AMRS
  - ONI USN
  - Future Network under International Cooperation Framework

Legend:
- RTN-MISC
- AIS
- VMS
- Marine Department
- IFN
- ReCAAP ISC
- OASIS
- ACESS II
- IFC RSN
Appendix VII: Royal Thai Navy’s ‘Trinity Naval Roles’ Model
Appendix IX: The Ring-Fenced Naval Strategy