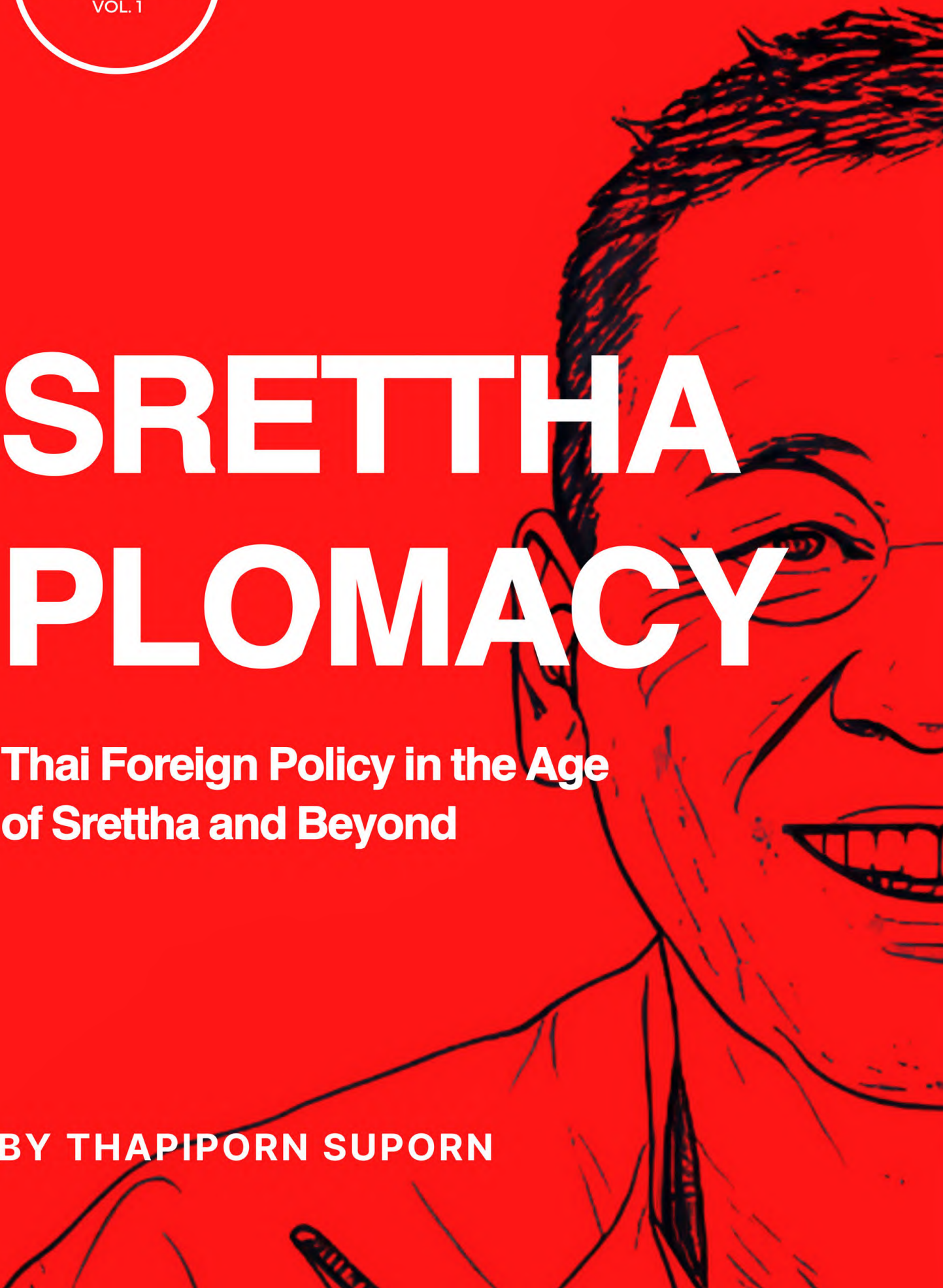




# SRETTHA PLOMACY

Thai Foreign Policy in the Age  
of Srettha and Beyond

BY THAPIORN SUPORN



# SRETTTHAPLOMACY

*Thai Foreign Policy in the Age of  
Srettha and Beyond*

Thapiporn Suporn



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## Publisher's Preface

Crackers Books is proud to present *Sretthaplomacy: Thai Foreign Policy in the Age of Srettha and Beyond*, the inaugural volume of our new series, **International Affairs Series**. This series aims to provide readers with insightful analyses and critical perspectives on the complex dynamics shaping global politics and Thailand's evolving role in the international arena.

Written by **Thapiporn Suporn**, *Sretthaplomacy* offers a comprehensive account of Thailand's foreign policy under the leadership of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, exploring the country's strategic positioning amidst the shifting tides of great power rivalry. With a sharp focus on how domestic politics influences international relations, this book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the intricacies of contemporary Thai diplomacy.

At Crackers Books, we believe in the power of knowledge to shape perspectives and inspire change. Our motto, **Read. Crack. Inspire.**, reflects our commitment to publishing books that challenge readers to think deeply, engage critically, and inspire new ideas. We hope that *Sretthaplomacy* will encourage scholars, students, and enthusiasts of international relations to explore new dimensions of Thailand's foreign policy and contribute to informed discussions on the future of Southeast Asia.

We welcome you to delve into this first volume of the *International Affairs* series and join us on this intellectual journey. Read the book, crack its complex arguments, and let it inspire new ways of thinking about global affairs.

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Read. Crack. Inspire.

Phitsanulok, October 2024

## Preface

For decades, the Thai people have lived as if they are constantly seeking a “Messiah.” Whether it is Thaksin Shinawatra, Prayut Chan-o-cha, Pita Limjaroenrat, or Srettha Thavisin, these figures are seen as potential saviors expected to resolve the deeply polarized political tensions in Thai society while improving the lives and economic well-being of their fellow citizens. If anything, the “Messiah” the people seek seems to be a *persona non grata* to Thai conservatives, as evidenced by coups and judicial activism over the past decade. This is, by all means, a structural constraint of Thai politics and a barrier to the revival of Thailand’s international stature and regional acceptance.

As the 30th Prime Minister of Thailand, Srettha Thavisin fits the Messiah’s daunting tasks, with hopes that he will surpass his predecessor in all aspects, particularly in economic and foreign policy. Mr. Srettha is no stranger to Mr. Thaksin. He clearly shows his support and allegiance to Thaksin, whether through his unofficial role as an advisor to former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin’s sister, or his opposition to the People’s Democratic Reform Committee during the political turmoil of 2013-2014. While some politicians dedicate their entire lives to reaching the

highest position in Thailand's parliament, Srettha, a billionaire-turned-politician, took only 175 days—from March 1 to August 22, 2023—to become the country's prime minister, the only position in politics he stated he would hold, as he once confided to the press. However, the extent of his freedom to navigate Thailand remains in question, given that Mr. Thaksin, directly or indirectly, still wields influence over the domestic and foreign policies of Srettha's administration.

Srettha's foreign policy appears to be more colorful and proactive compared to Prayuth's. He positions himself as the country's top salesman, adopting a foreign policy approach that pays homage to "*Thaksiplomacy*," the CEO ambassador, and, of course, the CEO-style premiership. His frequent overseas travel, though faced with criticisms, highlights his proactive economic policy, touting to promote and elevate Thai tourism and introduce Thai products to the global market. In many ways, Srettha's foreign policy track record appears impressive. While deepening relations with China—a move that has drawn criticism from pundits and scholars who argue it may leave the country vulnerable—the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shown improved performance in addressing the crisis in Myanmar.

Moreover, Srettha's administration aspires to elevate Thailand's presence on the global stage through efforts to enhance the country's soft power, engage in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, and pursue membership in organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and BRICS. However, these ambitions have been hampered by illiberal forces attempting to halt progress.

Srettha's foreign policy, much like his domestic agenda, which includes pressing human rights issues such as the prosecution and imprisonment of students and political activists—particularly those charged under the *Lèse-majesté* law—remains far from perfect. Nevertheless, it establishes a foundation for his successors to build upon. Unlike the previous junta regime, the processes behind foreign policy-making and the country's grand strategy are now managed by experienced professionals rather than military leaders. It may be a cliché to assert that unstable domestic politics can hinder a country's foreign policy, regardless of its quality, but this adage remains relevant in Thailand, where the search for a “Messiah” continues.



This book undoubtedly represents my labor of love, and I wish to dedicate it to Oonjit Theerapattham—a writer, a veteran journalist, a pioneering woman in a male-dominated field long before the term “feminism” gained traction in Thailand, and, of course, a grandmother. Without her, I would not be the person I am today.

Thapiporn Suporn

September 28, 2024

Khon Kaen, Thailand

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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01

INTRODUCTION

07

MUDDLING  
THROUGH

30

PROBLEMS AT  
HOME LOOM  
LARGE

44

UNCHARTED  
WATERS

73

AFTER SRETTA

83

BIBLIOGRAPHY

104

INDEX

# *Introduction*



## Introduction

“The fairest day after a bad emperor is the first.”

—Tacitus

After spending 358 days in office at *Phitsanulok* Mansion, the official residence of the Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin was dismissed by the Constitutional Court. The court ruled that the Prime Minister violated constitutional provisions on integrity and ethical standards by appointing Pichit Chuenban, who had been sentenced to six months in prison for a graft-related offense in 2008, as a cabinet minister. The ruling abruptly ended the first elected civilian government after Thailand had been under authoritarian rule for more than eight years. While this is viewed as yet another instance of Thai conservatives wielding power through the judiciary, jeopardizing Thailand’s democratic progress, the trajectory of Thai foreign policy in the post-Srettha era appears to align with the approach of “*Sretthaploamacy*,” a term coined by the author to describe Prime Minister Srettha’s foreign policy approach.