

National Development and Human Security Promotion: Aging Society in National Security Strategy*

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the issue of aging society has become a major phenomenon in every region of the world. Giving priority on demographic issues along with national development is, therefore, crucial for every country to take a very serious consideration. As such, the main goal in national development of almost every country is to focus on human security and sustainable development to keep their own nation and people secure, safe and peaceful at all levels—from the national level, social, community to the individual level. In addition, the focus has to cover all dimensions including economy, social and cultural, political, science and technology, natural resources and environmental, as well as national defense dimension. All in all, to build such sustainable security, the main key is to invest in improving the quality of ‘people’ so that they all sufficiently retain necessary potential and skills at all ages, inclusive of the elderly.¹

Keywords: Aging Society, Human Security Promotion, National Development, National Security Strategy, Thailand

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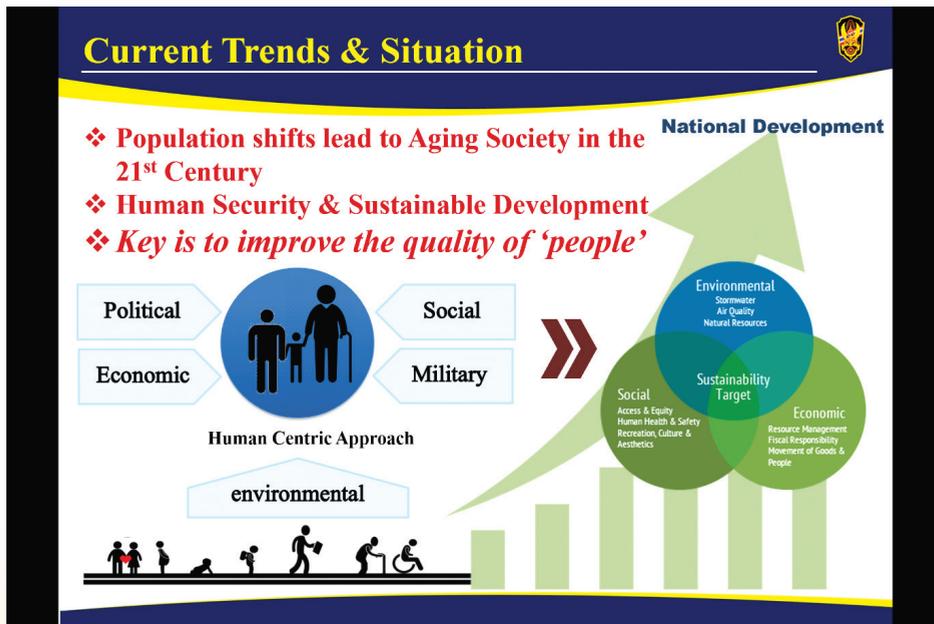
¹ The National Economic and Social Development. (2018). *Summary of the results of the 2nd National Strategic Committee Meeting*. Retrieved April 19, 2018, from http://www.nesdb.go.th/ewt_w3c/ewt_news.php?filename=index&nid=7577.

What this paper aimed to deliberately discuss is the current and general information regarding *aging society situation*, all at the global, country and the Royal Thai Armed Forces' levels in order to provide readers a big picture of what's going on and how the issue affects national security strategy so far and beyond. Additionally, the paper presents also a summary of how *state's policy framework* has governed the issue and directed relevant agencies in coping with emerging problems at the time being. Finally, the paper ends with a *summary and several key recommendations* for the government, armed forces as well as related agencies to further put in good use.

Current Aging Society Situation

According to the United Nations' World Population Prospects 2017, it was found that the trend of the elderly population has increased significantly in all countries around the world. In 2017, the world population of 60 years of age and over was estimated at 962 million, which is expected to be more than double by 2050 to 2.1 billion and will jump more than triple by 2100 to as many as 3.2 billion people. This proportion of the elderly has increased more rapidly than all those of the younger population.²

Such global phenomenon is in line with the increasing proportion of the elderly population in Thailand, which found that the proportion of

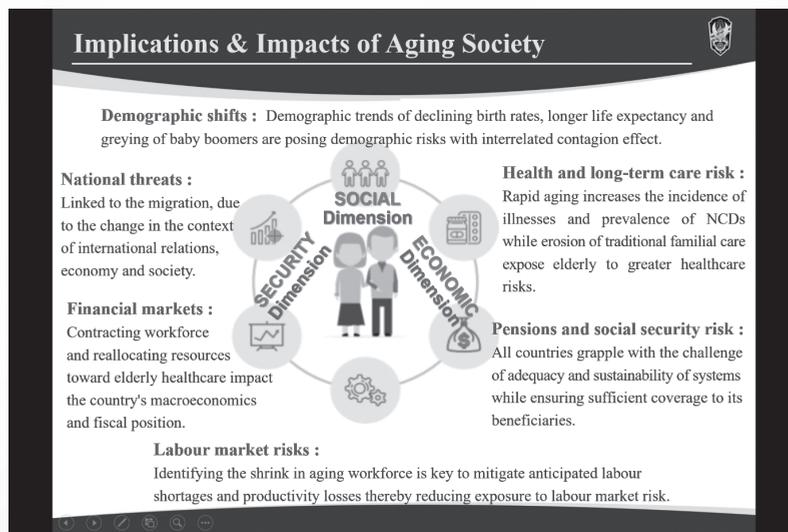


ภาพ Current Trends & Situation

² United Nations. (2017). *Aging*. Retrieved April 19, 2018, from <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/ageing/index.html>.

elderly population has also increased continually. Once compared between the year of 2021, 2026 and 2036, the proportion of the elderly in Thailand increased from 20 percent to 24 percent and 30 percent, respectively. On the other hand, children and working-age population will decline continually from 16 percent to 14 percent, and from 64 percent to 56 percent, respectively. This will, later on, jeopardize the balance of Thailand's overall population structure. In other words, Thailand will be approaching the complete aged society by 2022, with more than 14 percent of the country's population aged 65 or over. In 2031, Thailand will eventually enter the super-age society, with more than 20 percent of the nation's population aged 65 and above—based on the principle of dividing the age range of population set by the United Nations.³

Trends in growing elderly population result from several factors, such as demographic shifts with decayed fertility rates, declining mortality rates as well as longevity. This has heightened the proportion of the world's aging population extensively.⁴ When a country enters the aging society, it will affect the **social dimension** which related to human security, because “the elderly” are normally the group that is at risk of health problems, particularly from Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs). The diseases, in turn, limit their ability to enjoy their everyday living. Also, there is a tendency for the elderly to live alone, which even makes it difficult to deal with the matters. Under the **national security dimension**, the key problem is linked to the migration, both domestically and internationally. This is due to the change in the context of international relations, economy and society,



ภาพ Implications & Impacts of Aging Society

³ Foundation for Older Persons' Development. (2015). *Older Persons Situation in Thailand (Population)*. Retrieved October 29, 2017, from <http://fop dev.or.th/>

⁴ National Institute On Aging And National Institutes Of Health. (2017). *Why Population Aging Matters A Global Perspective*.

which may have the potential to cause problems in the destination countries. For the **economic dimension**, there may be risks associated with unsecured income earning and thus leading to poor status. Also, there could exist a problem of inequality access to resources. Additionally, the productivity of older workers is being predicted to be inadequately sufficient affecting the country's overall production, which may decrease accordingly due to the diminishing number of workers. While the labor forces have more burden in taking care of aging people, the savings could then be reduced. This eventually will have a significant effect on domestic capital, which is one of the key factors in developing the country's economy. And, if the government has obligations to take care of more elderly people, such as the living subsistence, public health services and retirement pensions, there would be too large an amount of fiscal burden for the country to handle and prolong. In addition, if the government is unable to collect tax adequately, it will eventually result in an even bigger problem of public debt problems.⁵ All these are, therefore, challenges that could affect every dimension including social and cultural, security, as well as the economy, as mentioned above.⁶

As for the armed forces—the country's main security organization—it has long played an important role in national defence, sovereignty safeguarding, as well as national development and providing assistances to the people. Moreover, there is no doubt that the armed forces play savory important role as one of the national powers indealing with such missions both in war and in military operations other than war. However, when considering the current trend and situation of personnel in the armed forces,⁷ it was found that the average age of the troops has been climbing higher. It is therefore necessary for the armed forces to search and recruit strong young men who are about to enter the country's workforce. On the contrary, the number of Thai men is currently on a decline from 9,862,427 in 2010 to 7,397,325 in 2040. Although, the decline in the number of Thai males has not yet resulted in a direct impact in the near future, it is likely to have a significant effect on the entry into the military in the long run, particularly, when considering the effect of the country's demographic change in the overall context of Thailand's becoming a complete aging society. Inevitably, the competition in recruiting young men into such industries including the armed forces in the future will become a major human resource concern that requires careful planning and consideration.

⁵ Thipsuda Thavaramorn. (2011). *Is Thailand ready for aging society?* Retrieved October 29, 2017, from http://www.sec.or.th/TH/Documents/Information/Interviews-Articles/2-talk_241154.pdf.

⁶ Mahasarakul, Kannika. (2018). Thai armed forces and the readiness in responding to the aging society issue. Strategic Studies Center, National Defence Studies Institute, Bangkok.

⁷ Bunnag, Amornrat. (2017). The effect of population change to the aging armed forces. *Presentation Documents at The Academic Conference*. From 13 to 14 December at The Cavalli Casa Resort, Ayutthaya, (50).

State's Policy Framework

In the recent past, Thai government has continually set up various policy frameworks to deal with the aging society issue in a multi-level and multi-dimensional fashion through various courses of policy, for example, in the recent 20 Year National Strategic Plan (2017-2036), the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) and the 2nd National Plan for the Elderly (2002-2021). As for the 20 Year National Strategic Plan (2017-2036), the aging society issue has been included in the Plan's Third Strategy: Human Resources Potential Development and Empowerment, which focus on the development of people's potential throughout their entire life. In the age span of the elderly, the senior citizens will be encouraged to: revitalize themselves as an important workforce in driving the country through the enhancement of living and professional skills to be able to earn an income and hold an appropriate job that fits their ability; promote and rehabilitate their own health in prevention of any diseases. Setting the community's environment to be as friendly for the elderly, together with social insurance, is to be consistent with the basic necessities of life. Furthermore, the Plan's Fourth Strategy: the Opportunity and Social Equality Promotion, sets also a specific goal to create environment and social innovation that will support the living for all age groups by developing infrastructure and environment that are friendly with people of all ages in accordance

with the Universal Design principle; for instance, public transport footpaths, public space and residential areas, as well as the investment in infrastructure to support technology and innovation development for the living of people with special needs. Some examples of these developments include an innovation of anti-fall protection in the elderly, elderly care robots, dementia testing through electronic devices, and physical equipment for the disabled. In summary, both national strategies, as mentioned above, aim to strengthen the living environment in the aging society that will result in the people's well-being to promote a better quality of life in the coming future.

Similarly, the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) has addressed the elderly people in its First Strategy: Human Capital Potential Strengthening and Development by promoting the potential of elderly people to be able to enter the job market more such as offering courses on the development of vocational skills that fit the target age range, physical fitness and job characteristics; promoting interpersonal learning skills among various generations; supporting various financial and treasury incentives for entrepreneurs to appropriately employ the elderly; promoting marketing channels, funding and information services concerning career opportunities for the elderly in the community; and applying an approach to develop a better

caring system, as well as creating an appropriate environment for the elderly. While the Second Strategy: Fairness Building and Social Inequality Reduction has laid out an increase in social welfare for the target group, such as increasing the disability and subsistence allowance for the poor elderly, supporting housing and public utilities supply for the target population to solve the urban slum problem and providing a community with appropriate services for the aged population. In addition, there are also promotions and provision of appropriate infrastructure, particularly for children, juveniles, women, the disabled, the elderly and the underprivileged as to provide equal access to government services and social opportunities, including the development of skills to pursue a career and earn a living in accordance with the potential and suitability of each individual. There are also some role promotions of the above groups to be able to participate in managing and decision-making of both national and local levels in order to further support the development of the country.

Lastly, the 2nd National Plan for the Elderly (2002-2021) or the NPE, which conceived as the main national strategic plan for the elderly, has aimed to serve as guidelines for the elderly involving agencies to observe in developing of better living standards for the Thai elderly. Adhere is the perspectives: “the elderly are valuable

assets to the society.” Here, there are 5 key strategies to support the concept as follows: 1) Strategy on readiness preparation of the people for their quality aging, 2) Strategy on the elderly promotion and development, 3) Strategy on the social safeguards for the elderly, 4) Strategy on management of developing the national comprehensive system for undertakings and developing of personnel for the elderly, and 5) Strategy on processing, upgrading and disseminating knowledge on the elderly and the national monitoring of implementation of the NPE.

Under the Royal Thai Armed Forces, there has been an implementation of the 20 Year Defense Strategy Plan (2017-2036) of the Ministry of Defense.⁸ It has been foreseen that future threats will not require such massive forces as in the past to conquer or suppress. Therefore, the country’s armed forces has to downsize its force to an appropriate size. In addition, the armed forces also has to acquire modern weaponries that be on a par with those of other countries in the region in order to maintain a balance in peaceful coexistence and to promote ability to negotiate and mediate for the country’s national interest without having to depend on the superpowers. Regarding to these matters, the Ministry of Defence has implemented a number of early retirement programs as to support the armed forces’ personnel reforming

⁸ Ministry of Defence. (Draft) 20 Year Defence Strategy Plan (2017-2036).

plan to downsize its force to an suitable level that, so far, three projects have been successfully completed as follows: 1) Personnel reduction program for general officers; 2) Personnel reduction program for those who are over 50 years of age, focusing mainly on the combat force; and 3) General personnel reduction program for all those who are over 45 years of age. The results of all three programs over the past 5 years were successful as planned with a result of 24,475 enrollments into the program. Subsequently, the projects have been extended for another 3 years and have been implemented together with the dwindling admission, for example, decreasing the production of cadets, air cadets, and non-commissioned officer cadets, as well as pushing for the revision of country's Reserve Personnel Act, which is to includemilitary reserve students and non-commissioned personnel, in part, to assist people in a disaster situation once occurred. This would make it unnecessary for the armed forces to maintain such a large number of personnel, which would virtually help reduce the country's huge expenditure. In addition, the Ministry of Defence has been holding a long-term plan to use civil servants, instead of military officers, in various tasks in accordance with the country's future context.⁹

Conclusions and Recommendations

As previously discussed, the current aging society circumstances and the state's policy framework indicate clearly that the government is continually prepared to deal with the future population situation in a serious manner. As for the country's security means, the armed forces-whose main functions are to safeguard national security and people's interests, playing quite an important role in the national security matter and acting as a mechanism for promoting regional security, has explored for viable solutions to this concern. Several studies have been conducted to search for sound and possible proposals and considerations in preparing the organization for the aging society. Accordingly, results of recent studies suggest the following:

(1) Review the combat readiness level and guidelines for the use of force in accordance with the National Defence Plan: The combat readiness level should be adjusted and in line with the changing security environment. In addition, the arm forces should be able to appropriately obtain combat personnel in keeping up with both internal and external threats based on changing circumstances and contexts in all areas, including the country's population structure.

⁹ Komchadluek. (2016). New Armed Forces: Compact and Efficient. Retrieved October 29, 2017, from <http://www.komchadluek.net/news/scoop/226657>.

(2) Give a priority to the personnel management policy: The highly-prioritized personnel management policy should be implemented, especially, in the operations units such as army, navy, air force and all units in reserve affairs by reviewing allocation of all posts and positions, as well as recruiting reserve personnel in all tasks and assignments as designed and required by the Department of Defence. Above all, this is to focus on the principle of “Efficiency and job Performance” - by managing people in line with the “Put the right man on the right job” concept. In addition, the Department of Defence is in a process of drafting personnel development plan to reduce the army’s burden in taking care of under performing troops due to body deterioration as the age increases.

(3) Promote military research and technology: As a result of downsizing, the budget should be spent on military development in the area of modernizing military equipment and weaponry, enhancing existing troops efficiency and reducing lost and casualties from tactical training; for example, developing a lightweight land-based weapon system, a high-accuracy motion detector, an advanced platform for military bomb disposal and military medical robots. Such promotion of military research and development for the enhancing of the armed forces’ capabilities is virtually a way to develop the armed forces during the transition period towards aging society.

(4) Extend cooperation in various aspects among the Thai armed forces and allied countries: The enhanced cooperation should then help increasing the armed forces’ personnel capabilities, maximize the applications for the most use and benefit, as well as modernize the Thai military's doctrine since knowledge and expertise in military practice is technically a specific matter and difficult to be replaced. Lastly, because of decreased population, the armed forces thus has to keep and maintain competent personnel in service to cope with all possible threats affecting future national security.

(5) Promote financial planning and savings for retirees: Such tools or savings systems that could be beneficially planned and utilized for these matters including the Social Security Fund for old ages, Government Pension Fund and State Enterprise Employee Provident Fund, Retirement Mutual Fund, Long Term Equity Fund, Life insurance and the National Pension Fund, for example.

In summary, because of the awareness and anticipation of the potential impacts of the aging society crisis, causing a population’s structure imbalance in many countries, including Thailand, the government has laid out the previously mentioned plans and policies for relevant ministries and agencies to implement into a proper action plan and tangible practices. As a result, then, people of all ages, especially the elderly, will be able to enjoy equal opportunities and equality. In addition, all the plans

and policies could be one of the country's driving forces leading to the national goals and objectives. As for the armed forces sector, which is also likely to be affected by such changes, the Royal Thai Armed Forces therefore has adjusted the related policy to be in line with the new context of all threats that does not require the use of large military forces as in the past. The new policy, as a result, aims to modify and streamline the force structure into an agile, smaller one that is still able to maintain its capability and efficiency in accordance with those of challenges and neighboring countries. In doing so, the Ministry of Defence has focused on reducing the number of aging personnel, particularly in combat roles by implementing several early retirement programs. Additionally,

modern technology is adopted and utilized to compensate the declining number of personnel as to increase the efficiency in carrying out required missions. All these measures are practical actions designed to cope with the national crisis of demographic change. In regard to this matter, the Strategic Studies Center, National Defence Studies Institute really hopes that all the recommendations presented here, which are aiming to prepare the armed forces in response to the aging society concern, will be part of determining and allocating the future number of personnel to efficiently suit or appropriate for the foreseen needs and still be able to carry out its key missions in defending Thailand effectively to ensure the safeguarding and maintenance of the country's sovereignty and national interests.

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