

Sir John Wheeler Bennett wrote in his introduction to *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945*, that his book intended, among other things, to show how the German army “. . . when it was mistaken enough to come down into the arena and to play politics instead of controlling them, it began a descent which ended in abject defeat – militarily, politically and spiritually.” The seminar will focus on how this quotation may help us to better understand the contrasting political role of the Thai and Myanmar armies today and in the recent past. The interdisciplinary literature on military-civil relations has grown extensively since the 1950s but the two notions that Wheeler noted – controlling politics and playing politics – has been largely ignored not only in the case of Thailand and Myanmar but also in other countries in the region, particularly Indonesia and the Philippines. Military-civil relations in these countries will also be examined. Ultimately, armies must learn the lesson that Lord Castlereagh examined in 1815: “Tyrants may poison or murder an obnoxious character, but the surest and only means a *constitutional* sovereign [or army] has to restrain such a character is to *employ him* . . . the essence of a free state is to manage the party warfare, as to reconcile it with the safety of the sovereign [or army] . . . to do this, the King must give contending parties facilities against each other, and not embark himself too deeply in anyway.”