



## **THEME: Thailand and the 2006 coup**

Debating Thailand's September 2006 military *coup d'état*

Thai politics beyond the 2006 coup

Coup, capital and confrontation in the late Thaksin era

The coup and the South

The great power game and Thai military rule

Thaksin the orphan, and the King: Contested moral leadership as seen by poor Buddhist Karen

King, coup and sufficiency economy: the quest for political legitimacy

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## The art of (considering) the possible

For more than 20 years, Southeast Asia has been a laboratory of military politics, democratization, and drastic political change. Stable but violent authoritarian military and civilian governments have had to step down abruptly (Suharto 1998; Marcos 1986, for example). The dominance of the military has suddenly declined in many areas of protracted conflict (Aceh 2005 and 1998, East Timor 1999, and Papua 1998, for example) of the region. But the process has not been without setbacks as Thailand 2006, Burma/Myanmar 2004 and Aceh 2003, Patani 2003 and 2006 and Papua 2001, testify.

Fundamental political changes pose a challenge for traditional Asian studies and regional studies in 'social science'. It has often been the main specialists of a country who have been the last to grasp the potential for change in "their countries". When Suharto fell and the country embarked into a democratic course, it were the Indonesianists who were the last to acknowledge the change. Similarly, it is the best specialists of the Myanmar political system who now overestimate the durability of the mechanisms of authoritarian stability that they have been studying for decades. Their focus has been on the modalities that have actualized; on the choices that have been made, not on those that could have been taken; on the causal coincidents that materialized, not on those that did not but could have.

For the students of Thai democratization in the 1990s, the coup of 2006 might have come as a surprise. Focus on the consolidating mechanisms of democracy can have confused Thai specialists of the potential of non-democratic tendencies taking over. The Thai coup of 2006 reminds us that expertise in an area requires an approach where the actual developments can be related to the possible developments that could take place. A specialist of Thailand cannot really understand this complex country unless she or he is able see the potentials it has for a fundamental change.

Comparative perspectives are often necessary for the understanding of potentials: systematized lessons from other democratizing countries could reveal more about the risks that Thailand faced, than the mere scrutiny of what has been happening in Thailand. Furthermore, the study of the junctures of political discontinuity – coups, democratization, revolutions, etc. – is especially useful for revealing what is possible in Thailand, but also for systematizing lessons for other democratizing countries. Only by systematically studying the lessons of fundamental change can we learn about the potentials and risks. In order to be instrumental for positive change scholars need to be able to identify and reveal the potentials for improvements. But they also need to be able to find and warn about the possibilities risks on the path to progress. This is why the Southeast Asian laboratory of change is interesting. This is also why the current issue of *NIASnytt*, about the Thai coup and the potentials for post-coup politics, exemplifies scholarship that makes a difference.

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# Debating Thailand's September 2006 military *coup d'état*

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*On the night of September 19, with Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra speaking at the UN in New York, a faction of Thailand's military led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin staged a bloodless coup, suspended the constitution, and declared martial law. The new junta pledged allegiance to King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the following day, the coup leaders received his endorsement. General Sonthi declared that he would serve as prime minister for two weeks. Subsequently, the junta appointed an interim government with Privy Concellor Surayud Chulanont as prime minister. Since then a contested referendum in August has been held leading to a new constitution and elections are planned to follow by the end of 2007.*

The coup was essentially a retro action: a military coup had not been seen in Thailand since the early 1990s. Indeed, the sight of armed troops in camouflage patrolling the streets of Bangkok was surprising to most Thai and international observers. Already in 1967, Thai scholar Fred Riggs claimed that Thai bureaucrats, whether civilian or in military outfit, are noted for their involvement in politics. The bureaucratic participation, as Riggs called it, has historically speaking been part and parcel in the Thai political arena since the overthrow of absolute monarchy in 1932. In fact, we also see a certain inertia in the announcements from the new and previous military leaders. The four reasons mentioned by General Sonthi clearly echoes the reasons for the coup in 1976 and also the coup in 1991 where General Suchinda mounted a coup against the civilian government on the same claims: widespread corruption and the existence of 'unusually rich' politicians, and the repeated accusations of acting as guardians of the monarchy. The national security reason for the coup has been changed though from a Cold War rhetoric to the present War on Terror.

The main difference between the other 18 coups since 1932 was that this time King Bhumibol Adulyadej not only endorsed the coup, but through his factions in the army and his

Privy Council proxies he seems to have played a much more decisive role.

Does it mean that Riggs's thesis is correct today? Yes and no. On the one hand, the coup is a reminder to those who have repeatedly claimed that the bureaucratic polity was over and had been replaced by a different model in response to the bargaining strategies employed by local business associations and representatives of private capital. On the other hand, the coup was predictable when Thaksin threatened the power circles of King Bhumipol's old boys' network – as Duncan McCargo has called it elsewhere – or simply the old conservative elite. Further, the coup also implies that a power struggle is emerging about the question of succession and the direction of Thai society when the King dies.

In this issue of *NIASnytt* we have collected six articles which offer a rich variety of themes, views and opinions about the various aspects related to the coup and factors leading to the military coup and its aftermath.

# Thai politics beyond the 2006 coup

*Pasuk Phongpaichit, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok*

*The keywords of political debate of the 1990s were terms like civil society, rights and freedoms, participation, and reform. By contrast, the keywords of the 2000s have included authoritarianism, exclusion, coup, nominee, security, violence and reconciliation.\**

## What has happened, and where will this lead?

Whether we like it or not, Thaksin Shinawatra's premiership (2001–2006) has brought out a deep division in Thai society. On the one hand, the mass electorate embraced him as their leader and gave him three unprecedented election victories. On the other hand, old elites rejected him for being authoritarian, for using political power to enrich his family and cronies, and for threatening major long-standing institutions through his headlong pursuit of rapid change.

## Thaksin's populism

The core of this division is Thaksin's so-called 'populism.' It is important to understand where this came from. When he rose to power, Thaksin showed no real interest in the masses. He became a popular leader over the following years because of the demand for such a leader.

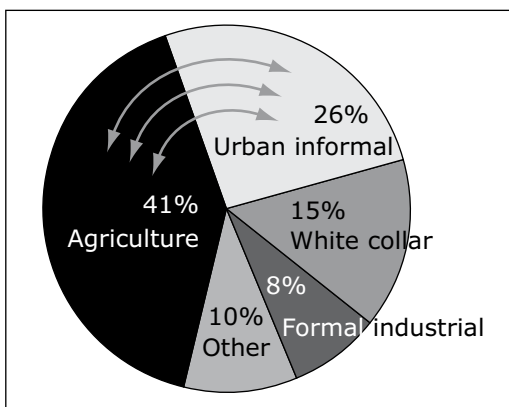
This demand was a function of the social structure and politicisation. The following diagram provides a sketch of Thai society in the 2000s. The formal working class – meaning

those with relatively permanent jobs in enterprises of some scale – is very small, around 8% of the working population. The middle class, i.e. anyone with a white-collar job including bureaucrats, professionals, and managers, is around 15%.

The majority of the society, about two-thirds of the workforce, are in agriculture or the urban informal sector – working as vendors, in mom-and-pop stores, service sector, small enterprises and illegal businesses. A big casual workforce is floating between many jobs because people move back and forth between agriculture and the urban informal sector.

Remittances from urban informal work subsidise faltering agricultural incomes. Together these two groups form the 'informal mass.' They are outside the state legal structure and social protection, and they dominate the electorate. For this informal mass, the financial crisis of 1997 was a key moment of politicisation. They did not cause the crisis but bore much of the impact (especially through unemployment), and received no relief. The resentment, and resulting politicisation, led to a wave of demonstrations, such as for debt relief, over 1998–99.

This wave coincided with Thaksin's bid for political power. As a wealthy businessman, he was an unlikely candidate to become a populist leader. But he became more intensely a populist over the next five years



\* This article is based on the Supha Sirimanond Memorial Lecture, which the author delivered at the Political Economy Centre, Chulalongkorn University on 25 July 2007)

– as he realised the potential of the informal mass as a base of popular electoral support. First, he offered social policies which were universal in scope (e.g., cheap health care for everybody) and thus appealed to the informal mass which is usually exempted from formal welfare schemes.

Second, he made himself into a public figure which members of the informal mass could imagine they owned, partly by deliberately distancing himself from the old elite of bureaucrats, politicians, and intellectuals.

Third, he claimed that he was the mechanism which translated the will of the people into action by the state, overriding democratic principles, judicial process and the rule-of-law on grounds that these principles had never benefited the ordinary people.

## The 2006 coup

Thaksin had politicised the gaping division in Thai society – between the urban elite and the great informal mass – which had been developing over the past half century of development. The leaders of the coup explicitly cited this division as one of the four justifications for the coup.

His populist trend had frightened the ruling elites, the military and a large segment of the middle class. These three elements joined hands in the coup of September 2006. The army provided the force. The ruling elites provided traditional legitimisation. The middle class gave support in public space. Even though the middle class is a minority, it shapes and dominates the public space in which politics is debated. In this space, Thaksin was condemned as a demon, and the coup was given a warm welcome.

The crucial point for understanding the participation by the ruling elites and army is to realise that 2006 is actually one point in a sequence going back to the coups of 1947, 1957 and 1976.

In all these four events, the army and royalists moved in alliance to eject an elected government on grounds that the elected government was too weak, too strong, too corrupt, too disrespectful of the monarchy, or too something else.

In 2006, the army had a special reason to participate. Thaksin had been trying to bring the army under his personal control. The old guard in the military and a lot of their upcoming subordinates resented this.

The army also saw an opportunity to gain redemption for the army's role in 1992, which had reduced their status so dramatically. The military had long wanted to regain some of its former prominence, and the opportunity to overthrow Thaksin gave them the chance.

The middle class initially welcomed Thaksin in 2001 as a leader to continue the modernisation reforms begun in the 1990s. Their support held up for four years, but in 2005, they turned against him in a violent and highly emotional way.

The middle class had three fears: first, that it was dangerous to have a state dominated by a clique of the biggest and rather corrupt business interests; second, that they would have to pay for Thaksin's populism through increased taxes and the resulting economic disorder; and third, that Thaksin's formula – an alliance of big money and big numbers – would make the middle class politically irrelevant.

## What next?

The best guide is history. The alignment of social forces around the 2006 coup is similar to that around the coup of 1976. On one side are the ruling elites, army, and urban middle class; on the other the rest, with strong rural emphasis.

In both 1976 and 2006, the coup was a reaction against a political challenge with its centre of gravity in the countryside. In 1976, Bangkok felt threatened by a Maoist insurgency, a peasant movement, and a student movement which sympathised with rural demands.

In 2006, Bangkok again felt threatened, but this time by a political leader and political party which had built unprecedented support in the rural areas of the North and the Northeast by delivering a range of populist programmes, and promising more.

After 1976, the establishment solution was a formula of 'managed democracy' with three main parts: constitutional engineering to pro-

duce a system that was democratic in form but insulated against the risk of mass takeover; military oversight of political activity from top to bottom; and a public campaign for national unity around the monarchy. All these three parts are seen again in 2006.

The 2007 draft constitution deliberately sets out to weaken the prime minister and the political parties. It installs a semi-appointed senate to serve as a conservative deadweight on the parliament. It aims for a return to the fluid coalition politics of the 1980s and 1990s.

The Internal Security Bill gives massive powers to the army chief to oversee politics from top to bottom. The military has tried desperately to undermine support for Thaksin using old-fashioned methods of disruption and intimidation.

This strategy of 'managed democracy' will not be as easy as in the post-1976 period, because of the large changes over the intervening thirty years. Thailand's globalised economy is incompatible with military rule.

The 1985–95 boom raised income levels, and multiplied the number of interests that are promoted or protected through political actions. Since the early 1980s, elections have become established for parliament and later for local government.

There is a dense pyramid of electoral organisation extending down from MPs through local government heads to village canvassers. Many have benefited from electoral democracy.

The attempt to 'manage democracy' might fail completely, unless it is flexible. Many people are unhappy about the 2007 draft constitution, and the attempt to pass the internal security bill. Civil society groups have opposed the current army chief's ambitions to become the next prime minister. Many in the informal mass feel that Thaksin and TRT have been martyred. These resentments can be explosive.

### From exclusion to inclusion

Thaksin's populism, the coup and 'managed democracy' are all strategies to exclude opponents from the democratic process. Thaksin hijacked the constitution in order to neutralise opponents

to his political ambitions. The coup tore up the constitution in order to undermine Thaksin's massive electoral support. The 2007 constitution has been written with the single-minded aim to prevent the return of Thaksin and the social forces he has come to represent.

Politics will only become stable when the political system reflects and accommodates all the important social forces and political aspirations in the society.

Competitive strategies of exclusion will only add to social division and political tension.

Democracy succeeds in societies where enough of the major social forces come to realise that elections, parliaments and public debate (for all their messy faults) are better ways to resolve the conflicts in society than power, repression, exclusion and violence.

In such societies, everyone agrees to accept a set of rules and institutions, and to play within them, rather than trying to subvert the rules or tear them up at the first opportunity.

The first step towards such a stable system has to be an inclusive procedure for writing the rules. Whatever faults the resulting charter had, the 1997 process at least was an attempt at such an inclusive procedure. The 2007 process was not and as such will inevitably be a false start.

It is time to aim for an inclusive politics. Perhaps the most difficult task in Thai politics now is how to convince the triple alliance behind the coup of 2006 to accept a political system which accommodates everybody fairly.



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# Coup, capital and confrontation in the late Thaksin era

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*The conventional perception of a military coup d'état refers to a military faction or individual seizing power for selfish, often anti-democratic reasons. The Thai coup d'état of 1991 and 2006, which overthrew the democratically elected governments of General Chatichai Choonhavan and Thaksin Shinawatra respectively, were staged for ostensibly similar reasons: rampant corruption, the emergence of deep divisions in society, attacks on the military and threats to the institution of the monarchy (National Peace Keeping Council, 1991; Council for Democratic Reform, 2006).*

This article analyses the nature of the military coup that brought down the Thaksin government in September 2006. It demonstrates how the coup group was able to draw on the rising royalist sentiment of 2005–2006 in order to legitimate their actions against the government. Secondly, it offers some provisional observations relating to the political economy of the coup. It intends to show how Thaksin's economic rise was perceived as a threat by other capitalist groupings in Thai society.

One of the most important differences between the 1991 and 2006 coups is the striking distinction between the background in politics and business and ambitions of the two coup groups. The 1991 coup group, the National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC), was led by the Class of 5 (C5) controlled core military units. They had concrete political ideas and ambitions. C5 leaders had an ambition to enter politics under their classmates' support. Coup leader General Suchinda Kraprayoon's brief prime-ministership in 1992 is testament to this ambition, however misplaced. Other than their already achieved objective of overthrowing Thaksin to protect the monarchy the political ambition of the 2006 coup group is not yet clear.

## The rise of a royalist military

The turning point that eventually culminated in the *coup d'état* was the sixtieth anniversary of His Majesty the King's accession to the

throne and provocations which took place during the period of annual military reshuffling. Massive public pressure and the resort to the 'Royal Power Discourse' that began to resonate from around the end of 2005 signaled an escalation during the King's Diamond Jubilee on 9 June, 2006 when hundreds of thousands of people donned yellow shirts and took part in festivities around the Royal Plaza all the way to Makawan Rangsang Bridge. Even so, Thaksin, facing pressure to leave office, would defy these strong royalist sentiments in a speech on 29 June, 2006 made before high-ranking government officials at the Government House: '... there is chaos in society because charismatic people and some organizations outside those sanctioned by the Constitution are trying to overthrow the government, rules and laws, Constitution and democracy' (INN News: 21).

The game then shifted to the military reshuffle that took place in mid July 2006 when Thaksin urged commanders in chief of the armed forces to hasten their submission of the lists of military personnel to be transferred. Gen. Thammarak Isarangkun, then Minister of Defense, determined the deadline on July 27, 2006 (*Matichon*, 14 July 2006). The most forceful demonstration of opposition to Thaksin's moves in the military reshuffle which was also a sign of affinity to the 'royal military' was the move by President of the Privy Council, Gen. Prem Tinsulanond to boost the morale



of the forces on July 14, 2006. Gen. Prem, dressed in military uniform, gave a speech at the Chulachomkiao Royal Military Academy in Khao Cha Ngoko asserting that ‘the soldiers belong to His Majestic the King, not to the government. A government is like a jockey. It supervises soldier, but the real owners are the country, and the King’ (Wasana, 2006: 1)

The ideological support rendered by Gen. Prem, who was also a well respected figure in military circles, provided anti-government forces with the morale boost necessary to act against the government. A week after Prem’s speech, Army in Chief Gen. Sonthi Boon-yaratkin accepted a reshuffle list submitted by the commanders in chief of four regions. This included the reposting of 129 middle-ranked military officers, including 38 battalion commanders, many of them considers sympathetic to Thaksin, because of their membership of C10 of the Preparatory Military Academy School. However, the royalist military could not get the upper hand in the reshuffle and this necessitated the coup on 19 September, 2006. The coup became a success despite the fact that Thaksin dominated every key political institution. Interestingly, the 2006 coup makers had royalist movement support.

### **The emergence of the anti-Thaksin and royalist movement**

The anti-Thaksin and royalist movement had been recreated by various groups such as academics, politician, aristocrats, Buddhist monks, business leaders, privy council members and military leaders, but Sondhi Limthongkul, founder and owner of *Manager* newspaper, was a key organizer. Sondhi’s attacks against Thaksin centered on the latter’s disrespect of the most revered and sensitive institutions of nation – religion and monarchy. He cited as crucial examples the merit making ceremony at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha presided over by Thaksin, and the appointment of an interim Supreme Patriarch. Sondhi endorsed slogans such as ‘We will fight for the King.’ He was wearing yellow, which is

not only the colour of Buddhism but also of the day that Thais assign to Monday, the day of the present King’s birth. People who joined him at his rallies were also encouraged to wear yellow shirts.

Sondhi’s protest base expanded further and subsequently would be transformed into the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD). It emerged from the earlier Campaign for Popular Democracy which called for forty non-governmental organizations to join in the protest (*Thai Post*, 6 February 2006: 11). The PAD now turned to organize a huge demonstration on 11 February, 2006 at the Royal Plaza (*The Nation*, 12 February 2006: 1 A). The ideology – effectively demonstrated through gatherings and exhortations of royalist slogans – coincided with Sondhi’s idea to ‘fight for the King and return royal power’. Finally, this would provide the basis for the royalist armed forces to stage a *coup d’etat* and legitimate it in terms of the royal institution.

### **The Thaksin challenge – the challenge of capital**

Any analysis of the coup of 2006 must also take into account the tensions within Thai capitalist groups. Given the contemporary nature of events, the shadowy politicking of capital groups in Thailand, and the sometimes highly personalized nature of business dealings, the ideas of this section are necessarily tentative. One point of departure is to recognize significant economic rivalry among Thai domestic capital, especially between the Shinawatra business group of Thaksin and, despite significant linkages, and the monarchy’s investment arm, the Crown Property Bureau (CPB). Tensions were not limited to these two; Thaksin alienated other capital groups as well, so that by the times of the political crisis of 2005–2006 a loose alliance of capitalists supported Sondhi under the banner of royalism. Thaksin’s aggrandizing tendencies led disaffected capitalist groups to mobilize against him (Connors 2005; 2006).

## Thaksin and the palace

The CPB was still staggering from the crisis of 1997: as a former key shareholder of the Siam Commercial Bank, the CPB's shares were reduced to a mere 11.8% between 1999 and 2003. After 1997, the CPB also needed to increase the rates of its property and real estate to be in tune with prevailing market prices, like the two billion baht World Trade Center project, and the 1.1 billion baht for the Dusit Thani Hotel project (Porphan, 2006: 125–126). Nevertheless, the net worth of the CPB's corporate dealings – most of which belonged to the old business sectors like banking and real estate rentals – could still not compare with that of the Shinawatra Group. Paul Handley suggests that the crisis wiped out palace income, which had topped US\$ 100 million a year in the mid-1990s. Dividends stopped flowing and many tenants stopped paying rent (Handley, 2006: 410).

In this situation Thaksin did two things. First, he is said to have utilized his own money, showing his superiority over the Palace. At the end of the 1990s, many well-informed Bangkokians talked of Thaksin having taken on many of the Prince's larger expenditures, including the refurbishment of the old palace of Rama VII, in which the prince wanted to reside (Handley 2006: 424). This suggested that Thaksin was not beholden to the palace. Second, on 9 June 2006, Thaksin was perceived as discrediting the royal celebrations by telling the media that his government had approved of a 500-million-baht budget to finish a new building in the Grand Palace where all the King's guests dine together (Thaksin 2006). Discussion on royal finances is rare in Thailand. From the perspective of the royalists this 'crassness' may well have been the last straw in Thaksin's attempt to challenge the palace.

Given the above, the coming together of key business groupings to back the overthrow of Thaksin is not surprising. Prachai Liewphairat of TPI (Spell out) Thailand's largest petroleum chemical firm, which had been forced out of business, joined the crusade by providing fi-

nancial support to Sondhi Limthongkul by placing rolling advertisements in the latter's *Manager* newspaper. Charoen Sirivadhanabhakdi, Thailand's richest whisky tycoon, who failed in his endeavour to enlist Thai Beverage Plc in the Stock Exchange of Thailand lent his support to Pramuan Ruchanaseree, a former Thai Rak Thai party member, by offering the Ratchapruerk Club, which he owns, as the venue for the launching of Pramuan's *Royal Powers* in the late July 2005. The affair was eventually cancelled due to pressure from members of the Thaksin administration (Anon, 2005).

The combined pressure of all these forces finally led Thaksin to dissolve Parliament in March 2006. The rise of the anti-Thaksin forces marked a significant alliance of capital, middle class, royalist and military and would form the basis of a social movement that paved the way for the subsequent military take over on 19 September.

## Conclusion

The 2006 *coup d'état* was far more than a simple case of military seizure of power. Rather, the coup was intimately connected to the monarchy in various respects. The 'royalist military' legitimated the coup by using the royalist discourse that was generated by the anti-Thaksin movement and the massive celebrations of the King's 60<sup>th</sup> year on the throne. The most interesting is that it is an unfinished coup. Accordingly, the first constitution referendum in Thailand which occurred on 19 August 2007. There were 10,747,441 (or 41.37 %) no votes; 14,727,306 (or 56.69 %) votes were in the affirmative (*The Nation* 21 August 2007: A 1). There are 24 provinces in the North and Northeast. They seemingly voted against the junta's constitution. Also, Thaksin is still their popular leader. It means that the final confirmation of the junta's constitution highlights the country's deep regional divide instead of serving as a ringing endorsement of a new dawn for the country's immature democracy. The strong confrontation among pro- and anti-Thaksin groups may have been moved away from the constitution drafting de-

bate and the demonstrations at Sanam Luang, Bangkok, and has entered party politics. The key factors, which are leading to more confrontations among pro- and anti-Thaksin groups, are asset scrutiny process, the court decision to criminal cases and British government extradition approval of Thaksin and his family. Also, the role of the military under the new army in chief, Gen. Prem and the palace will occur after the next general election. The confrontation is not over yet.

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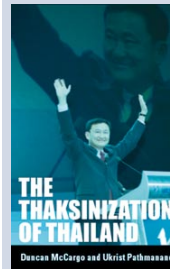
## The Thaksinization of Thailand

*Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand*

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*Examines the Thaksin phenomenon in depth. Was first study to warn of the dangers of repoliticizing the Thai military.*

# The coup and the South

*Duncan McCargo, University of Leeds*

*On 16 September 2006, I attended a military-sponsored event at the Yala Provincial Mosque, attended by hundreds of Malay Muslims carrying small Thai flags to show their loyalty to the Thai state (some, it must be noted, had been paid to attend). After the ceremony, I spoke to the army general in charge, who suggested that I look him up when I was next time in Bangkok. He told me to call him on his mobile phone number, as there would soon be a reshuffle of senior posts. Three days later, the Army seized power in a coup d'état, and the general concerned received a sudden promotion. Did he already know something when I spoke to him that Saturday? When I had breakfast with him at the Four Seasons Hotel a few months later he denied having been 'in on' the coup, but I was not sure how far I believed him.*

On the face of it, the military coup of September 19, 2006 was completely unrelated to the de facto civil war that has raged in Thailand's Southern border provinces since January 2004, and which has now claimed more than 2600 lives. But in practice the two issues cannot be fully separated. The government of Thaksin Shinawatra bore significant responsibility for the deterioration of a long-simmering low-intensity conflict into a fully-fledged violent insurgency, and this failure helped to re-politicise the military and lay the basis for the coup.

The government of General Prem Tinsulanond (1980–88) had brokered a form of social compact with the Malay-Muslim community that comprises over eighty per cent of the population in the border provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Prem's administration used special administrative and security structures, fronted by the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC). Through the Centre, the Thai state bought off Malay-Muslim religious and political elites. Religious teachers received generous funding to offer the secular Thai curriculum in their schools, while Muslim politicians were able to win parliamentary and eventually some ministerial seats. This social compact was underwritten by some sleazy deals; the Fourth Army was granted a privileged status to oversee security matters, and unfettered access to revenues from smuggling and other activities.

When Thaksin came to office, he saw himself as the representative of a new, self-made Sino-Thai business class who sought to wrest control of the country's power and resources from Thailand's traditional overlords: the monarchy, the Army, senior bureaucrats, and their close ally the Democrat Party. He was determined to break the power of what I term 'network monarchy' – a liminal power structure managed by Prem (now president of the Privy Council) on behalf of the palace, and to replace it with his own network of allies, supporters and cronies. In the deep South, that meant cutting Prem down to size, removing the Fourth Army's monopoly power over security issues, and abolishing the old social compact, including the SBPAC.

The rest is history. Misreading the conflict and arguing that there was no longer any real insurgency in the South, just banditry funded by some opposition politicians, Thaksin abolished the SBPAC in 2002, and put the police in charge of security (Thaksin is a former police officer). In fact, the longstanding separatist movement in the South was then in the process of re-grouping. Thaksin's police sidekicks – senior officers sent down from Bangkok – had at least 20 army informers killed, thereby removing the Thai state's primary source of human intelligence about developments in the region. Some key informants were murdered in the controversial 2003 'war on drugs' (a policy of extra-judicial killing that left some 3,000



Army checkpoint at Narathiwat. (Photo: Duncan McCargo)

people dead, many of them with no involvement in the drug trade, and very few of them major dealers). This new wave of extra-judicial killing filled Malay Muslim communities with alarm, and aided recruitment for a resurgent militant movement that was already capitalising on international developments after 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq.

On 4 January 2004, at least fifty – perhaps over a hundred – militants attacked an army camp in Narathiwat, killing some soldiers and making off with a large cache of weapons. This incident was a humiliation for the Thai state, demonstrating the formidable capacity of the enemy and the incompetence of the government forces. Since that day, the Thai military has been on the defensive in the deep South, fighting irregular opponents who use tactics of surprise and terror against both state officials and the civilian population. Many victims of the violence have been Muslims, often those branded by the movement as hypocrites. No one has formally declared responsibility for the violence, but confession evidence and the texts of anonymous leaflets show that an organised but loosely structured militant network is fighting for independence from Bangkok.

Under Thaksin, the security forces proved terribly inept. Obsessed with the need for quick results, he constantly rotated army and police commanders, and subverted the intelligence gathering and decision-making processes by listening only to those security officials he trusted personally. Two major incidents in 2004 greatly exacerbated the problem: the storming of the Kru-Ze mosque on 28 April, in which 32 men died in Southern Thailand's most revered holy site; and the Tak Bai incident of 25 October, in which 78 men apparently suffocated while being transported in army trucks.

Thaksin's mishandling of the South led him to clash with Prem, the Privy Council and the palace, who urged him to adopt a more conciliatory approach to the conflict. It was over the South that the growing rift between network monarchy and Thaksin first became evident. As early as October 2004, prominent Pattani Islamic school owner and leading royal ally Nideh Waba called for a royally appointed government to oust Thaksin – a demand taken up by the broader anti-Thaksin movement in 2006.

The South became, in effect, a microcosm of the broader tensions between Thaksin and net-

work monarchy. The divide was symbolised by the royalist National Reconciliation Commission of 2005–06, which was chaired by Anand Panyarachun (former premier and close confidante of the King), and was set up by Thaksin as a way of reducing political pressures generated by the Southern conflict. For a time, Anand became a sort of moral shadow to Thaksin; it became clear that for many people that the alternative to Thaksin was not the opposition Democrats, but royalists such as Anand and Privy Councillor Surayud Chulanont.

The crisis in the South gave new political life to the military, who had been metaphorically banished to the barracks following the May 1992 events when they had shot scores of civilians dead on the streets of Bangkok. In an attempt to rein in the violence, Thaksin appointed the first ever Muslim army commander, General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin. Sonthi, however, became disillusioned with Thaksin's policies towards the South and increasingly alienated from the Prime Minister. This alienation, and a belief that the military needed to be free to tackle security problems without political interference, contributed to the growing restiveness of the military in the run-up to the coup. The Army were deeply unhappy that they were being blamed for a problem they believed Thaksin and the police – their long-standing rivals – had largely created.

In the event, the post-coup government, headed by Surayud Chulanont (as I predicted in a paper first given in 2005), proved no more successful in the South than had Thaksin. Surayud's apology for Tak Bai in November 2006 actually produced a surge in violent incidents; the militants were now far too strong to be assuaged by gesture politics, and the genies released on Thaksin's watch had no intention of returning to the bottle. By late 2007, tensions between Muslims and Buddhists were growing rapidly; the military was seeking to subcontract and privatise frontline fighting to rangers, village defence volunteers and Buddhist militias. Anxiety about the South was associated with rising Thai Buddhist fears about

the future of the nation and the monarchy. Given the military junta's conspicuous inability to address, let alone resolve, Thailand's fundamental political problems, the continuing meltdown of the South had become a metaphor for the failure of the coup and rising collective national anxieties.

Rather than fighting real enemies in the Southern border provinces, the military junta had become mired in shadow-boxing with a physically absent but otherwise tangibly present Thaksin, and his local allies. As ever, the Thai military was more comfortable engaging in political struggles than in actual combat. Just as the September 2006 coup proved an empty move that failed to confront Thailand's political demons – including money politics, poor governance, weak popular political consciousness and an overweening attachment to a declining monarchy – so the generals failed to turn around a war in the South that may prove Thaksin's longest and darkest legacy.

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# The great power game and Thai military rule

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*There is a variety of suggestions trying to explain why the Thai military decided, in 2006, to stage the 18th coup in 75 years. Some point to corruption and declining growth and investment rates, others to the security problems in the South. A third explanation has tried to relate the coup to the role of the Privy Council and King Bhumipol Adulyadej, and not least the unresolved question about succession which essentially can be viewed in the context of power politics (Handley 2006b). The King is 80 years old and in poor health and this raises the question who is going to become the next king and subsequently, who is going to preside over the informal – and indeed formal – institutional influence of the monarchy on the future of Thai politics and economics?*

These questions are of great importance as they refer to some of the most common explanations of the re-entrance of Thai military rule. I would like to add an additional international dimension to the coup and especially point to the geopolitical role and influence of the US and China which has had a significant impact on King Bhumipol and the Privy Council's support to the coup. In fact, some evidence shows that if not directly then indirectly, the White House gave the green light to the coup. The new military dictatorship has probably strengthened the position of the United States in both Thailand and Southeast Asia as a whole.

## The historical dimension

King Bhumipol has always had close historical ties to the United States. Born and raised in the US, his political awareness was sharpened during the Cold War (Handley 2006a: 187–189). It is probably not wrong to suggest that the anti-communism of the old generation of the Privy Council and the King himself have had strong influence on their thinking today and that the US support during the Cold War has been a keystone of Thai security. In addition, and as various observers have argued, the monarch values stability over democracy and has been traditionally conservative in his ideological orientation.

It is also rather striking that Washington historically and currently has regarded the King, and not the Prime Minister, as head of state. This has been the indirect excuse for the US recognition of those Thai governments that came to power by military force, while the monarchy over time came to engage itself deeply in the political, economic, and social structure of Thailand. The accusations against the Privy Council and especially former Prime Minister and current Chief Privy Councillor Prem Tinsulanonda of masterminding bureaucratic alliances, their control of the Crown Property Bureau with its vast empire of land holdings and companies, and co-optation of the Buddhist establishment, have all led to unclear boundaries between the informal extra-constitutional power of the monarchy and the real institutions belonging to the King. The support from the United States during and after the Vietnam War has led to the construction of a vast and complex network of modern royalist political, economic and security interests which are entrenched into the national economy. The alliance between the conservative elite, the military and of the monarchy has required a coordinated discourse or as Glassman formulates it 'to rationalise military rule while attempting to give it somewhat of a popular face, US and Thai elites consciously promoted reassertion of the monarchy' (2007: 2040).

It is also of interest to note that Prem himself has Cold War ties to several leading US Republican Party members such as Paul Wolfowitz whom he congratulated during a visit to the US in 2000 for his role in assisting Thailand after the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia in 1979 (Crispin 2007). The pro-US Prem has for decades exerted considerable influence on promotions and reshuffles with the result that civil–military relations are very unstable and problematic. It is also clear now that during the weeks leading to the coup Prem met with the army leaders and delivered the message that soldiers should be loyal to the King and not to the government.

### The regional connection

The coup has had ramifications for political change and the development prospects in Southeast Asia as well. It is a severe setback for Indonesia which became democratic in the wake of the financial crisis in 1997.

Thailand had not experienced a coup in 15 years, and most observers thought that democracy and stability were inevitable. The country's institutions remain in an unresolved state of affairs, and the military continues to regard democracy with suspicion. This situation has strong spill-over effects on Thailand's neighbours, especially Myanmar where the Thai elite exert real influence over the military junta. In this situation the Thai leaders will probably not put pressure on Myanmar to introduce democracy.

What this implies is that there is an external dimension, regional as well as extra-regional, which has to be taken into consideration.

The United States, European Union, Japan and Australia officially reacted to the coup with disappointment, and each called for a quick return to democracy. None, however, demanded that Thaksin's government be reinstated.

One year after the coup little appears to be out of the ordinary for US–Thai military relations. US Ambassador Ralph Boyce was the first foreign diplomat who met with coup lead-

er general Surayud. Despite US suspension of US\$24 million in military aid and cancellation of some military education programs, various joint US–Thai military exercises appear to be business as usual. Although US law prohibits Washington from providing assistance after an elected leader has been deposed, the Thai military is still well connected to US security agencies. Washington may not have condoned the coup, but those ties have prevented any significant sanctions. The United States maintains a counter-terrorism training centre with Thai security forces; Thailand and the US conduct over 40 joint military exercises a year, including Cobra-Gold, America's largest combined military exercise in Asia; 20,000 soldiers including many of those in top leadership positions have received US training under the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET) which is 'designed to enhance the professionalism of foreign militaries as well as improve defence cooperation with the United States. The program is regarded by many as a relative low-cost, highly effective means to achieve US national "security goals"' (Chanlett-Avery 2006: 10).

### Chinese influence

Beijing called Thailand's military coup an internal affair and wished the country 'harmony and prosperity'. The PRC has consistently upheld the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, the foreign ministry said in a statement posted on its website. China does not use sanctions to punish non-democratic countries.

Thai coup leader Gen. Sonthi Boonyaratglin visited Beijing four months after the coup had taken place. The Communist *People's Daily* reported, 'The Chinese army would like to promote friendly relations with the Thai army.' There are growing numbers of Thai military officers going to China for training and Chinese military officers coming to Thailand offering military education opportunities.

Beijing offered more money than the US by announcing military aid and training for



49 million US dollars. China also appointed several senior military and security experts: e.g. State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, a former Chinese Foreign Minister, visited Bangkok and confirmed Beijing's support to the junta although Beijing's leadership would probably have preferred Thaksin.

### US endorsement of military rule

China's reappraisal towards the Council for Democratic Reform under Constitutional Monarchy (later simply the Council for Democratic Reform) in Bangkok was bad news for the United States far beyond Thailand. In reality, President George W. Bush and senior US envoys to Bangkok saw the coup as an opportunity to seize the moment and counterbalance Chinese influence. They clearly signalled to the junta that Washington had no intention of downgrading bilateral relations because of the coup. As noted in *Asia Times*, 'Thailand's coup has served US regional interests well' (Crispin 2007). Thailand has always been the most trusted strategic ally of the United States in Southeast Asia, and US officials are leveraging their senior military contacts now in government. While the US maintained cordial relations with Thaksin, especially through cooperation on counter-terrorism issues, there were strong concerns in the White House, Pentagon and among US Embassy officials in Bangkok that the ethnically Chinese Thaksin was gradually moving Thailand closer to Beijing at the strategic expense of the United States (Crispin 2007). Thaksin was an ardent supporter of establishing a closer economic and political relationship with China (Chanlett-Avery 2006: 13) and also became involved in business with Myanmar's military leaders. Indeed Thaksin stands accused of profiting from his telecommunications business investments inside Burma.

According to speculation in Thai newspapers it would be the irony of this story if the Crown Property Bureau buys the Shin Corp shares back from Temasek (the Singaporean telecom-based conglomerate which bought

Thaksin's Shin Corp), not least seen in light of the fact that one of the accusations against Thaksin was that he sold national assets to a state-owned Singaporean company which is now ready to sell with a huge loss.

Thaksin, a longtime friend of the Bush family, resigned from the board of the Bush Senior-led Carlisle Fund when he became Prime Minister (Shorrocks 2002) but much to the detriment of himself, George H. W. Bush paid a personal private visit to His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej after the coup. This was widely viewed in Thailand as a symbolic endorsement of the royalist coup. During the November 2006 APEC meeting in Hanoi, Bush met with coup general Surayud on the sidelines and conveyed that Washington 'understood' Thailand's political situation (Crispin 2007).

Yet another sign showing US knowledge of the upcoming military takeover was that the second Bush administration dismissed Thaksin's personal letter in April 2006, where he claimed 'anti-democratic' forces were attempting to knock him from power through 'extra-constitutional' means. He didn't realize those anti-democratic forces were and remain some of the United States' best in-country contacts (Crispin 2007). It's no surprise when a US diplomat confirms that US-Thai military-to-military relations have remained firmly 'on track' despite the formal but minuscule suspension in aid. Accordingly one long-time Thai observer notes that: 'The US is saying to itself: they may be generals, but they're our generals' (Crispin 2007).

Whether it is termed *realpolitik* or hypocrisy the US today supports the junta in Thailand who ousted a democratically elected leader but rejects and boycotts the military regime in Myanmar. It seems that today no military dictatorship in Southeast Asia that claims itself as an ally of the US in the 'war on terror' need fear that Washington will object to its seizure of power or exercise of statist prerogatives. 'Post-democracy in Thailand is, in other words, a process that is part of an ongoing relation-

ship with the development of post-democracy in the United States' (Glassman 2007: 2041). While publicly criticizing Thailand's restoration of authoritarian rule and pointing at the new turn towards protectionist measures that threaten certain US business interests, US officials are in private confirming Washington's commitment and will to continue bilateral cooperation.

For the United States, the September 2006 military takeover has presented a unique opportunity to diminish Chinese influence, which through soft economic power has seen Beijing consolidate strong alliances in neighbouring Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, and the rest of Southeast Asia (Schmidt 2006). It is therefore no coincidence that Thaksin, spurned by what he perceived to be his former US ally has chosen to launch his anti-junta propaganda cam-

“ For the next 41 years [after the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932], Thailand alternated between short periods of parliamentary rule and longer spells of military rule. The armed forces, especially the army, became intensely politicized and staged numerous destabilizing coups d'état. Rivalries between the army, the navy, the police and the civilian bureaucracy were often virulent and corrosive. Following the onset of the Cold War, Thailand's armed services received substantial support from the United States, which increasingly looked upon the country as an important bulwark to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Until the 1960s, Thailand's competing forces could operate relatively unchecked by any higher authority. However, by the 1960s the monarchy was gaining increasing extra-constitutional authority. This was evidenced by the King's pivotal role in the violent events of 14 October 1973, which culminated in the collapse of a military dictatorship following pressure from the nascent student movement and other emerging social forces.”

Extracted from Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, p. 10. See page 11 for fuller details of this book.

paign, in attempted divide-and-rule fashion, from Britain, China and Singapore.

In conclusion we might say that because Thaksin and his cohorts provoked and sought a precarious relationship with the King he would sooner or later run into trouble especially since he tried to replace those loyal to King Bhumipol in the military with his own people. But it was the King's network – their ideology and political sympathies that determined the situation and this is where the US-China link comes in.

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# Thaksin the orphan, and the King: Contested moral leadership as seen by poor Buddhist Karen

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*Thaksin is still popular among the poor in Thailand and many Karen voted for him. They saw in him a leader of high moral standing – with qualities as defined in Buddhist ethics. Moreover, he acted as a strong leader and fulfilled his promises. The Buddhist Karen now consider him an orphan: in Karen tradition an orphan is a metaphor for a person who is alone in the world and thus extremely unfortunate. Karen tales about the orphan emphasize the high moral qualities of such individuals. They help the poor and the old, gain merit and become great leaders. But they are often expelled from the community since they had no relatives and are unable to perform ritual sacrifices for the spirits alone, and are as such considered to be misfortunate – a condition that can spread around among other people.*

## Moral leadership

The Karen saw Thaksin's village funds of one million baht, the reduction of health fees and his war against drugs as signs of moral goodness (*khunngaam kwaamdii*) and moral reciprocity (*bunikhun*) of a wealthy and charismatic leader. In Buddhist cosmology, a moral leader provides security and prosperity to his followers. He can be a 'righteous ruler' (*dhammarajā*), and a 'universal ruler' (*cakkavatti*) or even a coming Buddha (*bodhisatta*) by increasing his moral perfection (*parami*). These concepts often have a millenarian dimension among the Karen (Gravers 2001). However, they are also part of the national political discourse in Thailand on democracy and leadership (Connors 2006) and they were strongly invoked at the beginning of Thaksin's rule (McCargo and Ukrist 2005: 15). As seen from the Karen perspective, Thaksin was orphaned because he challenged another charismatic leader with a high karma, i.e. King Bhumibol, whose *parami* is undisputed (Gray 1992). The king's numerous development projects among the minorities and his ideas of sufficiency economy, based on Buddhist ethics and a moral moderation to global capitalism and growth as means of self-immunity and a happy life (Apichai 2006) are by the Karen seen as clear signs of high moral

leadership. In this way, Buddhism is a medium for contested, moral and legitimate leadership in Thailand. Karen supporters are waiting for Thaksin's return and one slogan recently painted on a wall ran like this: 'We the poor and deprived wait for you, Thaksin!' They see no problem in two morally strong leaders acting according to the cosmological precepts.

## Karen utopian Buddhism

The Buddhist Karen will often refer to the apocalyptic scenario before the arrival of the next Buddha, Ariya Mettaya. A universal ruler sent by King Indra will arrive, and cleanse the world of all its vices with fire, wind and water. Then a righteous ruler will appear and rule according to the ten virtues of a ruler: alms giving, morality, liberality (donating belongings for public benefit), straightforwardness, gentleness, self-restriction, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance and rectitude. He must show compassion to his people and secure their welfare. Only when the world is peaceful, prosperous and morally perfect will Ariya arrive. The Karen support a puritan version saying that only vegetarians (who avoid killing animals) and those who abstain from alcohol, drugs, violence and other vices will meet Ariya. Thus they form religious communities



Khuba Wong's gilded body in a glass coffin, Huai Tom. (Photo: Mikael Gravers)

where such rules are strictly kept. Leaders are often charismatic monks such as Khuba Wong in Lamphun province or Hsayadaw Thamanya in Pa-an, Burma. Khuba Wong, who died in 2001, followed the tradition of the famous monk Khuba Siwichai, who restored pagodas and rejected state intervention and control of Buddhism in Northern Thailand. He and his disciples have had numerous Karen followers. One Karen Khuba, Djau La, used the title Chao Rat ('crown prince'). He proclaimed Lamphun as the future Karen capital and promised that it would become a 'peaceful and prosperous country'. Recently, a young Karen monk said he was an incarnation of Chao Rat and promised his followers 500 baht for every baht they donated. Many sold all their belongings and in return for the donations they received a bag of 'money' – which turned out to contain banknote-like papers with religious inscriptions. The monk is being investigated by the police for fraud, but many Karen hope that he will return: his moral notions were fine, they believe, although he mishandled money. The

Khuba movement mix Buddhist cosmology, development, political leadership and royalty in a way which may surprise a foreign observer. Thaksin's supporters in Chiang Mai, his native town, often gather around the statue of Khuba Siwichai in support of their exiled leader.

Wong's monastery at Phrabat Huai Tom is a city-like settlement dominated by a 73-metre-high gilded pagoda in Burmese style. It has a temple of the city pillar (*lak muang*) and straight and clean streets. A strict morality prevails in the community: they reject modern consumerism as detrimental to merit making and the arrival of Ariya, but they do not reject development. The king and the crown prince have visited Huai Tom and it has a royal project and about fifty silversmith workshops supplying silverware to Chiang Mai's Night Bazaar, thus providing an income for poor Karen families. Huai Tom had also an OTOP (One Tambon One Product) certificate for silver and handcraft products from Thaksin's development programme.

Here and in other Karen settlements – as well

as among the Christian Karen – Thaksin raised expectations with his ‘capitalism from below’ aiming at controlling globalization. Thaksin participated in large-scale Buddhist ceremonies in 2001 (Klima 2004). 1.2 million baht and 1.7 tonnes of gold collected by the famous forest monk Luang Ta Maha Bua were consecrated and donated to the treasury in order to fill the gap in reserves caused by the economic crisis in 1997. The ceremony was attended by 100,000 people. Thaksin also participated in a ritual recalling the soul, in this case a symbolic recall of the national soul and identity. He cited the famous monk Buddhadasa on moral leadership and supported the puritan Santi Asoke movement and its Dhamma Army. Thus Thaksin signalled his moral intentions, but both Mha Bua and Santi Asoke have turned against him in disappointment of his leadership.

### The leadership crisis and the coup

Thaksin increased his power by controlling the media and by placing supporters in all important committees of constitutional control as well as the army and the police. He became more and more autocratic and challenged the old elite and the moral power of the king. Thaksin appointed an interim Buddhist patriarch of the Sangha – a prerogative of the king who normally appoints a monk from the royally related Thammayut sect. The king blamed Thaksin for suing his critics and placing himself above critique, an exclusive royal prerogative. At the culmination of the crisis, former Prime Minister, President of the royal Privy Council, Prem Tinsunalond, cited the king saying that only persons with moral goodness should rule and that bad people should be kept from rising to power. Prem referred to the ten duties of a Dhammaraja. The Nation is sacred and Thaksin, he said, splits the nation (*Bangkok Post*, 9 Sept. 2006). This was said on the occasion of the publication of a book on royal powers which also mention the apocalyptic prediction. Thaksin replied that ‘a charismatic person wielded extra-constitutional powers’ – either Prem or the king. With his legitima-



Thaksin – the *cakkavattin*? Poster in a Karen village. (Photo: Mikael Gravers)

cy contested by the old elite and urban middle classes, he could either stage a coup and risk violence, or be exiled by a counter coup. After being exiled on 19 September 2006, he realized that King Bhumibol is the sole arbiter of legitimate power in Thailand, and that no government can claim to be legitimate without his endorsement (Tanabe and Keyes 2002: 17; McCargo 2005). A person without moral goodness, who does not follow rules of moral reciprocity, and who undermines the democratic constitution also challenges the cosmological notions of rule and power. This creates disharmony, a fear that the social order will

collapse, and a feeling that the national identity is endangered. According to his urban adversaries, Thaksin did not follow the middle road. The Buddhist notions of moral leadership and democratic principles of good governance got entangled and resulted in a military ousting of a democratically elected prime minister.

### A new democratic order?

The Karen saw congruence between their Buddhist cosmo-logic and Thaksin's global-logic and its 'national capitalism from below', a moral economy with striking millenarian aspects. For poor moral leadership (monks, politicians or a king) is a barrier against uncontrolled globalization and rampant modern consumerism. But a high *parami* is also seen as a guaranty against uncontrolled passion and violence. The reason that many Karen still hope that the orphaned Thaksin will return could be that those who wield power in the interim government and wrote the new constitution have not yet demonstrated enough charismatic leadership qualities nor moral reciprocity. Besides, they have not yet demonstrated that Thaksin was immoral and guilty of corruption. To many Karen the present uncertainty may confirm a decline of Buddhist morality and signify an approaching apocalyptic event. They keep waiting for the next righteous leader.

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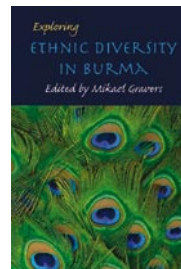
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# King, coup and sufficiency economy:

## The quest for political legitimacy

*Søren Ivarsson, University of Copenhagen*

*Seventy-five years ago civilian and military leaders overthrew the absolute monarchy in Thailand and took over political leadership in the name of democracy and constitutionalism. The first generation of political leaders (those who had taken part in the overthrow) did not rely on the symbolism of the monarchy to establish political legitimacy. Between 1935 and 1950 Thailand did not have a resident king and in this period the monarchy was marginalised in a cultural and political sense. During the Sarit era (1957–1963) the military government and the present king formed an unprecedented alliance. This led to a revival of the monarchy and under King Bhumibol the monarchy and royal symbolism are again central for the construction of political legitimacy and the conceptualisation of power and moral order in Thailand. Nowhere can we see better this important role of the monarchy and royal symbolism than in the way that the king's philosophy of sufficiency economy was activated around the coup in September 2006 in order to create a sense of political legitimacy for the coup and the post-Thaksin political regime.*

### A conservative royal vision for Thailand

After the financial crisis had devastated many people's lives in Thailand in 1997, the Thai king used his annual birthday speeches in 1997 and 1998 to offer words of consolation and recovery advice to the nation. His cure to the economic calamities involved the implementation of what he called a 'sufficiency economy'. His ideas are clearly linked with Buddhist philosophical and moral principles and he associated the sufficiency economy with the formation of a new 'economic man' who lived a moderate, self-dependent life without greed or overexploitation. Linked with slogans like 'to have enough to live on' the king advised people to be moderate in their desires: '[S]ufficiency is moderation. If one is moderate in one's desires, one will have less craving. If one has less craving, one will take less advantage of others. [...] Moderation, in other words, living within one's means, should dictate all actions' (Royal Speech 1998: 12). According to this logic, people should be content with having a 'reasonably comfortable life without excess, or over-indulgence in luxury' (ibid.: 10).

Subsequently, the king's ideas took on a remarkable social life in Thailand. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) invited economists and other scholars to assist in compiling and formulating these ideas into a more complete philosophy. Based on this work, a definition of the philosophy of sufficiency economy was worked out and 'adopted' in the Ninth National Social and Economic Development Plan for Thailand. In that context the sufficiency economy is interpreted as a paradigm shift which takes the middle path as the 'economic life guiding principle' which will lead to a more 'resilient, balanced and sustainable development'. In so doing, the sufficiency economy is believed to offer a 'holistic concept of moderation and contentment' (NESDB 2000: 1, 3). Since then sufficiency economy has also become a standard topic in textbooks used in schools in Thailand and has become emblematic of the king's wisdom, high morality and status as a righteous ruler.

In the official narrative, the king's sufficiency economy is linked with a philosophy carving out a new path for Thailand in a glo-

balised world. Still, his ideas crystallise various themes, which have been circulating in Thailand for decades. The king's thinking on sufficiency economy echoes, for example, various localism discourses which have been in existence in Thailand since the late 1970s – e.g. Prawes Wasi's notions about 'Buddhist agriculture' or Payutto's notions about 'Buddhist economics' and Seri Phongphit's back-to-the-roots approach to rural development. At the same time, the king's ideas about sufficiency economy are also clearly resonant with core elements of former official ideological campaigns. Take, for example, the Basic Five Values campaign – a spiritual development programme launched by the National Culture Commission in 1982 which propagated self-reliance, diligence and responsibility, frugality and saving, and discipline (Amara 1996). In the same way, notions about Buddhist virtue, self-reliance, thrift and a commitment to community and nation were embedded in the so-called Land of Justice, Land of Gold Project (*phaendin tham phaendin thong*) launched in the 1980s (Connors 2003: 141–143). So from this perspective, the king's ideas do not represent anything new but are part of a long tradition where the conservative capitalist state, in Michael Connors words, has used the monarchy to 'ideologically discipline the rural population through the discourse of thrift, self-reliance, national security and moral selfhood' (ibid.: 132).

More generally, the king's ideas are also resonant with what Kasian Tejapira has called the 'ethno-ideology of Thainess'. With reference to Nidhi Aeusrivongse's analysis of Thai nationalism expressed in elementary school textbooks, Kasian argues that this 'ethno-ideology of Thainess' is linked with a representation of the Thai nation as 'a happy and calm village community [...] where intimate, reciprocal, cooperative, familial and clientelistic socio-economic relationships obtain. There are no serious problems and conflicts since there is hardly any real difference in terms of political and economic interests, values and world

views'. And further: 'The state is an organic outgrowth of the natural, traditional hierarchy, at the level of the family and community' (Kasian 1996: 247).

Clearly, the king's ideas about sufficiency economy fits well with and consolidates this 'ethnology-ideology of Thainess'. While they may endorse a critique of globalisation and global capitalism as such, he does not call for a radical solution or a solution through conflict. This conservative, royalist view of Thai society places the root of economic problems on greed and lack of moderation. That is, the causes of economic problems are to be found within people themselves – in their minds. If we simply spend within our means the world would be a happier place for all. The poor peasant shall not blame middlemen, moneylenders, agro-industrial companies, or falling prices on agricultural products caused by economic protectionism in other countries. He must find in his heart the roots and solution to the problems. Consequently, the king's recovery advice to the nation after the financial crisis in 1997 formed a clear antidote to the politicisation of the 'informal mass', which took place in the wake of the financial crisis.

In this manner, the king's ideas about sufficiency economy had been put into play before Thaksin's first landslide victory in the parliamentary elections in 2001 paved the way for five years of unbridled Thai Rak Thai rule in Thailand. Thaksin did not rely on royal symbolism and the sufficiency economy to build up political legitimacy. Instead, he based his political legitimacy on the voters and welfare policies. In fact, as several articles in this issue of *NIASnytt* argue, Thaksin challenged the position of the monarchy in Thai society and politics.

### Sufficiency economy and the coup

The 2006 coup was a royalist coup dressed in potent royalist symbolism. In specific the sufficiency economy has become an important mantra for the post-Thaksin regime. When



Surayud Chulanont outlined the new government's policies he stated that it 'will uphold market mechanisms in its economic policies, but good governance will be instilled under the philosophy of sufficiency economy to ensure economic fairness and minimise conflicts of interest as well as personal interests' (*The Nation*, 28 October 2006). The sufficiency economy has also been written into the draft constitution, which was passed in August 2007, and in the Tenth National Economic Development Plan. The Prime Minister has also guaranteed that his government would allocate 10 billion baht for projects promoting well-being in line with the king's philosophy of sufficiency economy (*Bangkok Post*, 10 March 2007). Further, the new government's apparent commitment to the king's ideas is reflected in the naming of various government projects – e.g. Happy Living Project and Community Development Project under the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy and Centre of Poverty Eradication under the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. Viewers of Thai television will also notice a great variety of programmes and informative spots dealing with sufficiency economy.

In Thailand and abroad, the link between the post-coup regime and the sufficiency economy gained unprecedented publicity in UNDP's *Thailand Human Development Report 2007*. The report focused on the issue of sufficiency economy in Thailand. From Prime Minister Surayud's foreword we learn that 'the sufficiency economy philosophy has now firmly taken root in Thai society. It has become the guiding principle for our country's development strategies. [...] The thinking advocates growth with economic stability over rapid but unbridled growth. It emphasizes sustainable development, sound macroeconomic policies, and the equitable sharing of economic benefits' (UNDP 2007: iii). It is also stated in the report that '[t]he sufficiency economy now serves as a mission statement of the nation' (UNDP 2007: 68).

Under the post-Thaksin regime, the sufficiency economy seems to be everywhere. It

serves as an important denominator in the branding of the post-coup regime vis-à-vis the policies pursued by Thaksin's government. It offers the illusion of a reborn Thailand where the bureaucracy – both the military and civilian – act on behalf of the king, the moral being number one in the kingdom and regarded to be above politics. This ideological universe enacts a Manichean split-vision where Thaksin embodies unbridled capitalism, consumption and greed, while the new regime is the guardian of ethics, Buddhist morality and the king. In this way the choice between the new regime and Thaksin is not only a matter of divergent policies, but in moralistic terms the choice is ultimately presented as a choice between 'good' and 'evil'.

At the same time, it is very difficult to judge what adherence to the sufficiency economy actually entails in practice. It seems to be possible that almost anything can be called sufficiency economy. Due to the strict law of *lesè-majesté* in Thailand it is a very dangerous enterprise to criticize the sufficiency economy, its applicability to conditions in Thailand, or the regime's use of the concept. Recently, however, criticism of the sufficiency economy and 'royalist populism' has surfaced in the media (e.g. Pravit 2007; Thulee 2007). At the same time, we can also detect attempts to appropriate the sufficiency economy and use it as a yardstick to criticise government policies (e.g. Chanida and Bamford 2007). Thus, the sufficiency economy is turned into a contested issue. The constitution referendum in August clearly reflected the country's deep regional divide and that the coup has in no ways mended this gap. Thai society is severely polarised, and, as Ukrist Pathmanand put it in his article in this issue of *NIASnytt*: 'The confrontation is not over yet'. In a near future we may witness how the sufficiency economy enters this confrontation when oppositional groups in Thailand employ it as an ideological tool to delegitimise government policies. The sufficiency economy will then have been turned into a medium for contest.

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**Søren Ivarsson** is a Historian and Associate Professor at The University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He works on the history of Thailand and Laos with special emphasis on nationalism and historiography. Details of his new book, *Creating Laos*, can be found on p. 31.

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“ The king's thinking on good citizenship certainly conveys a conservative regard for order and discipline. [An analysis] of Bhumiphol's speeches, spread over thirty years, suggests that the king's thought on good citizens revolves around four central issues.

First, the people must be educated, have quality and ability: this is related to the theme of self-reliance and economic progress. Educated people would help society progress in an orderly fashion and be prosperous.

Second, the people must be good and have religion, for religion helps people behave appropriately and 'be a good person, to behave beneficially and not to cause trouble for oneself or others.' Furthermore, knowing one's status and duties 'will lead to happiness and the wellbeing ... for human society'.

Third, the people must have unity so that the country can progress and prosper, as well as remain secure. Unity leads to the survival of the nation, pride and dignity. Unity 'is the strongest force in the land and when it is achieved it will inspire the people in the nation to be unanimous in attempting to ... create progress and security'.

Finally, the people must have strength. On this principle, the king discourses on the importance of self-reliant people who are able to learn and develop both their minds and bodies. Only on this basis will a society prosper. Importantly, here the thematic of the common good is located in the wellbeing of the excellent individual whose path towards self-development has positive consequences for the wellbeing of society as a whole. Thus the moral basis of society, while exemplified in the actions and words of the king and the Buddhist *sangha*, must also be rooted in the self-contained and self-interested activities of strong and capable individuals.

Extracted from Michael Kelly Connors, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand* pp. 132–133.



Fuller details on this book are found on page 30.

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# 2007 Nordic NIAS Council Annual Conference

## 'Culture and the configuring of security: using Asian perspectives to inform theoretical direction'

*The Nordic NIAS Council (NNC) annual conference was held this year at Frostavallen Hotel, Höör in Sweden. The organizing committee included Professor Roger Greatrex and Dr Helle Rydström from the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies at Lund University, Dr Paul Midford from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, and Dr Timo Kivimäki and Dr Alexandra Kent, both from NIAS. Our administrative member was Martin Bech from NIAS.*

The committee began drawing up plans for the conference over a year ago and discussions were lively and stimulating. The core purpose of the conference was to bridge gaps between various academic approaches to security by examining how they are interrelated, and how they may inform one another. It asked about the ways in which discourses and practices of national/international security relate socially and culturally to local security efforts and experiences. The primary objective of this rather experimental conference was to bring different disciplines and perspectives into dialogue with one another with a view to developing new theoretical directions.

The conference was graced with the presence of three distinguished keynote speakers, Professor Ole Waever from Copenhagen University, Dr Caroline Hughes from the University of Birmingham and Professor Shamsul A.B. from the National University of Malaya. Their presentations – which were spaced throughout the event – built upon one another and drove the discussions forward. Ole Waever laid the ground by presenting some of the salient concepts and theories of security, paying particular attention to the concept of 'securitization' that he has been active in developing. Using detailed case material from Cambodia, Caroline Hughes discussed how 'culture' can be dislodged from the daily life of the people and securitized by governments in ways that may even endanger the security of citizens. In a discussion of Malaysia's security culture, Shamsul A. B. explored how British notions of security became naturalized into the Malaysian worldview through the colonial experience.

The seven panels, which covered topics ranging from how security is represented, contested, formulated and gendered to how it relates to health, development and the environment, without exception prompted lively debate that developed in tandem with the keynote presentations.

By the time of the final wrap-up session on the third day, some clear and inspiring ways of looking at the relationship between culture and security had emerged. As a group, the conference delegates had focused discussion on the quality of security as a cultural artefact that may be almost imperceptibly generated and regenerated in local worlds, often in organic, complex and informal processes. On the other hand, it was agreed, security may become reified and appropriated in the interest of political agendas that may be detrimental to the nebulous, heterogeneous security processes in which ordinary people try to engage. Overall, I believe that the delegates left the conference having enjoyed each other's company, the beautiful surroundings and excellent food at Frostavallen, but also armed with some new theoretical tools for analyzing how security discourses and practices shift and interconnect on different levels: international (based largely on the Anglo-Saxon notion of security), national, regional and local.

*Alexandra Kent  
Researcher, NIAS*

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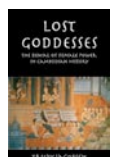
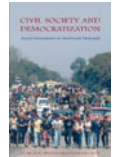
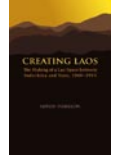
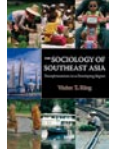
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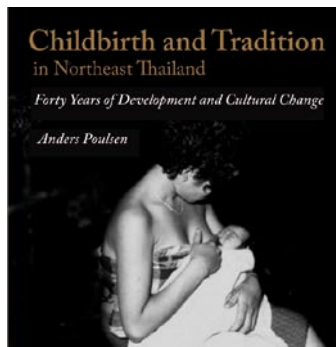
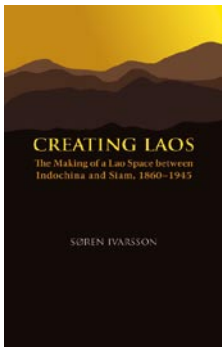
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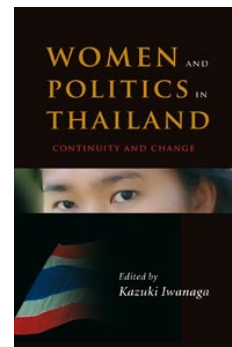
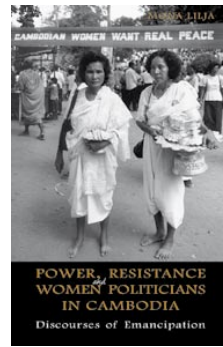
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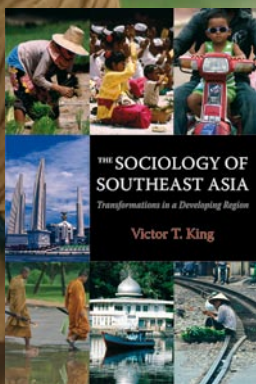
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