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Thailand

Thai military make threats against pro-democracy Redshirts

- IV Online magazine - 2011 - IV435 - April 2011 -

Publication date: Thursday 21 April 2011

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One year after the Military gunned down nearly 90 pro-democracy civilians in Bangkok and in the run up to the promised first election since the 2006 coup, the Military have been very active in increasing the obstacles to a free and fair election. They are seriously worried about the outcome of this election.

Naturally the Democrat Party Government and its bosses in the Army will not be stuffing ballot boxes or inflating the number of votes for the Government. That would be too obvious and they would be quickly found out. But what they have been doing since the 2006 coup has been a war of attrition to gradually destroy Taksin's Thai Rak Thai Party and the Peua Thai Party which is its new incarnation. The Courts and the Election Commission have been used in a bias manner to destroy the chances of a Red Shirt election victory. Bribery and threats have also been used to get politicians to change sides. Added to this we have blanket censorship and the use of the *lèse majesté* law against government opponents. The Military have also used bloody violence and threats.

Yet Peua Thai Party is doing nothing to try to win the election. They have virtually no new policies and hope that Red Shirts will automatically vote for the party. If they are seen to lose, this will give a great deal of false legitimacy to the dictatorship. There is growing unease among many Red Shirts and the gap between this huge social movement and the professional politicians in Peua Thai is widening.

General Sansern Keawkamnurd, spokesperson for the Army, has announced that the Army is accusing Jatuporn Prompan and two other Red Shirt leaders (Wichien Kaokum and Rambo Isarn) of "*lèse majesté*" following their 10th April rally in Bangkok. Jatuporn is accused of "insulting the princess" by saying that he too would like to be interviewed on TV by the same presenter. The Democrat Party Spokesman Teptai Senpong supports the Army's accusation. The recent interview of the King's youngest daughter indicates how the Thai Monarchy is in the process of degeneration. Firstly, the princess' speech delivery and the content of what she said, is more likely to remind people of an intellectually challenged individual than a demi-god. She boasts about how rich she is while trying to tell the public about the "good works" of her parents. The interviewer grovels on the ground in front of the princess' shoes, twice, and she nods with approval. He also grovels on the ground at the same level as the princess' dog and even shares the dog's cup cake. The Thai population are supposed to be brought near to tears of joy and loyal emotion by such idiotic spectacles.

The Army has threatened those who are trying to campaign for the repeal of the *lèse majesté* law (see adjacent article) and urged loyal subjects to "prevent" such activities. The generals claim that foreigners are "impressed" by the greatness of the Thai Monarchy, but are confused by misinformation from Red Shirts.

It is the Army that is the real unconstitutional power in Thailand. They use the Monarchy to legitimise all their actions. This explains why the Army is so manic in defending the Monarchy and in using *lèse majesté* against democracy activists. The generals stand to lose everything if a republican movement sweeps across Thailand and it looks like that might just happen.

Army commander General Prayut Chan-ocha has declared that the country was always "democratic", as though the 2006 coup and all that followed, never took place. He reaffirmed the lie that the Military "never shot pro-democracy demonstrators" last year. Yet there is overwhelming photographic and documentary evidence that the Military and the Government ordered the killing of unarmed Red Shirts by bringing in tanks, heavily armed soldiers and snipers to crush the pro-democracy demonstrations in Bangkok. Nearly 90 unarmed civilians, including paramedics and foreign journalists were shot by snipers in "free-fire zones" set up by the Military. The army has now sent troops into villages

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this April, to coincide with the Songkran festival. They claim that they want to tell the people the “truth” and make sure everyone remains loyal to the Monarchy. General Prayut claimed that many Red Shirts were trying to insult the “holiness” of the Monarchy and told Red Shirt leader Jatuporn Prompan to “watch it”.

The DSI or Department of Special Investigation has been “unable” to release the results of autopsies on civilians killed by the Army 12 months ago. Now the head of the DSI is demanding that Red Shirt leaders, who are out on bail, be returned to jail for making pro-democracy speeches at recent rallies.

Recently the Oxford-educated Finance Minister Korn Jatikawanit, boasted on his facebook site that he had ridden in a taxi driven by a Red Shirt. On leaving the taxi, Korn gave the driver a lesson: “you can hold different views from me but don’t use violence”, he said. Korn is part of the military-installed Democrat Party Government that ordered the cold-blooded shooting of Red Shirt civilians last year.

The “Electoral Commission” has just confirmed that 73 loyal servants of the regime have just been appointed as unelected senators, making up half of the upper house. There are 18 former government officials, 11 military officers and 6 policemen. After the 2006 coup the Military re-wrote the Constitution so that half the senate would be appointed instead of being elected as before. Earlier, pro-military Election Commissioner Sodsri Satayatum said that she would prefer it if the General Election was cancelled. She claims the country isn’t ready for an election. Meanwhile the fascist PAD is destroying itself with internal strife. Their support has seriously declined and they cannot agree about participating in the coming election because they know that they will receive a miserable vote. The PAD staged violent pro-Monarchy and pro-dictatorship demonstrations in Bangkok, including the seizure of Government House and the International Airports. Now some of their leaders want the election scrapped and a Burmese style junta to rule the country. The Thai Military-dominated “security council” has also stated that since Burma now has a new “democratic” government, Burmese refugees can be forced back over the border.

Background to the rise of the Red Shirts

There is a common thread running through the political crisis in Thailand and the political crises that exploded earlier this year in the Middle East. In Thailand, Egypt, Tunisia and many other “developing nations”, societies have been rapidly urbanising and changing over the last 30-40 years. Yet the ruling elites and the power structures which dominated these societies had not changed. Different events triggered uprisings and struggles, but the underlying tensions remain the same.

For the last forty years the Thai ruling class has maintained its power through the Military, the Monarchy and occasionally by the use of an electoral system dominated by the money politics of business controlled political parties. The naked coercive power of the Military and other state institutions is complemented by the ideology of the Monarchy. This is achieved by imposing and socialising the belief among the population that the King is an all-powerful god who is to be loved or at least feared. This belief is a complete myth, but at various times it has been effective in serving the interests of the conservative ruling elites.

This state of affairs has constantly been challenged by mass uprisings and struggle by social movements. But in 2001 a serious challenge to the old order arose from within the ruling class itself. Taksin Shinawat’s Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) won a majority in parliament by winning the hearts and minds of the electorate. His business-dominated party promised and delivered a universal health care system, job creation programmes and a raft of modernisation policies. In the past, elections had been about money politics, where politicians acted as personal patrons of their constituents while offering no political policies. The rise of TRT came to represent a serious, but unintentional, challenge to the conservatives in the ruling class. This sparked a military coup in September 2006, which in turn sparked the building of a pro-democracy mass movement called the Red Shirts.

12 April 2011