

Thailand's Growing Disorder and the Changing Role of the Thai Military in the Reign of Rama X

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Thailand: January 2021: Growing Disorder



Questions:

- 1. What is happening now in Thailand which might appear as growing disorder?
- 2. How did Thailand get to this situation?
- 3. What might be the future?



WASON WANICHAKORN/AP

1. The Current Disorder: A. Progressive Demonstrations since July 2020



B. Growth in Right-Wing Counter-Demonstrations



C. Increasing Squabbles in Parliament's Lower House



D. Intensifying Military Factionalism

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In fact, there has been a long history of army factionalism--

- Wongthewan (1870-1932) FUSION But princely rivalry
- Royalist versus Anti-Royalists (1932-1938) FISSION
- Nationalism (1938-1944) FUSION
- Phibun versus Pridi (1944-1951) FISSION
- Soi Rajakru versus Sarit (1951-1957) FISSION
- Sri Sao Thewes (1957-1973) FUSION—But Praphas versus Thanom versus Krit
- Krit Sivara (1973-1976) FUSION
- 1976-1981 (Arch-royalists versus Moderates) FISSION
- 1981-2002 (Arch-royalism under Wongthewan) FUSION—But YT vs DS s AK vs C5
- 2002-2006 (Arch-royalism versus Thaksin) FISSION
- 2006-2016 (Arch-royalism under Queen's Guard (Eastern Tigers)—FUSION
- **2016-Present (QG/ET versus Wongthewan—FISSION**



2. How Did Thailand Get to This Situation?

A. Persistent Monarchical Dominance

Monarchical establishers of Modern Siamese Military

1. United Standing Army created in 1852.
2. Sua Pa and three coup attempts



B. Multiple Coups by a Powerful Military that has blocked Political Transformation



C. 20 Constitutions
since 1932,
representing
Attempts at Change
that have been
Stymied



D. Frail Democracy

strong leader?



weak democracy?

E. Deep Polarization within the Thai Populace



F. May 2014: Yet another coup



What the 2014-2019 junta accomplished:

- 1. Temporarily forced a return to anti-Shinawatra “order,” despite ending democracy.
- 2. Reinvigorated arch-royalists
- 3. “stabilized” any succession
- 4. Consolidated the domination of the ET/QG military faction over the army and other factions.
- 5. Reinforced Thailand’s armed forces as a pivotal political player, with enhanced political/economic clout
- 6. Preserved Pseudo-Absolutist M-ism in Thailand



G. Death of Popular Monarch and Ascension of His Unpopular Son— October 2016



H. November 2017 “Anti-Democratic” Constitution

- Senators appointed by junta
- Senators can participate in appointing Prime Minister
- Amendments must be made with 1/3 of Senators
- Prime Minister can be unelected
- Electoral Formula for Lower House prevents a single party from gaining a majority
- Constitution works against the building of a strong party structure
- Constitution allows for military enclaves of power (20 Year Strategy; Reshuffles rule)

I. The Irregular Election of March 24, 2019: By the Junta, Of the Junta and For the Junta

- 1. Election Commission appointed by the Junta
- 2. One Political Party Participating in the Election (Palang Pracharat) was created and endorsed by the junta
- 3. Soldiers Enforced the Election Results, which were skewed in favor of Palang Pracharat
- 4. Electoral Result: Junta Leader Gen. Prayuth Chanocha Retained Power as new “Elected” Prime Minister in a Charade Democracy

By June 2020, Thais were increasingly aggravated by the political situation

- 1. Worsening Economy**
- 2. People's Exhaustion with no Change in the People Leading Thailand**
- 3. Continuing Unpopularity of the Regal Sovereign**
- 4. Popular Future Forward Political Party was dissolved in February 2020, in what appeared a partisan move.**
- 5. Disappearance of a Thai anti-royalist in Cambodia (clearly an assassination)**
- 6. Young People Fed up with no political change**

Since October 2020:

^{Army Chief}
Gen. Narongphan Jitkaewthae
Wongthewan (retires 2023)



^{Deputy}
Gen. Teerawat Boonyawat
(Artillery faction)



Since 2020: Chief of Staff and Assistant Army Chiefs

Gen.Warakiat Ratananont Gen. Pornsak Polsawat(Wongthewan) Gen.Tamanun Witi (QR/ET)



Since 2020:

1st Army Region: Commander and Deputies (all Red Rims)

Commander: Gen.

Jaroenchai Hintao (QG/ET)

Handpicked by Prawit Wongsuwan

3 Deputies and Cohort

Commander: $\frac{3}{4}$ ET/QG

1st Division Kings Guard: CC:

Gen. Songpao Satsao-ngern (Wongthewan)

1st Regiment Kings Guard: CC:

Col. Asaseuk Kanteerat (Wongthewan)



Defense Ministry



Expanding Military Role on Privy Council

- Privy Council Chair (Acting): Gen Surayud Chulanond
- 8/15 of the Privy Council are retired senior military officers



Royal Household and Lord Chamberlain Advisors



More Direct Palace Control over Police



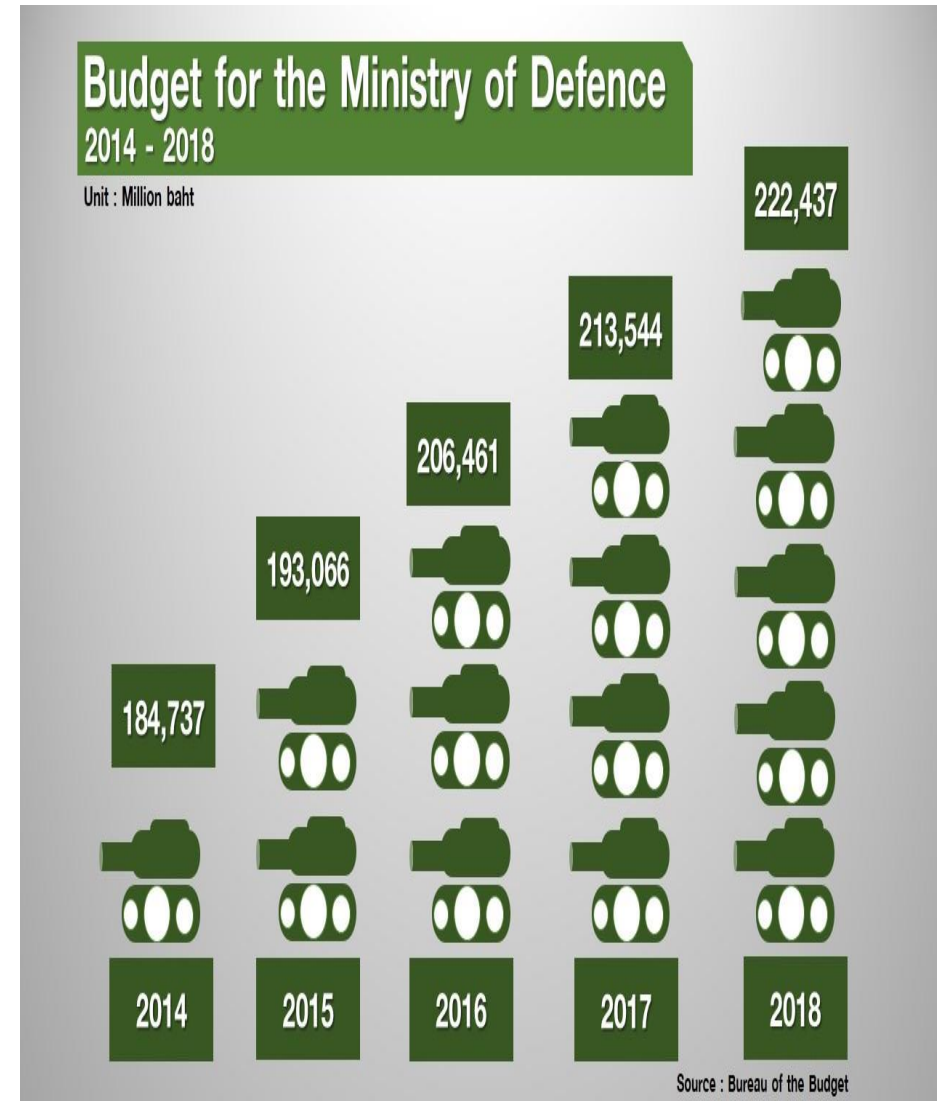
Legal Institutions promote Military Power

- 1) Martial Law Act of 1914
- 2) Section 44 of 2014 Constitution—carbon copy of previous draconian laws
- 2) Emergency Decree on Public Administration in an Emergency Situation (2005)
- 3) Internal Security Act (2008)
- 4) Organization of Ministry of Defense Act (2008)
- 5) Internal Security Operations Command, of which most NCPO decrees have been passed on.
- 6) 20 Year National Strategy (2018-2037)
- 7) Criminal Code (Section 112)

3. Military has Enormous Financial Resources

a. Military is largest landowner;

b. Receives 3rd largest ministry allocation of Budget revenue
(227.6 billion baht in 2019)
though it possesses slush funds.



Factors Boosting the Military's Clout



More demands for Military Reform in Thailand



King's Military Changes

1. New direct palace control over 1st Division, Kings Guard and Royal Guard 904, both absorbed into newly renamed Royal Command Guard. **Establishing Police Retainers 904 under palace.**
2. Moving all military units outside of Bangkok except for 1st Division, Kings Guard (e.g. 11th Infantry Regiment)
3. Establishing a new Kings' Guard dominated base of army operations in the heartland of ET/QG power in Chachoengsao, eastern Thailand, checking the sway of Prayuth/Prawit faction in that area.
4. Placing His consort (later Queen) as Commander of the Special Operations Unit of the King's Guard



Birth of Red Rim Soldiers: Rama 10's new faction



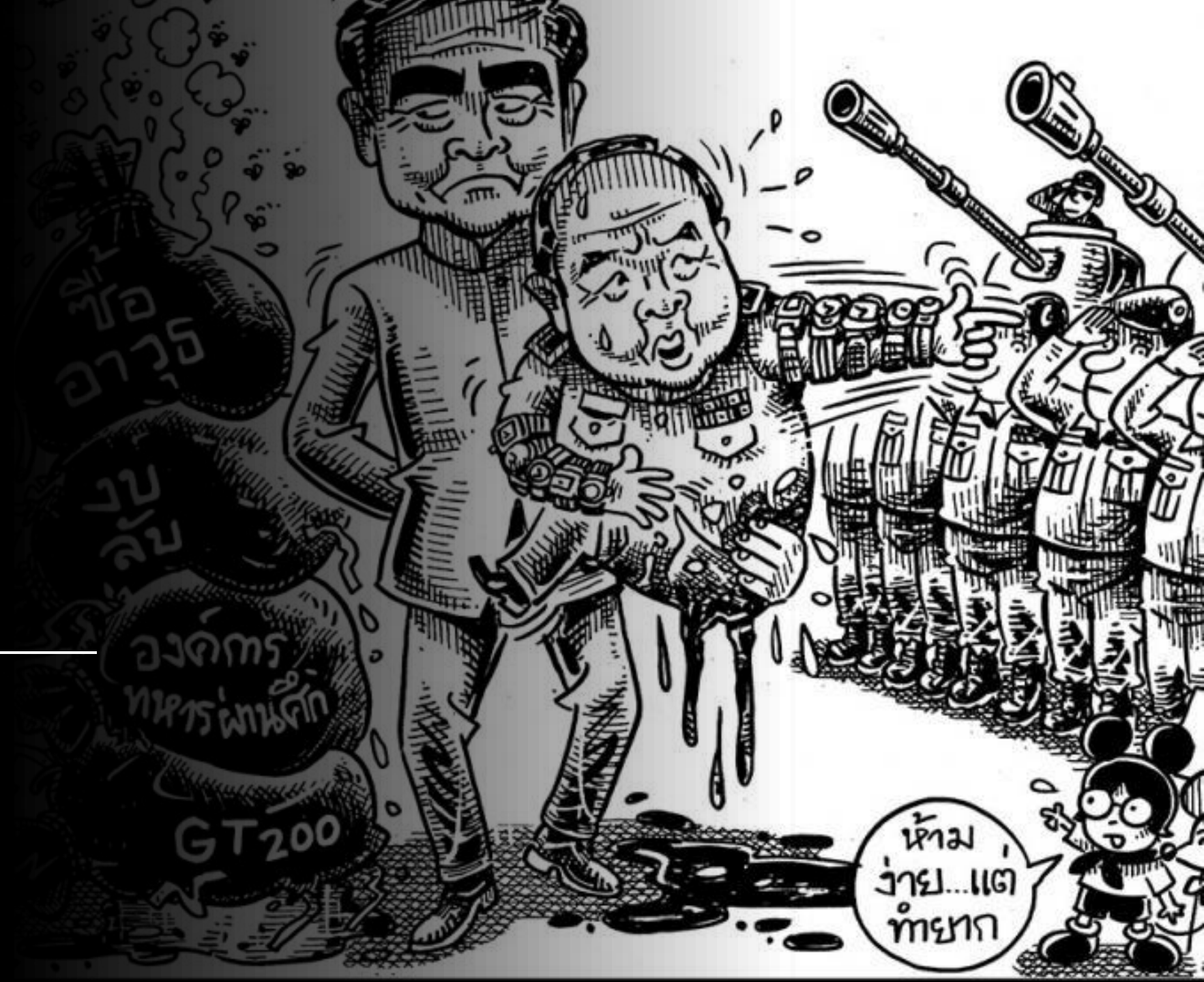
January 11, 2021: What's happening?

- Demonstrations Demanding Prayuth's Resignation; Constitutional Amendments and (for some) Monarchical Reform; will surround parliament
- Parliament is considering Amendments but unlikely
- Prayuth Refuses to Resign
- King has embarked on a charm offensive while encouraging demonstrations by Right Wing
- Right Wing Demonstrators growing
- Police in the Front Line against Progressive Demonstrations and Army in the Back
- If things get out of hand and protests become violent, the king could endorse a military coup

Luckily for Prayuth, in 2021, COVID-19 is growing in Thailand—
Emergency Decree



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Scenario 1:
Seoulification of Thai
Politics: A New Normal in
which Generally Peaceful
Protests become an
everyday affair





Scenario 2:
Violent Clashes
between
progressive
and right-wing
demonstration
groups

A man in a dark military uniform with several medals on his chest is speaking at a podium. He is gesturing with his right hand. The background is blurred, showing a wooden wall and a microphone. The text "Scenario 3: Military Coup" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Scenario 3: Military Coup



Most likely scenario could involve Scenarios 1-3

- 1. Peaceful progressive protests intensify
- 2. The military helps to build up right wing squads in order to harass the progressive protestors
- 3. Clashes erupt between the two groups (progressive versus right-wing)
- Or 4. Progressive protests either diminish or the military is called in to restore order with the government claiming national security needs
- 4. New irregular elections are held with either cheating by the pro-military Palang Pracharat or a very weak opposition party is allowed to hold power temporarily. Eventual result: either military coup or judicial coup

Conclusion: Breakthrough or Breakdown?

- 1. It is already a breakthrough that Thai demonstrators have let the genie out of the bottle and are regularly now talking about the need to reform the Thai monarchy. In addition, protestors and other Thais alike are increasingly voicing their views to push the pro-military government out of power and reform the Thai military
- 2. But it remains to be seen to what extent Thailand's khaki-stocracy of monarchy plus military will tolerate the NEW NORMAL of hyper-pluralism and protest politics. If violence does not occur, maybe demonstrators can incrementally bring about change. If violence does occur, most likely the state will use it (or manufacture it) to use force once again to retain power.

Thank you!

