

First reactions and calls after the Coup d'Etat in Thailand

Wednesday 20 September 2006, by [BBC](#), [Focus on the Global South](#), [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#), [YIMPRASERT Junya Lek](#)
(Date first published: 20 September 2006).

We are presenting below two mails which have been sent on the Asia Social Movements email discussion list soon after the coup d'Etat, and a statement from Focus on the Global South – to which a BBC info has been added. We shall publish other reactions and calls as soon as possible.

Contents

- [Focus on the Global South's](#)
- [Two letters from Lek](#)
- [Dictatorship Rules Thailand](#)
- [Thailand's military tightens](#)

Focus on the Global South's Statement on the Coup in Thailand

Sept. 20, 2006

Focus on the Global South views the recent military takeover of government in Thailand as a most regrettable setback in the country's democratization process.

The rationale for the takeover - that Thai society has become divided as never before in the nation's history, and that the threats of violence require measures to maintain peace and security - may be an accurate reflection of the current political and social situation. Undoubtedly, corruption and arrogance on the part of the Thaksin Shinwatra government undermined democracy and the Constitution, and it led people to challenge the legitimacy of the regime. However, the usurpation of power and trampling of rights and liberties by a group of officers calling themselves the Democratic Reform Council is in no way justifiable. Indeed, before the coup, there were already attempts to resolve the political crisis by democratic participation within the framework of the Constitution. These were forestalled by the military intervention.

As faithful advocates of participatory democracy, we demand respect for the 1997 constitution. This constitution was derived through the process of extensive consultation with all sectors of society, and is the only one that could be rightly called the people's constitution. Thus, we join most of the Thai people in demanding the expeditious and complete return of democratic rights to the Thai people and an immediate restoration of the people's basic rights to freedom of information, freedom of expression and freedom of

association.

Two letters from Lek

Dear friends,

For several months Thailand has been in political confusion with the campaign against PM Thaksin. Rumours of a military coup have been around for a month or so. Today (19.08.05) around 11 pm the military attempted a coup: tanks moved into the streets and surrounded Government House.

Thaksin (in New York) has been attempting to assure the UN General Assembly that he is in control, but this seems not to be the case. The Army's Commander-in-Chief has already issued many statements, the third stated that 1) the 1997 Constitution (the so-called 'People's Constitution') be cancelled, 2) the Senate, Parliament, Cabinet and Constitution Court be foreclosed, 3) the Privy Council and 4) the Judiciary, except the Constitution Court, must continue to function as usual.

The Coup's first statement (23.50 hrs) stated that the reasons for the Coup were unprecedented divisions within the population as a result of governmental corruption, governmental intervention and obstruction of independent institutions, and disloyalty to the King.

The reasons given by the leaders of the Coup may be valid, but their action is disloyal to the political aspirations of the people. The Thai people have already shown that people's democracy will not be defeated.

For people's democracy!

Lek....

Sept. 21, 2006

Dear friends,

For those who are interested to follow up on Thai situation, here are two main English newspapers. The Nation has a number of sounding critics. Bangkok Post report the situation.

<http://nationmultimedia.com/>

<http://bangkokpost.com/>

"Thaksin had to go but a Military Coup is not the way". This is the message that sums up the feelings of many in Thailand. Many groups are now starting to show their anger and disagreement with the Coup: farmers, students, activists, progressive media, academics and individuals. Statements of disagreement with the coup are being circulated. Some actions have been started such as wearing

black and flashing car lights in the day time, banners are being posted in some areas etc. I am working on a background paper or fact sheet and will keep You up-dated on 'what are the Thai are doing'.

The Military Coup is what my friend called an ' anachronism', out-of-date anywhere in the world, and not going to last, for sure it cannot survive.

In solidarity,

Lek....

Dictatorship Rules Thailand

Last night the military staged a coup against the elected, but controversial, government of Taksin Shinawat. As usual, and in the tradition of all Thai military coups for the last 60 years, the dictatorship claimed to have staged the coup in order to "reform politics", "protect democracy" and that they had "no interest in taking personal power" and would be "returning power to the people as soon as possible". And in the tradition of many previous coups they later sought and received support from the monarchy.

The military have taken over all Thai TV channels and have blocked foreign news channels such as CNN and BBC. The TV is showing pictures of the Royal Family along with various declarations from the so-called "democratic reform committee".

The Thai Peoples Movement had good reason to oppose the Taksin government which presided over gross human rights abuses in the South and in the so-called war on drugs and pushed for many neo-liberal policies, such as privatization and free trade agreements. Yet the Taksin government retained huge popularity among the poor. On 2 nd April this year 16 million people voted for the government, as opposed to 10 million who voted against. The reason was simple. The Thai Rak Thai government of Taksin had initiated many pro-poor policies including a universal health care system and various measures to cut poverty. Yet many of those who joined the anti government movement earlier this year, dismissed the electorate for being uneducated and ill-informed. Unfortunately many social movement leaders also took this position. Instead of respecting the poor and the electorate, they demanded that the King sack the government. Although the King refused to do this, the position taken by the anti-Taksin movement has helped pave the way for this coup.

It is now up to us in the Peoples Movement to once again struggle for democracy in Thailand. This struggle for democracy can be the only road to real and lasting political and social reform which is much needed in order to make Thai society a more just and peaceful society. In the near future we shall have to make sure that the Thai Social Forum takes place in late October this year and that this forum forms a nucleus for democracy and social justice.

Giles Ji Ungpakorn

Peoples Coalition Party, *Turn Left* newspaper and Workers' Democracy, Thailand.

Thailand's military tightens grip

Thai military leaders have begun consolidating their hold on power after staging a coup while Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was abroad. Martial law has been declared, with large gatherings of people and critical news reporting banned.

Mr Thaksin's deputy and chief aide, Chidchai Vanasathidya, has been taken into army custody.

Army chief Gen Sonthi Boonyaratglin said in a TV address that the coup was necessary to unite the country.

The military had no intention of holding onto power, he added.

The coup leaders have announced that regional army commanders will take charge of areas outside the capital, Bangkok.

"Prime Minister [Thaksin] has caused an unprecedented rift in society", Gen Sonthi Boonyaratglin, Coup leader

The country's stock market, banks and schools will be closed on Wednesday, which has been declared a public holiday.

The coup follows months of growing tension in Thailand, with protests against Mr Thaksin and a general election which was annulled due to concerns about its legitimacy.

Yellow ribbons

In the capital Bangkok, tanks have cordoned off the government district. They have yellow ribbons tied around their barrels to signify loyalty to Thailand's revered king.

On the surface, Bangkok is functioning as normal, says the BBC's Kate McGeown there. The city's monorail system is packed with commuters, and cafes and street vendors are open for business.

But government offices, banks and schools are closed, and there is a strange quietness about the usually vibrant city. People are noticeably subdued, and the usual friendly chatter has been replaced by silence.

BBC World, CNN and other international TV news channels have been taken off the air, while Thai stations have been broadcasting footage of the royal family and patriotic songs.

Gen Sonthi made his brief TV address flanked by the heads of the three services and the police, and backed by giant portraits of the king and queen.

He said coup leaders had "agreed that the caretaker prime minister [Thaksin] has caused an unprecedented rift in society, widespread corruption, [and] nepotism".

He said the constitution, the senate, the house of representatives, the cabinet and the constitutional

court had all been “terminated”, and a newly formed Council of Administrative Reform would “restore normality”.

‘Not coming back’

Mr Thaksin cancelled a speech he was due to give at the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday evening as news of the coup emerged.

His official spokesman, Surapong Suebwonglee, initially declared confidence the coup would fail.

But contacted by Associated Press news agency, he said: “We have to accept what happened. We are not coming back soon.”

The rebels have visited King Bhumibol Adulyadej and declared loyalty to him. The king has not yet made any comment on whether he backs the coup.

The coup leaders have ordered provincial governors and heads of government agencies to report to them.

They have also banned assemblies of more than five people, which are now punishable by six months in jail.

A statement urged “farmers and workers” to remain calm - an apparent reference to Mr Thaksin’s rural base of support.

In another move to defend against a counter-coup, a senior general said Mr Thaksin’s main deputy, Mr Chidchai, had been “invited to stay” at Army headquarters on Tuesday night.

Neighbours’ disquiet

Reaction from abroad has been largely negative.

The US called on Thais “to resolve their political differences in a peaceful manner”, while the EU’s Finnish presidency expressed “grave concern” at events.

Australia “deeply regretted” the coup, while New Zealand urged politicians and the military to resolve their differences democratically. Malaysia’s prime minister declared he was “shocked”.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the organisation supported changes of government through democratic means rather than by the barrel of a gun.

The BBC’s Jonathan Head in Bangkok reports that while many people wanted Mr Thaksin out of office, there will be unease about the way this has happened, and people will be looking to see whether the king has supported the coup.

Our correspondent says the coup is a surprising development for a country that had been viewed as one of Asia’s leading democracies, and events in Thailand will have repercussions throughout the region.

It is the first coup attempt in 15 years in a country where they used to be commonplace. There were 17 of them between 1932 and 1991.

Wednesday, 20 September 2006, 06:38 GMT 07:38 UK

P.S.

* From the Asia social movement e-mail discussion group