

On the new constitution of Thailand

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On April 6, 2017, the new constitution of Thailand is officially promulgated. Thailand's king, King Maha Vajiralongkorn, officially endorsed and signed the new constitution in front of the executive, legislative and judiciary branches at the Ananta Samakom Throne Hall in Bangkok. The document had been drafted by the military-appointed committee who had staged a coup against civilian government almost 3 years ago (2014). While the military and its supporters claimed that the new constitution will provide stability to Thailand, but reality is that the new charter will strengthen the rule of the military and the old establishments and the elites. Firstly, it is very undemocratic, and not from the will of the people. It will not return Thailand to the democracy Thailand once was.

The new constitution brings back a bicameral assembly, but this time with a 250-member Senate that will be entirely appointed, which include seats reserved for senior military officers. And the Senate can activate special mechanism allow 'outside-unelected' person to become Thai Prime Minister. The chief of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), retains special power of Article 44 of the interim constitution which gives the junta absolute powers over all 3 branches of the government. In addition, the Constitution court, and the 'independent bodies' (consist of junta loyalists) have the ability to oversee the policy formation, the government policies, and its execution of the civilian government. Hence, the political parties will not be able to play a major role anymore in shaping the political life of the country.

I would like to draw your attention also that the junta still have 16 months according to their roadmap till the next general election. This is a very long time indeed--- couple this with the 20-year strategic plan, the junta's attitude toward the electoral process and the unpredictability of the election results, and the 'unknown' new king's , anything can happen!

Thailand as a whole still in conflict between the 'red-shirt' and the 'yellow-shirt', even though more than 10 years had past. Without any genuine plan for national reconciliation, and the real plan to decrease the animosity, it is possible that the ruling elites and the king may choose not to go back to the civilized path of liberal democracy that respect human rights and the rule-of-law. If this is the case, people's freedom and human rights will suffer greatly.

With this in mind, I am requesting you and the international community to continue paying attention to Thailand especially during this volatile but crucial period. Please put more pressure if necessary to bring democracy back to Thailand as soon as possible.

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