

# What Abhisit said in response to Red Shirt demands for immediate democratic elections

Live negotiations 28-29/3/2010 – Commentary by Giles Ji Ungpakorn

Monday 29 March 2010, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 29 March 2010).

The Red Shirt leaders called for a dissolution of Parliament and immediate elections so that the electorate could decide on whether or not (and how) to amend the military Constitution of 2007 and also to decide on future government policies.

Abhisit gave no commitment to fresh elections and questioned the reason for such elections. All he could say is that “we hear what you say”. According to Abhisit further negotiations were necessary. Basically his position was to buy more time while not proposing any concrete time table.

Abhisit falsely claimed that he was “democratically elected, not manoeuvred into power by the military”. He claimed that he “always” opposed the “methods” of the 2006 coup. When challenged about whether he would reject all laws and bodies which stemmed from this illegal coup and oppose military intervention in politics, he said that any amendments to the military Constitution of 2007, as demanded by the Red Shirts, would have to be made by both the elected House of Representatives and the Senate. Half the Senators were appointed by the military after the coup. In other words, while Abhisit claimed to oppose the 2006 coup, he supports all the measures brought in by the military junta, including the military appointed senators. He also asked if the Red Shirts would accept the interventions of courts after any future elections if a political party was found to be in breach of election laws. This implies that Abhisit supported the manoeuvring of the courts which dissolved the elected Samak government on the grounds that Samak engaged in a cooking programme on TV.

Abhisit implied that any further negotiations should also involve other parties which might not be happy with amending the military Constitution. In other words Abhisit thinks that the PAD should be involved in negotiations. He also resurrected the old chestnut about the “silent majority” not supporting either side in order to argue that the Red Shirts did not represent the majority. Yet repeated elections and the size of Red Shirt mass demonstrations undermines Abhisit’s claim. The fact that he was forced to negotiate with Red Shirt leaders on live TV is also an indication of the Red Shirt’s strength.

Abhisit refused to answer whether the present Thai state was controlled by the military and other non-constitutional elements. He refused to comment on the fact that the military Constitution enshrines the legitimacy of the 2006 coup. He refused to answer the charge that the military had illegally allowed the PAD to seize the international airports against the wishes of an elected government in late 2008. He claimed that the military Constitution of 2007 was accepted by a democratic referendum. He ignored the fact, pointed out by Red Shirt leaders, that many provinces were under martial law at the time of the referendum and the fact that the military junta spent millions in a one-sided campaign to accept the Constitution.

Abhisit stated that before fresh elections could be held, the issue of Constitutional amendments should be solved and society had to be “peaceful”. On the side of the Government, PM secretary-

general Korbsak Sabhavasut also stated that the Constitution should not be amended by the party that wins a future election because this would not be “democratic”. But the Red Shirt leaders affirmed that they wanted Parliament dissolved now and fresh elections held as soon as possible. They pointed out that they were making these demands on behalf of millions of Red Shirts who have little patience for a continuation of the military backed Government. They maintained that fresh elections should be held before any new amendments to the Constitution are made. This is so that the people can give their opinion in fresh elections about how to proceed with the Constitution without any further delays or excuses for delays. Let us see what the people decide. If Abhisit claims he is representative of the majority of the electorate he shouldn't be worried about fresh elections. The PAD now have their own political party, so their support can be tested in practice by elections. The Red Shirts said that if Abhisit felt that he could govern the country right now in the face of mass protests then he could just ignore the demands for elections. The question is... can he really govern?

### **The negotiations were adjourned for a toilet break at 18.57 Bangkok time.**

PM secretary-general Korbsak Sabhavasut claimed that elections would solve nothing and possibly lead to a crisis. What guarantee was there that people would accept the result? The Red Shirts repeatedly gave assurances that Red Shirts would accept the result of democratic elections. What Korbsak failed to mention was that the crisis resulted from the fact that the military, the PAD and the Democrat Party refused to accept the results of democratic elections ever since 2005.

The Red Shirts proposed an ultimatum that Parliament should be dissolved within 2 weeks and that they would wait until tomorrow to hear the answer of the Government.

### **Negotiations ended at 19.22 Bangkok time.**

While these negotiations were taking place, a gang of thugs set fire to the food tents of the Red Shirts.

---

## **Day 2 Negotiations Abhisit vs Red Shirts 29/3/2010**

Broadcast live on TV

Commentary by Giles Ji Ungpakorn

The Government side requested a period of secret negotiations before the live broadcast. This was rejected by the Red Shirt leaders in the interests of transparency.

Red Shirt leaders repeated their demand for the dissolution of parliament within 15 days and elections in 45 days.

Abhisit replied that fresh elections would solve nothing and that a dissolution within 15 days was “impossible”. He stated that there were certain conditions to be met before elections. He claimed that no one should give in to “mob rule or mob demands”. Yet, in the past, Abhisit's Democrat Party always cooperated with the PAD mob which seized the international airports and Government House, which eventually led to a military installed illegitimate government with Abhisit as PM in December 2008.

Red Shirt leaders stated that the present government was created in the military barracks. The

Government also presided over “double standards” in the application of laws. There were many cases of corruption in Sufficiency Economy projects, military purchases and other projects. They stated that they have no faith in the Government’s commitment to reforming the Constitution. Abhisit can only stay in power by having armed soldiers stationed at every corner of the capital city. An election where various parties outline their economic and social policies and their proposals for constitutional reform and put them to the electorate is therefore the best and most democratic option.

Abhisit denied that there were legal double standards applied under his government. Yet no one from the PAD has been punished for seizing the airports and Government House and using violence on the streets in 2008. He brushed aside any need to consider amending the final clause of the military Constitution which gives legitimacy to the 2006 coup. Abhisit claimed that it was impossible to hold peaceful elections in the present climate. He lied that the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2006 coup happened because there were violent clashes between two groups.

The Red Shirt leaders answered that the only democratic way to resolve the present deep divisions in society was to ask the electorate to decide the future of Thailand. The Red Shirts then proposed the dissolution of parliament within 2 months.

Abhisit introduced yet another condition for holding elections in order to buy time and stretch out the time before elections. He said that elections could not be held until the economy stabilised. He repeated that constitutional amendments and a referendum to approve such amendments would have to be made first before elections. In effect he was saying that elections could not be held until at least the end of 2010 and maybe even later. It might even be the case that it would take longer to achieve these things than the one year and nine months. That is when new elections must be held according to present the military Constitution.

Nothing was achieved by these negotiations and the danger is that talks might continue behind closed doors without proper accountability to the democracy movement.

---