

Thailand: Seeing through the mist of tear gas

Friday 16 April 2010, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 16 April 2010).

After the recent bloodshed on the streets of Bangkok, the army, the Government, and the media, academics and NGOs who have sided with the royalist elites, especially those who deceitfully call themselves “neutral”, are all trying to distort the major facts about what is happening in Thailand. Together with the blanket censorship ordered by the Government, this distortion is like firing a second round of tear gas at the population in order to cause confusion. So let us just remind ourselves of the basics.

The first basic point is that any government that sends soldiers armed with M16 automatic weapons, live ammunition and tanks, in order to disperse a peaceful and disciplined demonstration, has already decided on the option of using lethal force against the demonstrators. This is an undeniable fact whether or not the soldiers also carry shields and rubber bullets and whether or not the soldiers initially fire live rounds into the air. In the inevitable situation of stress and tension, the soldiers will start firing live ammunition against civilians and they have indeed done this. It is also true that this will occur whether or not there are some mysterious black-clad figures running around. These could be special military forces, people hoping to stimulate a bloody crack down, or some other group. Whatever the case, these people had no connection with the UDD who have repeatedly restrained their supporters. The UDD stored captured weapons so that they would not be used and in contrast to the behaviour of the army, any captured soldiers were well treated. Let us be clear. When the army bring lethal weapons of war and station snipers on high buildings, they are already intent on the option of killing civilians. Machine guns and tanks are not brought on to the streets to cook noodles, show off to tourists or repair the roads. In most civilised democracies, the streets are cleared of demonstrators, whether legitimately or not, by the use of riot police and mass arrests, not by systematic use of weapons of war.

The Abhisit Government and its military backers were therefore intent on killing civilians. This is of course, nothing new in Thailand. In the last 40 years the Thai elites have gunned down and murdered unarmed civilian demonstrations 6 times. Five of these bloodbaths occurred in Bangkok in 1973, 1976, 1992, 2009 and now in 2010. The sixth occasion was in the South at Takbai in 2004. It is a matter of great urgency that democratic and human rights standards are established in Thailand to deal with this. Elite figures, politicians and Generals have to be publically punished if found guilty. The entire military command needs to be retired and the army has to be drastically reduced in terms of budgets, numbers and influence. Lese majeste and other draconian laws need to be abolished also, in order to stop the spectra of Republicanism or Communism being used as an excuse to murder civilians.

The deceitful so-called “neutral” academics and NGOs, including Focus of Global South, who claim that “both sides should take responsibility for the bloodshed”, are merely reducing the responsibility of the Government, the oppressor. It is like saying that both the elephant and the ant are “responsible” for the ant being crushed to death under the elephant’s giant foot, just because the ant was in the wrong place. On the one hand we have the military backed Government and its armed forces trying to crush a democratic protest with lethal weapons. On the other hand we have thousands of unarmed and disciplined protesters. It should not be hard to see the difference, unless of course you backed the 2006 coup (however reluctantly) and you backed the semi-fascist PAD Yellow Shirts. This is what nearly all these so-called neutrals did.

The semi-fascist PAD Yellow Shirts used weapons and violent tactics to wreck Government House, prevent the opening of an elected parliament and to make the extremely damaging seizure of the international airports in 2008. They have not been punished because the military and Abhisit's Democrat Party support them. In contrast, the Red Shirts have occupied some roads in Bangkok. They have not shot anyone or destroyed buildings. Yet the Government is manufacturing lies about "Red Shirt Terrorists". Previously they lied about troops "not using lethal weapons on civilians".

The second basic point is that the Abhisit Government was never democratically elected. It is in power because of a military coup in 2006, two judiciary coups, the PAD violence and the manoeuvrings of the military. Abhisit's Democrat Party can never hope to win an overall majority in any future election and in the past it has never won such an election. It can only cling to power by the use of the military and blanket censorship which is turning Thailand into a Police State. So the Red Shirt demand for the Government to resign and for immediate democratic elections is totally legitimate. Their long drawn out protest in the streets is totally legitimate. The use of a state of emergency and the military by the Government to shut the mouths of the Red Shirt protesters, and to arrest their leaders, is totally illegitimate. The military Constitution and the "law" that Abhisit keeps talking about are totally illegitimate.

There are many people who say that democratic elections will not solve the crisis. They are probably right. But this is only because the elites, the military, the royalist, the middle classes, the PAD, the academics, the NGOs and the Democrat Party are not committed to respecting the majority vote and democracy. They firmly believe, like all supporters of dictatorships, that the Thai electorate is "unqualified to be given a free vote".

The third basic point is about the accusation that the Red Shirts are "committing treason", revolting against the Nation and the Monarch. Let us just remind ourselves who should hold sovereign and absolute power in a Democracy. It is the People. The Red Shirts are defending that sovereign power. The Government, the military and its royalist supporters are committing treason against the people. It is as simple as that.

The Abhisit Government must resign now. The military must return to barracks and the People should decide the future of Thai society.

Giles Ji Ungpakorn
