

# Military claims that the Red Shirts are the main enemy

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Army boss General Prayut Chan-ocha maintains that the Military's top priority is to repress the Red Shirt pro-democracy movement and defend the Monarchy. Recently he said that "everyone is obligated, in an act of loyalty, to root out certain individuals from offending the country's revered institution because without the Monarchy, we may live but things will never be the same...". The truth is that without the Monarchy the military would not know how to legitimise its brutality.

Prayut's views are supported by the General Wantip Wongwai, head of the 3<sup>rd</sup> army, who says that there is a serious republican movement headed by Jakrapop Pencare and myself. The army will go into villages and tell the truth about the army and the Monarchy to the people!!

Mainstream accounts of Thai society and politics always include the cliché that "the King is loved and respected by all Thais". This may have had some truth at certain periods in history, yet it overlooks the constant changes in public opinion and the severe repression, especially the use of the lèse majesté law, and also the manic propaganda associated with the ideology of the Monarchy. Today there are people serving up to 18 years in prison for merely criticising the Monarchy, yet despite this repression there is now a serious republican mood among millions of citizens. The King is openly verbally insulted and criticised in public, especially when demonstrations take place. The reason for this is that since 2006, the Military and the conservatives have systematically destroyed the democratic rights of millions of people who voted for Thai Rak Thai, using the excuse that they were "protecting the Monarchy". The King also remained silent when the Military gunned down pro-democracy demonstrators in April and May 2010 and the Queen has openly supported the fascist PAD and the actions of the army.

It is ironic that the majority of, both the opponents and supporters of the Monarchy, believe today that Thailand is run by the King in some kind of Absolute Monarchy system. For most Red Shirt republicans, the King is the root of all evil and has ordered military coups and dominated politics for his own benefit. For most royalists, the King is an Absolute Monarch, a Constitutional Monarch and a "god" all at the same time! Reason does not come into the royalist thinking. This is partial convergence of belief is achieved by imposing and socialising the view among the population that the King is an all powerful god who is to be loved and feared. Today millions of Red Shirts have started to hate the King, but they still fear his power. Yet, the King's power is a myth, created for ideological purposes by the ruling class, especially the Military.

If we are to understand the role of the King in Thai society, we have to understand the double act performed by the Military and the King. For ruling classes to achieve hegemony in most modern societies, they require both coercion and legitimacy. The Military and their bureaucratic allies have their armed might to stage coups and manipulate political society. The King symbolises the conservative ideology which gives legitimacy to the authoritarian actions of the Military and their allies. It is a double act of "power" and "ideological legitimacy". In this double act the weak-willed King has no real power, but he is a willing participant.

The Military has intervened in politics and society since the 1932 revolution against the Absolute

Monarchy. This is because the revolutionary Peoples Party led by Pridi Panomyong relied too much on the Military rather than building a mass party to stage the revolution. Yet it is also a cliché to just state the number of coup d'états that have taken place in order to say that Thailand is plagued by coups. The power of the Military is not unlimited and it relies on the ideology of the Monarchy and an alliance with businessmen, civilian technocrats and corrupt politicians in order to supplement its violent means of coercion.

At important moments in history, the power of the Military has been significantly reduced or kept at bay by social movements and popular uprisings. The post 1973 and 1992 periods are good examples. It would be more accurate to state that the Military is an important centre of power among many. Other elite centres include big business, political bosses and high ranking bureaucrats. What is unique about the Military, however, is its weaponry and decisive ability to topple governments through coup d'états. The Military has a monopoly on the means of violent coercion which it has been prepared to use by gunning down unarmed protestors in the streets. The latest example was in April and May 2010 when over 90 people died. Previously, the Military shot unarmed protestors in 1973, 1992, 2004 and 2009 and in 1976 the Border Patrol Police, a paramilitary police force created to fight the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), was used, along with fascist mobs, in order to murder and brutalise students in Bangkok.

Because the Military has always had a problem with trying to legitimise its actions by quoting "Democracy", it has relied heavily upon using the Monarchy to shore-up its legitimacy. At the same time, the Military also needed to promote the Monarchy. This process was initiated in the 1960s. Today the Military always claim that they are "protecting the Monarchy" and that "they are the servants of the King and Queen". We see the generals in photo poses, supposedly taking orders from royalty. Yet it is the generals who are really in charge of the Palace. The Palace willingly cooperates in this arrangement, gaining much wealth and prestige. Claiming legitimacy from the Monarchy is a way to make the population afraid of criticising the Military and all the elites, and the draconian lèse majesté law is in place to back this up.

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