

# Thailand's "Game of Bodies"

Monday 17 June 2013, by [UNGPAKORN Giles Ji](#) (Date first published: 16 June 2013).

One might be tempted to celebrate the fact that Tarit Pengdit, head of the Department of Special Investigations, has forwarded the cases against former PM Abhisit Vejjajiva and his deputy Sutep Tuaksuban to the public prosecutor. Tarit stated that there was ample evidence that they had ordered the killings of Red Shirt pro-democracy demonstrators in 2010.

However, I must take a different view. Firstly there is no guarantee that the prosecutor will actually charge Abhisit and Sutep. Secondly, even if they actually come to court, one would have to suspend reason to believe that they will actually be sentenced to life imprisonment for mass murder. I do not believe in the death sentence and so I would never wish them to be executed as many "murderers" have been in this country. Thirdly, and most significantly, Tarit announced that no soldiers will be prosecuted, thus continuing the appalling tradition of allowing the military to act with total impunity.

It was the army that overthrew the democratically elected government of Taksin Shinawatt in 2006. The coup-makers then appointed a military junta to rule the country for a year. When elections were held, it was the military who moved behind the scenes, along with the judges, to overthrow the elected government again. The military, under the command of generals Anupong Paojinda and his deputy Prayut Junochai then "set up" a military-backed government under Abhisit Vejjajiva and his mis-named "Democrat Party". The Democrat Party never won a majority in elections and was totally beholden to the military. Formally Abhisit was Prime Minister, but the real power was in the hands of the military under generals Anupong and Prayut. Both military officers had previously played key roles in the 2006 coup d'état.

When the Centre for the Resolution of the Emergency Situation (CRES) was set up in response to Red Shirts protests demanding democratic elections, it was established and operated inside an army camp and was controlled by top military generals including Anupong and Prayut. Prayut had day to day responsibility for military operations. Abhisit and Sutep were also centrally involved with Sutep having the formal position of "director". However, it would have been impossible for these two civilian politicians to have had any real power over the military and to have ordered the military operations against the Red Shirts which resulted in nearly 90 deaths. The orders must have come from Prayut and Anupong and been approved by Abhisit and Sutep. All four are guilty of mass-murder.

So why let the military generals off the hook?

We can immediately dismiss the excuse which some pro-Yingluck, pro-Taksin Red Shirts might make that "it was the King who actually ordered the killings". King Bhumibol has always been incapable of giving real orders. He is a creature of the military and the elites, who use him to legitimise their actions. In addition to this he has been sick and hospitalised for many years. Anyway, this excuse would mean that Abhisit and Sutep should also be left alone.

The military have been left off the hook in Thailand's "Game of Bodies" because Taksin, Yingluck and the governing Pua Thai Party have long made a deal with the military. In return for tolerating the election of the Pua Thai Government in 2011, the military will be absolved of any wrong-doing. In the future Taksin will also be allowed to return to Thailand. The lèse majesté law, which has been used

against progressive Red Shirts, will also not be changed or abolished. In early 2012 Taksin made a speech in Cambodia where he said that he had no quarrel with the military and that his only opponents were the Democrat Party.

The case against Abhisit and Sutep serves a number of important functions. Firstly, it is a “displacement activity” to create an image of a government which seeks to bring the killers of the Red Shirts to justice. The Government is dependent on Red Shirt votes. But unless the whole basis of Thai society is changed by the actions of strong social movements, Abhisit and Sutep will never spend the rest of their lives in jail. If they did, it would create a precedent to bring Taksin to court for ordering the killings in the War on Drugs and at Tak Bai in the South. Secondly, having a case hanging over the heads of Abhisit and Sutep is a good bargaining counter in negotiations to bring Taksin back and amend the Constitution in favour of Pua Thai politicians. There are no plans by the Pua Thai Party to amend the Constitution or re-draft a Constitution to bring about real democracy. The proposals of the Nitirat group of progressive law academics does not have Pua Thai support. Importantly this bargaining counter will not upset the military as they and Pua Thai feel that Abhisit and Sutep can be used and abused.

What the elites on both sides of the divide would like to see is a return to their form of stability where the crimes of the generals and politicians are white-washed away and the lèse majesté prisoners are left to rot in jail. The only challenge to this plan will come from a strong progressive pro-democracy movement which can develop out of the best elements of the Red Shirts. These elements will have to reject Pua Thai, Taksin and the UDD leadership. They will also have to reject the crude and reactionary tactics of the “51” group of Chiang Mai Red Shirts who have behaved like thugs and exhibited homophobic behaviour.

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