

# **The numerous problematic rationales in accepting the September 19 coup as legitimate**

Thursday 28 September 2006, by [ROJANAPHRUK Pravit](#) (Date first published: 27 September 2006).

**Pravit is one of a very few journalists that is still actively report on actions against the Coup. We would see him in black observing and interviewing people in almost every action that have been organised — mostly lead by students from major universities in Thailand i.e. Thammasart University and Chulalongkorn University. A major university in the North 'Chiangmai University' is, starting from today, organizing an activity as well.**

**Below is Pravit's article that is reflecting the differences of views and thoughts among Thais at the moment. [Lek]**

Many reasons were cited why the public should accept the legitimacy of the coup makers that overthrown caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra on September 19, but most if not all logics seemed to be flawed.

**Problematic Rationale # 1:** We oppose the coup but since it already occurred we just have to accept it

This line of thinking is common amongst many social and political activists, the so-called NGOs who vehemently opposed Thaksin over the past year or so before he was ousted through the coup. The group is now more concerned about suggesting the military junta what "good things" for the country they should do and omitted themselves from asking a more fundamental question: "Do you accept the legitimacy of the coup makers? If so why, if no, why not." It's crucial for anyone living in an aspiring democracy to tackle this question head on.

One way to think is to ask, if Thaksin's abusive rule is wrong, and staging coup to overthrow an elected government is wrong, can the two conditions lead to anything that may be right?

The truth is, many who oppose Thaksin refused to accept his legitimacy after the fraudulent April 2 election earlier this year. It's strange that these people didn't say: "Well, Thaksin had already got elected. What else can we do. We'll just have to live with him."

However, when the coup occurs, simply because many people were so happy that Thaksin is gone, they reacted by saying: "It had already happened. What else can we do?"

Surely some double standard is being applied here in justifying the legitimacy of the coup makers.

**Problematic Rationale # 2:** Thaksin is worse than any other form of dictatorship

The point is, how can one come to such conclusion at this stage, especially with the new-coming junta? It would take sometime before people can judge the sincerity of the coup leaders who claim to

be “restoring democracy”.

It took most Thais at least three to five years before they came to the conclusion that Thaksin is a corrupt dictator who has hi-jacked democracy through winning rural and poor people supports by administering them with hand-out populist policies. Majority of Thai voters used to regard Thaksin as an able and decisive prime minister. Middle class Thais used to blindly support Thaksin and many of those who eventually ended up demonstrating against the man once did even pressured the Constitution Court to not punish Thaksin over his asset concealment charge. (This writer had never voted for Thaksin for the very simply reason that it's too dangerous to vote for one of the richest man in the kingdom into becoming a prime minister - too much concentration of power).

Thus in order to arrive at such conclusion people may have to live with the junta for 5 years or more. And if the next election which is slated for the end of 2007 didn't yield the kind of result the so-called “educated middle class” wanted, should they again call for another coup?

Where will this lead Thailand to?

**Problematic Rationale # 3:** This coup was not violent, bring about peace and people are happy

Whoever thinks this coup was non violent employed a very limited definition on what constitute violence. Is the dispatching of tanks to the streets, to television stations to force them to change programme not violent? What about orders given by the junta restricting press freedom, freedom of political assembly and more? These indeed are clearly acts of violence.

One businessman who owns a German car dealership told a television host a few days ago on UBC channel 7 that he likes the result of the coup because the situation “is better than before and [political] infighting has ended”.

But did it really ended or was it merely temporarily suppressed by the forces of guns and tanks?

And when the new round of conflict resurface again, do we then not need to invite the military to come back and stage yet another coup in order to reset the start botton of this game called “Thailand's path towards Democracy” in some foreseeable future.

Perhaps we should do away with any pretence in wanting to become a democratic society and accept our lot as a psuedo-feudal society.

Then there is the illusion that everyone or 99 per cent of the population is happy. Why then does the coup makers have to muzzle the media and forbid political gathering?

**Problematic Rationale # 4:** The 1997 constitution has already been killed by Thaksin anyhow

If the so-called 1997 “People's Constitution” a result of the revolt against the 1991 coup that was initially popular but quickly turned sour in 1992 is already dead, should we then simply allow yet another group of dictators, albeit in uniform, to mutilate the bodies further and officially announce it as dead?

To accept the legitimacy of the coup makers is to send a message that people with big guns can interfere with politics whenever there's political rift (which is common is a democracy) and artificially put a temperary halt - again and again - and rule country without any transparency or accountability for the time being.

How can the whole National Human Rights Commission of Thailand still get up in the morning and

go to work as normal and co-operate with the coup makers and claim to fulfill their duties as human rights protectors when they're now de facto accepting the legitimacy of a group of gross human rights violators who came out from military barracks is anyone's guess?

The best and most honourable thing the commission can do now, and do quickly, is to resign en masse and make a public statement denouncing the coup makers as illegitimate. They may not be able to overthrow the junta but they can at least raise the issue of "legitimacy" to public's attention that co-operating and accepting the legitimacy of lawbreakers, be it Thaksin or the military junta, is very wrong.

#### **Problematic Rationale # 5: The coup leader is a good man**

Even if he may be a good person and devout Muslim as an individual, what assurance is there that he will be able to prevent his subordinates from not falling into the temptation of cutting a deal with the old order and other interest groups? Thailand is a society full of web of relations that crisscross formal relations and some of those in Thaksin's regime are likely to have good personal relations with key members of the junta.

Many of the Thai print media have become so obsessed with playing a role in ousting Thaksin over the past year that many may have forgotten that they're fighting against a business-cum-political dictatorial order, and not just one man. Now they're willing to have at least a brief honeymoon period with the new junta because they also believe that the coup leader, or one man, is a good man.

People must ask if any of the 17 coups in the modern history of Thailand over the past seven decades have yielded real benefits or were they more detrimental to the development of Thai democracy and social justice.

As long as the Thai public and the mass media keep on giving all coup leaders blank-cheque acceptance plus honeymoon period free of harsh criticism or even defiance, future generations of soldiers will also be expecting the same red carpet treatment from the public and the society will be trapped in this vicious cycle - and they will be coming back for more.

#### **Problematic Rationale # 6: If you won't accept the coup then do we have any other choice?**

A few years ago, many people used to say: "If not Thaksin then who?"

Life isn't always about binary choice. People should think hard to find a third or fourth ways. Surely there're more options than just either Thaksin or tanks. People just have to think harder and be more imaginative.

**Problematic Rationale # 7: If we rock the boat, a counter coup might be staged by Thaksin and his men**

How long will Thais continue to live in a state of fear?

When will Thais nurture confidence that, come what may, they will and can solve political problems by themselves without relying on guns which can never be beneficial to Thailand in the long run.

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**P.S.**

\* Article reproduced and circulated on the Asian Social Movements mailing list by Lek Yimprasert from the Thai Labor Campaign, September 27, 2006.